

Breaking New Ground (Summer 2017)

JUNE 20, 2017

We're breaking new ground—literally and figuratively—at Bennington, with a raft of new partnerships, new teaching initiatives, new faces, and new spaces. This embrace of change is part of our history and our DNA at Bennington—but no matter how constant the pace, with each step into the new comes a renewed energy and excitement.



Forging Partnerships

- **Tackling the Toughest Problems:** The Center for the Advancement of Public Action (CAPA) has continued its role of bringing Bennington's resources to bear on some of the most urgent issues facing our communities, local and global. The fifth annual **Incarceration in**

America conference took place this spring on campus. This event has been the site of some of the most important thinking and activism around the issue, including developments that have coalesced into the **CloseRikers** campaign. This spring, CAPA also hosted **Thailand's ambassador to the U.N.** to discuss the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, and organized **Volatile Futures/Earthly Matters**, a conference on how the social sciences are grappling with planetary crisis. In a further demonstration of Bennington's commitment to link learning and citizenship, CAPA also partnered with the Hoosick Falls Central School District to launch **a conference** for advanced high school students and the public on issues related to their local water supplies.

- **Investing in Our Community:** The strength of Bennington College depends on the vitality of the community in which we live and work—and vice versa. With that in mind we have partnered with local business leaders, arts and educational institutions, and civic-minded investors to help lead development of the **Putnam Block** in downtown Bennington, with an eye to creating a vibrant, walkable downtown. The project will offer housing, commercial spaces, and flexible work sites for incubators and start-ups.
- **Understanding Culture:** The **Museum Fellows Term**, a program operated in partnership with the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, provides Bennington students the opportunity to take a deep dive into art institutions in New York City over winter and spring terms. Working with museum professionals, artists, curators, gallerists, collectors, and other arts and culture leaders from within the rich Bennington alumni network and beyond, Fellows learn how the art world works—how it defines culture and confers value. This year, we expanded the program to include two new museum partners—the Whitney Museum and the

Jewish Museum—and students organized a well-attended panel of alumni artists and curators about navigating change and uncertainty that took place at the Frankenthaler Foundation's headquarters in the city.

- **Bennington Country is Art Country:** This spring, cultural institutions in the region announced a new initiative to strengthen the area's status as a premier arts destination. Bennington College is at the heart of this endeavor through the work of our alumni and faculty. The work of alumna Helen Frankenthaler '49 will be the subject of two **major exhibitions** at The Clark, and one of her paintings in the College's collection, *Silver Coast*, will be on view at the Bennington Museum this summer. MASS MoCA's newly opened Building 6 features long-term installations by **faculty member Mary Lum** and former faculty member **Gunnar Schonbeck**. This summer a show at Usdan Gallery, ***Vital Curiosity***, will include works by Bennington faculty and alumni—including Frankenthaler, Paul Feeley, Odili Donald Odita MFA '90, Noam Rappaport '96, Grace Bakst Wapner '55, Stephen Mueller '71, and Carrie Moyer '82—that push the limits of color and underline Bennington's long-standing role as a vital center of innovation in the visual arts.

Contagious Energy

- **The Buzz About Bennington:** This year saw the largest applicant pool in the history of the College. The nearly 20% increase over last year is thanks to the outreach efforts of our Admissions team; the high profiles of our alumni; word-of-mouth recruiting by alumni, family, and friends; and an uptick of attention from **college advisors** and **media**. As a result

of this outpouring of interest, the Class of 2021 counts students from 31 states, 26 countries, and 174 schools among the student body.

- **Ready to Launch:** This same enthusiasm is palpable among our students while they're here and as they make their way into the world. According to our survey of seniors, 83% of the **Class of 2017** published work online or in print, showed art at a public exhibition, performed in public dance, music, and theatre events, produced or published music, or presented scientific papers during their time at Bennington. We wish them well!
- **Becoming a Part of It:** Our network of alumni, friends, and families have contributed generously this year to keep this energy bubbling and to allow Bennington to continue breaking new ground. With two weeks remaining in our fiscal year, almost 2,000 donors have helped us reach our \$18 million fundraising goal, including a record seven gifts of \$1 million or more. Almost \$4 million has been marked specifically for need-based student scholarships, including four new endowed scholarships—crucial support for the 81% of our student body who qualify for need-based aid. These gifts also made it possible for 22 students to complete Field Work Term placements in public action organizations—allowing them to further their own educational experiences, do good in the world, and enrich the Bennington community with the insights they have gained through their work in the field. We are also particularly grateful for the \$3.5 million commitment made by trustee and Silo Society member Charlene Schwartz '54, which will support student housing and scholarships.

A Dynamic Education

- **Awards and Accolades:** As ever, our faculty and alumni have been recognized for their outstanding (and outsized) contributions to their respective fields. This year has seen two **Whiting Awards**, three **honors** and an **induction** at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, two Guggenheims (**here** and **here**), a **Lambda Award nomination**, a **solo exhibition** at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, and **awards** from Jacob's Pillow and the American Dance Festival. And the *Bennington Review*—the newly relaunched version of Bennington's storied literary journal—won the award for **Best Debut Literary Magazine** at the Firecracker Awards.
- **New Models for Teaching:** The Bennington approach to education understands and responds to how students learn now, keeping in view our long history of **pedagogical innovations and insights**. Five faculty members have been able to undertake a thorough study of our methods thanks to ongoing funding from the Mellon Foundation. Their work has resulted in the launch of a new initiative—the **First-Year Forum**, a year-long course led by a faculty member and a student leader that will introduce students early on to the skills and capacities they need to thrive and succeed at Bennington.
- **New Faces:** This summer we welcome **Anne Thompson** as the Director and Curator of Usdan Gallery—a new position that reflects the importance of Bennington as an arts hub in the region. We are also pleased to announce the hiring of new faculty members in computer science (**Ursula Wolz**), sociology (**Debbie Warnock**), and drama and CAPA (**Burcu Seyben**). **Camille Guthrie** will take on the role of Director of Undergraduate Writing Initiatives.
- **Major Grants:** The Mellon Foundation recently awarded \$135,000 to the **Consortium on Forced Migration, Displacement, and Education**—a group comprised of Bennington, Vassar, Sarah

Lawrence, and Bard colleges—to explore innovative ways to engage with urgent issues of displacement and **forced migration**. The **National Science Foundation** has awarded a grant to the College to continue and expand its research on PFOA contamination in the water supply of neighboring communities.

Mentors and Models

- **Our Network at Work:** One of the biggest advantages for Bennington students is the ability to draw upon the expertise of a network of alumni who have gone on to do extraordinary things in the world. This year, Deborah Borda '71, Andrea Fiuczynski '85, and Max Nanis '12 shared their insights on ***Creativity, Innovation, and the Business of the Arts*** with alumni and some of the newest members of the Bennington community—the Class of 2021 and their families.
- **Art and Activism:** Our alumni hosted their second **24 Hour Plays** in New York, which brought together over 40 of our outrageously talented writers, directors, actors, and crew to make magic in a single day—with the goal of honoring one of their own. The night supported the endowment of the **Spencer Cox '90 Scholarship for Student Activists**, which will be awarded to an upper-level student for the first time next year.

Building the Bennington of the Future

- **Commons Renovation:** Back in the early 1930s, the founders of this institution recognized that a new approach to education would require new types of learning spaces. Now, 85 years later, we are undertaking a **renovation** so that Commons can once again reflect—and even inspire—the conversations, collaborations, and pedagogies that embody a Bennington education today and in the future.
- **Student Health Center:** A stem-to-stern renovation of one of the College’s earliest structures is underway. The result will be a **new, integrated home** for the College’s health, psychological, and health promotion services, with the goal of making wellness part of our students’ educational experience.
- **Paran Creek Apartments:** Bennington will launch the **Paran Creek apartments** this fall, a new approach to off-campus living and learning for students.

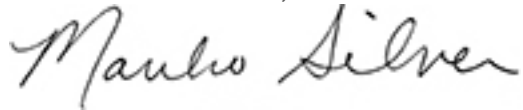
Charting Our Course

- **New Perspectives:** As ever, our Board of Trustees have been working tirelessly to chart a course for Bennington that will honor the lessons of the past while making way for the future. This year, **Deborah Borda ’71**, newly appointed President and CEO of the New York Philharmonic and a person *The New York Times* calls “one of the most successful arts administrators in the nation,” will join the board. In addition, Nare Filiposyan ’17 has been appointed as the new graduate trustee for a two-year term.

None of this work would be possible without the partnership of our alumni, families, and friends who support our work here in myriad ways. For those who have already supported Bennington this year—by

hosting a Field Work Term student, completing an alumni survey, participating in the alumni network, or supporting the College financially—thank you. For those who want to add to the energy we are generating here on campus and in the world, you have until June 30 to **make a gift** in this milestone year.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Mariko Silver". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mariko" written in a larger, more prominent style than the last name "Silver".

Mariko Silver