



FAX *Kevin*
John
bcc: *Bill*

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

November 10, 1994

Mr. Charles Cook
Director of the Commission
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
209 Burlington Road
Bedford, MA 01730-1433

Dear Charles:

The self study prepared by the College for the visit of the NEAS&C accrediting team presented a candid and full account of an institution on the brink of major changes. While every effort was made to capture the then current situation of the College--what remained as major strengths as well as its areas of weaknesses--it was not possible to describe in that context what changes were in fact to occur. The Report from the NEAS&C team suffers from the same constraints. Those constraints no longer obtain.

The Board of Trustees has now completed the work of articulating the redesign of the College and we are well into the process of implementing that redesign. The nature of that redesign is described in detail in a Board of Trustees Report on the Symposium and copies of that Report have been sent to the Commission. I have also appended to this letter issues concerning matters of fact in the team report. Given these special circumstances, I thought it would be most helpful for the Commission if I were to use this opportunity to bring you up to date on the status of the transition since the issuance of the Board Report.

A number of curricular changes have already gone into effect, specifically in the teaching of literature and musical instruments. Changes in the teaching of foreign languages, the integration of the major social science disciplines within the areas of history, philosophy, anthropology, and psychology, and the integration of art history into the teaching of history generally and throughout the arts curriculum will be implemented in September 1995. The faculty has been meeting since June to develop the multi-disciplinary curricular possibilities created by the abandonment of divisions as the primary mode of organizing curriculum. The construction of The New Media Center will be

completed by the end of this month, and its presence at Bennington is already transforming the teaching resources of the College including those of the library. Interim governance procedures have been adopted by the faculty as permanent policies are in the process of being developed.

In sum, the programmatic and structural changes outlined in the Report are being effected with minimum disruption and are well on schedule. In addition, to assure maximum continuity for upper-classmen, every senior met with a faculty committee at the outset of the semester, and similar meetings are now going on with juniors. The smoothness of this transition is primarily a consequence of the remarkable efforts of the faculty, new and continuing, to meet the challenges and opportunities of the redesign, and the equally remarkable degree of cooperation between the faculty and the administration. There remain, needless to say, reservoirs of pain and anger over the personnel changes, but that has not inhibited the process of moving the College forward in pursuit of its educational mission with the intelligence, determination and collaboration it requires.

The other major aspect of the transition--an increase in undergraduate enrollment from 370 to 600 students--will require five years to accomplish. That is, in part, because the success of those efforts is conditional on the implementation of the programmatic, personnel and structural changes. In addition, that success is contingent on an aggressive admissions effort over a full enrollment cycle and on attracting the financial support from individuals and foundations to provide revenue for the operating budget, and the launch costs of new initiatives while enrollment rebuilds. On the Admissions front, we have made a particularly strong appointment for the position of Director of Admissions. The new Director was formerly Dean of Admissions at Sarah Lawrence and before that Associate Dean of Admissions at Amherst. We are especially pleased to be able to report to the Commission that the fund raising efforts in support of the Symposium have achieved an early momentum that is enormously encouraging and that far exceeds our preliminary expectations.

We have allocated \$20 million over five years toward transition costs, including subsidizing enrollment revenues and launching new initiatives. Our enrollment projections are conservative and our new initiative budgets are generous. Since June, \$4 million has been raised in explicit support of the College's redesign, about evenly divided between individuals and foundations. On the basis of these results, our principal banker has renewed the College's operating line of credit and waived all reviews until next fall's audit.

Dr. Charles Cook
November 10, 1994

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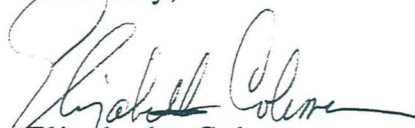
The third phase of the College's current \$30 million Capital Campaign has been dedicated to meeting up to \$10 million of the costs of the new design. The Campaign is right on target, having passed the planned \$20 million milestone in the last fiscal year. For this final phase of the Campaign, 185 prospects have been identified; since June, \$1.6 million has been pledged from this group. Another \$6 million in solicitation are now underway. As expected, the Symposium has had a dramatic, extremely positive effect on this phase of the Campaign.

The remaining \$10 million needed to complete the transition will be sought from foundations by way of both general support and support for new initiatives. The Pew Foundation, the Davis Educational Foundation, and the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation have invited us to submit proposals to fund the overall transition for a total of \$2 million; these submissions are now under foundation review. Additional proposals requesting general transition support of \$8 million are or will be pending by the close of the calendar year. Proposals focused on the establishment of particular new programs including foreign language teaching, environmental initiatives, continued development of the New Media Center, music as a liberal art, and a major public service field-work project continue to be developed for submission to appropriate foundation sources.

Given the magnitude of change that Bennington is embarked upon, the early returns are immensely promising. Moreover, the importance of our initial successes is inestimable, overcoming as they do the first rush of sensational, inaccurate accounts in the popular press of the consequences of the College's plan. Even the press accounts are changing--slowly--as the complex analyses and ideas that underlie the new Bennington have a chance to be grasped and considered.

Under these circumstances, I look forward with particular pleasure to meeting with the Commission next week.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Coleman
President