

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MEMORANDUM TO: Members of the Faculty

FROM: John Barr  
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

DATE: March 29, 1994

RE: The Symposium

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For the Board of Trustees, the Symposium has been extraordinary. Over 600 people--faculty, students, staff, parents, and alumni--have participated, many writing thoughtful, challenging letters and memos for the Board's consideration. The Trustees have worked through the winter sifting, evaluating, elaborating, consolidating, and focussing on many of these contributions. Although much remains to be done, three kinds of directions could benefit now from exploration and work by others. The first goes to several programmatic initiatives to which the Board is committed. The second is a consideration of infrastructure priorities. The third goes to one of several possible organizational changes that the Board is contemplating.

### New Programs:

(1) While retaining an abiding commitment to freedom, diversity, and individuality--to individual educational programs, to individual creativity, to individual evaluation--the Board of Trustees will give special emphasis to programs that broaden the College's focus to include the individual's context--his or her natural and built environments, social communities, and embodied selves. The purpose of such an emphasis is to strengthen our students' understanding of the conditions of personal and cultural freedom on which the life-long exercise of their individuality depends. Three academic programs have been proposed that bear particularly on these concerns: the study and practice of sound environmental understandings and behaviors; the development of intellectual habits of social reflection and the practice of public service; and a modern scientific, philosophic, and practical understanding of mind/body interactions.

(2) Two other programmatic ideas have so far won Board support: the establishment of a multimedia and video program concentrated on the making of work in digital media; and a broader charge to the visual and performing arts to create collaborations and integrations of educational experiences across the curriculum.

#### Infrastructure:

(1) Among a range of ideas about the College calendar, the Board of Trustees is studying the current pattern of the academic week. A first priority, beginning no later than the fall of 1994, will be to require all full-time faculty to be on campus for no fewer than four days per week. The scheduling of classes, counseling hours, and other College meetings will reflect this requirement.

(2) The Board of Trustees has asked the College architects to initiate a review of physical facilities to explore alterations and/or expansions in their use.

(3) The Board of Trustees has asked that a College housing policy be in place by July 1994 that favors new faculty and staff as well as faculty and staff committed to playing an active part in the residential life of the College.

#### Organization:

(1) While retaining a commitment to a full range of disciplines to be taught at the College, the Board of Trustees is seeking alternatives to the current divisional structure. Some have recommended the amalgamation of the divisions into a fewer number of larger groupings. Others have recommended the abandonment of divisions altogether, substituting a polymorphous organization of faculty more suited to the cultivation of individual student plans, to the ongoing creation of experimental programs, and to participation in the College as a whole.

The Board has asked the President to pursue these matters with people both on and off campus, making a report to the Board at its June meeting. The Board of Trustees meets again in April, June, and October. As further directions and priorities are established by the Board, I will, of course, keep you apprised.



**BENNINGTON COLLEGE  
PLAN FOR CHANGES IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY  
AND REORGANIZATION OF  
INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES AND PRIORITIES**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

After intensive review of the College's current condition, on January 26, 1994 the Board of Trustees acknowledged that a condition of financial exigency exists that must be addressed through changes in educational policy embodied by a significant reorganization of instructional resources and priorities.

Accordingly, the Board of Trustees adopted a resolution which directed the President to develop a plan for such changes in educational policy and reorganization of the instructional resources and priorities of the College as are consistent with the educational mission of the College; consistent with its current and projected financial situation; and consistent with maintaining its existence and competitive position and viability as an educational institution. The resolution further directed that the plan subsequently be submitted to the Board for approval and that the plan be designed for implementation by June 30, 1994.

On April 9, 1994, the Board of Trustees adopted the Bennington College Plan for Changes in Educational Policy and Reorganization of Instructional Resources and Priorities and instructed the President to implement the Plan as set forth herein.

**II. PREAMBLE**

In order to reestablish the College on a viable financial footing consistent with meeting its educational responsibilities, the productivity of the College and its capacity to compete competitively in today's market must be transformed. The revenue stream of the College has declined precipitously because of an insufficient number of qualified applicants and a dramatic rise in the financial needs of those students who do enroll. If the College is to be fiscally viable, it must enroll a student body of approximately 600 students, which will require doubling its current applicant pool.

In order to increase productivity and attract applicants in these numbers, the College must pursue a plan that combines downsizing, alteration, redirection and enhancement of its programs. Downsizing alone will only make the College less competitive; it must add new programs as it reduces and transforms existing ones. In addition to attracting significantly larger numbers of students, this design must be sufficiently timely and compelling to generate philanthropic support (individual, corporate and foundation) adequate to carry it through the period of transition.

Time has shown that a continuous capacity for innovation is the lifeline of Bennington. Bennington has neither the marketplace benefits of ancient tradition (it is a very young institution in the genre of distinguished private liberal arts colleges) nor the market appeal of more vocationally defined institutions such as the community college. It is in fact precisely through its special blend of tradition and innovation that Bennington has provided a genuinely distinctive and distinguished education. If Bennington is to continue it must recover its capacity for the innovative and the distinctive; it is prudent to build that capacity into the structures that define it.

### The Size and Character of the Faculty

The faculty will be reduced in over-all size. There will be no academic divisions, in order to maximize the strength and importance of the faculty as a whole and to stress the necessity of collaboration across the entire spectrum rather than within sections of the faculty. With the exceptions indicated below, all of the disciplines currently offered at the College will continue to be available, with the addition of film/video, and multi-media technology. Special emphasis will be given to those curricular ideas which provide an opportunity for extending beyond the confines of the disciplines as currently constituted and which are most responsive to the educational needs of our students.

The diminished size of the faculty also increases the need that it be qualitatively distinctive and increases the importance of each individual member of the faculty. Faculty members will need to be practitioner-teachers of whatever discipline or craft they teach whose work is addressed to a wider audience than their professional colleagues. Credentials absent practice will not suffice; and such practice must take place in a public arena beyond the confines of the College, where it is subject to the evaluation of peers other than immediate colleagues. These criteria will be applied immediately in circumstances where programmatic changes dictate. Otherwise, they will be applied at times of reviews for reappointment.

Presumptively tenured faculty not affected by faculty reductions will retain presumptive tenure, but the standards for future reviews will conform to the changes in educational policy set forth in this Plan. No new presumptive tenure contracts will be offered.

### Changes in Existing Programs

In order simultaneously to increase the number of languages taught and decrease the cost of such instruction, all language instruction will take place in a regional context involving the collaboration of the elementary and high schools in the area, the College, the business community and the adult learning community. There will no longer be any faculty positions in the College for the teaching of foreign languages and literatures as such.



College faculty appointments in music will be limited to active composers whose creative work is ongoing and whose work is being currently performed for the public at large. Composition will be at the center of the curriculum. There will no longer be any faculty positions for the teaching of instruments. In order to diminish costs, increase options, and provide a basis for greater curricular coherence, the study of instruments will use resources from the community at large in the form of lessons. . . .

Literature has always been a field of particular importance to the success of Bennington College and it must attract significantly larger numbers of capable students interested in both the reading and the writing of literature than is currently the case. If the College is to meet its enrollment needs, re-establishment of the College's distinction in this area is critical. The teaching of literature by faculty involved primarily in academic research and scholarship will be abandoned and replaced by teachers who are themselves active and published writers of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and drama addressed to the public at large beyond professional colleagues. This will allow Bennington to reclaim a unique position in the teaching of literature that it has gradually lost. Few if any colleges in the country can offer students the opportunity to study both reading and writing with a faculty composed exclusively of published writers of the kinds of books they themselves will be studying.

The College will cease to offer the array of disciplines currently provided by the Division of Social Sciences in order to diminish costs and simultaneously to focus resources in ways that connect them more productively. Politics, economics and sociology will be eliminated as separate disciplines and will be taught in the context of history, philosophy, anthropology and psychology. Faculty, in addition to being active practitioners in their respective fields, will be expected to bring a breadth of perspective that connects their disciplines to diverse areas of human inquiry.

The relationship between the sciences and other areas of human inquiry will become a paramount issue. Bennington is particularly well positioned to exploit the rich educational potential of the sciences and of mathematics (and its special relation to technology) by breaking through the divides that have kept it so isolated from other intellectual enterprises. To do this, the teaching of mathematics will require particular attention, and faculty teaching mathematics will have a special interest in its pedagogy and be capable of teaching effectively at both the introductory and advanced levels.

Bennington has recently been selected as a flagship site for the New Multi Media Program of a consortium of institutions. To strengthen the College's competitiveness, Bennington will develop an associated program that focuses on the making of film, video and other multi-media work.

Dance faculty will be professionally active choreographers whose creative work is ongoing and whose work is currently being performed professionally.

The faculty position in art history will be eliminated, and the subject will be integrated throughout appropriate curricula. Architecture will be treated as a complex of disciplines with as many connections outside the visual arts as within them, and its relation to technology will be expanded.

Directing will remain a priority; playwriting will be given greater importance and deeper collaborations forged with faculty whose primary focus is the teaching of literature.

### III. FACULTY REDUCTIONS

Financial exigency and changes in educational policy require the following faculty reductions and consolidations to effect savings and efficiencies and to permit restructuring and enhancement of programs in order to increase competitiveness.

The faculty reduction decision is not equivalent to a termination or nonrenewal for cause and does not and should not reflect adversely on the faculty members whose positions must be eliminated.

The effective date of the elimination of all positions shall be June 30, 1994. Faculty members whose positions are eliminated shall receive either one year's notice, or one year's pay and benefits in lieu of notice, as provided below in Section IV.

1. All positions for the teaching of foreign languages/literatures will be eliminated.
2. All faculty positions for the teaching of musical instruments will be eliminated.

All remaining music faculty will be professionally active composers whose creative work is ongoing and whose work is being professionally performed. The positions of all other music faculty will be eliminated.

3. There will be no teaching positions in politics, economics, or sociology. Currently presumptively tenured faculty in politics, economics, or sociology may apply for positions in history, philosophy, anthropology, or psychology.
4. All faculty teaching dance will be professionally active choreographers whose creative work is ongoing and whose work is being professionally performed. The positions of all other faculty teaching dance will be eliminated.



5. There will be no teaching position in art history.

All remaining visual arts faculty will be professionally active visual artists whose creative work is ongoing and whose work is being professionally exhibited or commissioned. The positions of all other visual arts faculty will be eliminated.

6. All literature faculty will be professionally active writers of fiction, non-fiction, poetry or drama whose creative work is ongoing, whose work is published and reviewed, and whose work is addressed to the public at large beyond professional colleagues. The positions of all other literature faculty will be eliminated.

#### IV. PROCEDURES

1. The President shall determine which faculty members' positions shall be eliminated pursuant to Section III.
2. Notices to those faculty members whose positions will be eliminated will be mailed prior to June 30, 1994.
3.
  - (a) Each presumptively tenured faculty member whose position has been eliminated shall receive pay and benefits in lieu of notice for the period of July 1, 1994 to June 30, 1995.
  - (b) Each non-presumptively tenured faculty member whose position has been eliminated shall receive one year's notice (a terminal appointment from July 1, 1994 to June 30, 1995.)
  - (c) A presumptively tenured faculty member whose position has been eliminated may request a terminal appointment from July 1, 1994 to June 30, 1995 instead of pay and benefits in lieu of notice for that period. Such a request must be made by the affected faculty member to the President in writing within 15 calendar days of the date of the notice to the faculty member of the elimination of the position, or, if a request for review is filed pursuant to Section V below, within 15 calendar days of the date of the President's final decision after review by the Faculty Review Committee [FRC].

V. REVIEW PROCESS FOR FACULTY WHOSE POSITIONS ARE ELIMINATED

1. The President shall appoint a Faculty Review Committee [FRC] to hear requests for review as described below. The Committee shall consist of three members of the faculty whose positions are not affected by the faculty reductions.
2. A request for review of the elimination of a faculty member's position may be filed by the affected faculty member. The request must be in writing and must be received by the FRC within 15 calendar days of the date of the notice to the faculty member of the elimination of the position.
3. Review shall be limited to whether the criteria stated in Part III above were properly applied in the individual case. The existence of a state of financial exigency, and the change of educational policy under which the position will be eliminated, are not subject to review.
4. Within 21 calendar days of the filing of the request for review the FRC shall hear the faculty member. All proceedings shall be informal and conducted with dispatch. The affected faculty member shall have the burden of producing evidence for review by the FRC. The FRC shall keep a record of its proceedings.
5. Within 14 calendar days of the proceeding, the FRC shall issue its written report to the President. The report shall state the FRC's findings on the reviewable issues raised by the faculty member. A copy of the report shall be transmitted to the faculty member.
6. Within 7 calendar days of the receipt of the written report of the FRC, the President shall review the FRC's report and make a final decision on the elimination of the position. There shall be no further review or appeal and no other body, board, or committee shall have jurisdiction in these cases.
7. Under no circumstances shall the dates specified in paragraphs 1-6 above be extended.