

To: The Community and Judicial Review Board
From: Judicial

On Monday, June 10, 20⁷ students, after signing the attached petition, agreed at a Judicial meeting to their own expulsion for breaking the parietal regulations. Judicial, in supporting those students, therefore expels them and submits their names for review to the Judicial Review Board.

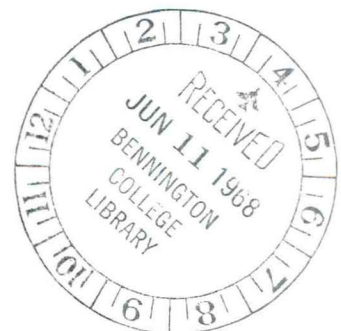
We wish to make clear that these students are attempting optimally to make possible something like the following:

1. a complete suspension of the rules for next term, in order that they in conjunction with other students and faculty may reorganize the community politically in an effort to find a way of articulating for themselves meaningful and proper areas of autonomy
2. a continuation of the process of self-study that might occur in this way--
 - a. classes would be suspended from September to Long Weekend; so would panels and committees;
 - b. any classes that students wanted to attend and that teachers wanted to teach would be held, but students and teachers would assume full responsibility for arranging their particular activities
 - c. the community would spend this period of time exploring various curricular possibilities as a way of redefining itself academically and as a community of teachers and students

We ask you to be responsive to the foregoing as possibilities and to determine immediately whether these 20⁷ students are expendable. If they are not, then we ask you to support them in their effort to find creative alternatives to the disaffection which is so wide-spread on this campus among students and faculty.

The proposals and possibilities for curricular change exist; these students stand for the necessity of making meaningful exploration; we submit their names to the Judicial Review Board and their action to the community.

The Judicial Committee
June 11, 1968



June 11, 1968
Bennington College

BACKGROUND STATEMENT ON JUDICIAL DECISION

Two hundred nine people have signed the attached petition on parietal regulations. The Judicial Committee has decided to recommend the expulsion of all two hundred nine students. We will attempt to give the history of and reasons for our action.

Judicial has been concerned about the state of the community and community government all term. We felt that student support for rules and regulations, and student responsibility for regulating life in the houses were two principles absolutely essential to Bennington community government. We believed that the nature of Judicial was such that it could not operate without considerable student support. Realizing that an overwhelming number of students did not support the parietal regulations, we felt the best way of upholding the principles of Bennington community government would be to act this term on the basis of a standard of consideration, working at the same time to convince the Constitutional Council that the rules should be changed.

The Judicial Committee has also been concerned about the fact that this issue of rules for men in rooms has at times seemed to overshadow the more important educational issues. We felt students were disturbed by problems in the academic areas of the College that were similar to problems in community government - an increasing rigidity and bureaucratization. We believed that the disaffection with government could not be treated without treating also these larger problems. We felt this recognition of the inseparability of the curricular and the extra-curricular was also in the Bennington tradition.

During the course of the term we have watched the hypocrisy in breaking the parietal regulations increase and spread to other aspects of the college. We became more and more disturbed. Finally, last Friday, the Constitutional Council made its decision on the parietal regulations. It supported the faculty and administration and turned down the student proposal.

This particular rule, then, had been through all constitutional channels. The next step was revision of the constitution. During the time such a procedure requires, however, we feared two unfortunate results. Either hypocrisy would become a way of life here, or compliance to the regulations would be forced on students from above. In addition, we had no reason to believe that students would have a real voice in the changing of the constitution.

Members of the committee were aware of deep concern on the part of many students over this issue. Some members of the

committee, acting as individuals, joined other students in deciding one of the best ways of channelling this discontent would be a petition stressing the desire for constructive activity and basic change. The attached statement was circulated by this group of individuals and around two hundred forty students signed.

When the petitions were presented to the Judicial Committee, we were undecided as to how to deal with them. We agreed, however, that action stronger than the simple presentation of the statement to the faculty and administration was necessary. We felt that it was within our power to give students a mechanism for demonstrating how deeply they felt about this issue and to show how strongly they desire change in all areas of the College.

We felt the most effective mechanism would be the recommended expulsion of the signers, with their consent and understanding of what we were doing. We felt that such an action would symbolize an end to a community government that no longer works. We felt it would also be a demonstration of the seriousness of student concern. We hoped, if presented correctly, it would open people's minds to new possibilities and add momentum to the process of change. We hoped it would provide the impetus next term for a re-examination of who we are and what we are doing here, a suspension of the rules to give members of the community a chance to rebuild it without hypocrisy, and, possibly, a suspension of the curriculum in its present form to give members of the community a chance to determine what they want most to learn.

All those signing the petition were called in Monday night, June 10, to discuss our ideas. We felt every student signing should understand the implications of her act. We also hoped to emphasize the positive aspects of the idea - constructive possibilities for change.

At the meeting we outlined our action. Several faculty members presented their ideas for change. Mr. Lyons suggested a free university within the college. Students who were interested could take half their program in the current curriculum and then join with other students and faculty for more informal courses, including interdivisional topics and discussions of who they were and what they wanted to learn. Mr. Teare and Mr. Stroud suggested sensitivity training or a modified form of group therapy. Mr. Fredericks presented several concrete proposals for experimental courses and individual programs. Mr. Hanks, Mr. Witkin, Mrs. Kirkpatrick, and Mr. Sainer also expressed opinions. Mr. Lyons concluded by emphasizing that our suggestions would not necessarily be destroying anything that people wanted to preserve - the same courses would be available if enough people wanted them. It would merely be a breaking up in order to rebuild, an experimentation

with new ways of learning. All speakers were met with enthusiasm. After they spoke, students were given an opportunity to remove their names from the original statement. Those who remain are fully committed.

Judicial believes this action has already served one useful purpose. Students at the meeting became excited, hopeful, and involved. The final signers represent a wide variety of people.- Not all of them support all of the above ideas. They include students who are and have been happy here, as well as those who are not. They are all agreed, however, that with some effort, Bennington could be much, much better, and that we need a radical change.

If the kind of change we suggest - suspension of rules and opening up of the curriculum and individual programming - should prove next fall to be lacking in sufficient support, this group of students is ready to work to broaden their base of support. We hope this step they have taken this term will give their action more meaning. We hope that other members of the community will respond to their pleas, that Judicial Review will attempt to understand their views and to accept them back into the community, and that everyone returning next fall will cooperate for constructive change.

A MINORITY OPINION

As the only member of Judicial who did not sign the petition, I wish to express a minority dissenting view concerning the student petition and the action agreed upon by Judicial and the student body. Although several students I spoke to after the Judicial meeting Monday night agreed with me and were willing to sign a petition to the effect, there simply was not time to collect names to give a statement any significant political meaning. Thus, I submit this opinion as indicative merely of my own view on this issue.

I question the student petition and the action it engendered for the following reasons:

It seems highly unfortunate that the men-in-rooms issue should act as the nucleus around which revolves the most fundamental and serious question and suggestions concerning the structure of student life and education at Bennington. The connections drawn between the men-in-rooms issue and the dissatisfaction with the curriculum are far-fetched at best, and seem to rely primarily upon the facts that the men-in-rooms issue is the only one which has engendered enough enthusiasm to warrant extending its implications into other areas concerning our education. There is no doubt in my mind that change in these areas must be considered and the proposals offered by faculty members during the meeting were provocative and exciting, but the use of a student ultimatum on men-in-rooms is not, to my mind, the most effective vehicle by which to air these questions.

I also question the timing of this action. While it appears from the enthusiasm aroused in the student body that they are willing to consider this question at the very end of the year, there is an atmosphere in which the statement was considered and composed was certainly a hurried one, and some students suddenly faced with a monumental decision to make felt that they had no opportunity to deliberate upon their action until after it was taken. Of course I realize that time is a factor which should not stand in the way of action itself, but I do wonder if other students (both those who signed and those who recanted) may not have been worried about a decision that they had not really considered, and some expressed this to me after the jubilation of the meeting had died down.

Finally, I would like to say that I agree in principle with the feeling that change is expedient and necessary and that student dissatisfaction with the Constitutional Council must be expressed for student government to continue to function with any attempt at efficacy and honesty. It was exciting to see Bennington students aroused (for the first time since I have been at Bennington) over issues concerning their lives and educations at Bennington. But I do question the wisdom of this method of presenting the men-in-rooms issue as a test of student power and of extending this original demand to great proportions completely outside of Judicial function. I think the issues might have been dealt with far more effectively in separate actions. Anything is possible if students FEEL STRONGLY about what they demand and in this connection I reject the idea that students have become the underdog in this community. I cannot help, however, wondering about

a community of students that finds a men-in-rooms issue the most revealing one upon which to base their demands for a better life and education at this college.

Mary Crowe