

November 19, 1942

Miss Ann Packard
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Wellesley College Government Association
Wellesley College
Wellesley, Massachusetts

Dear Ann,

Thank you very much for your interesting letter describing the Wellesley Judicial System. Although, as you will see, it is difficult to describe the Bennington "Judicial System", I will try at all events to answer your questions.

Since Bennington is a much smaller college than Wellesley, (the student body numbers approximately 300 at present), our "judicial system" is somewhat more informal than that of your college.

In the first place, when students come to Bennington, they are looked upon as adults, and are expected to act in an adult manner. This is one of the most important facets of the Bennington educational experience. Students plan their own programs upon an individual basis with the help of their counsellors. Marks, prizes and other scholastic rewards are pushed far into the background. A student studies because she wishes to learn. Tests are rare, and if used, are used to show the student what she has yet to learn. Papers and class-work are the primary considerations in making out student reports. These attitudes toward study and toward the incentives to study result in the fact that the problem of the honor system, so bothersome in other colleges, is non-existent at Bennington.

As for violations of library regulations, here again faith is placed in the student's maturity and sense of social responsibility. We have no system of library fines and penalties. Having a small, yet carefully chosen library, we know that every book counts. At times students may be somewhat slow in returning books; however, very few are lost or damaged. Occasionally the student house chairman put pressure upon the members of their houses to return books that have been out of the library for over two weeks, but this is all that appears necessary.

As for more general social behavior, here again we have few rules. Behavior that is injurious to the student's health and work, or objectionable to the community, from the point of view of internal order and public relations, is discouraged by a rather alert public opinion among the student body. Wherever such behavior occurs, the student is talked to by her house chairman and often by other girls in the house. (The houses number approximately twenty-three students and are cross

Miss Packard

11-19-42

#2

sections economically, racially, and by year, of the whole student body.) If the girl persists in her anti-social behavior, she is brought before the Central Committee. The Central Committee is composed of two student house chairmen, (elected by the twelve student house chairmen), the Director of Admissions and Student Personnel, and the Secretary to the Director of Admissions and Student Personnel. The girl's house chairman or faculty counselor may also be called into the meeting if it seems advisable to do so. This group has no power to impose fines or punishments. It can recommend that a student be dismissed from college, but has never done so, as far as I know. Yet the Central Committee has a tremendous amount of prestige, which it uses to impress upon the student offender the foolishness of her activities. Throughout, emphasis is placed upon the educational and corrective role the house chairmen and Central Committee are elected to perform.

I know all this sounds utopian, but it works, although we have a few cases of persistent offenders. The key to this type of "judicial system" is the work of the house chairmen in straightening out students within their houses before and after offences occur. It also lies in the fact that the students know they are trusted and respected by the administrative branch of the college. They realize they are expected to act maturely. Usually they do so. The Director of Student Personnel, the faculty counselors, and the resident psychiatrist, also a member of the faculty, assist this process, but to a remarkable degree, it takes place automatically.

Again many thanks for your letter, and I hope this information will be of some use to you.

Sincerely yours,

SS

Miss Eleanor Metcalf, Chairman,
College Council