

Town Hall Follow Up



Bennington College - Laura Walker

Nov 22, 2021

Dear Faculty and Staff,

In the interest of our collective efforts to support students, we wanted to share with you the message below, which was shared with students on Friday.

Thank you for all you do,

Laura



BENNINGTON COLLEGE MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Students,

Thank you all for attending the Town Hall. It is important that we come together as a community to address these complex and difficult issues. I am committed to an environment where everyone feels heard—and is heard. We are here to listen and talk but also to make concrete changes that help us create an institution that is a reflection of our values. Here is the [recording](#), for anyone who missed it.

Please know that Bennington College takes incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault and other forms of violence very seriously and will investigate all incidents that are brought to our attention. That needs to be 100 percent clear to everyone on this campus. The next steps outlined below—and the existing resources—address our policies in this area, as well the larger Title IX issues, and steps that we can take, with student input.

The information below is organized into the categories that were the major focus of the Town Hall. Every question is of course important—and we intend to address each in the series of Community Forums we are organizing.

Thank you for your time and your caring as we work together to make Bennington what we collectively want it to be.

Thank you,

Laura Walker

Sexual Misconduct and Harassment

- **Community Forum**—In collaboration with Jill Moffitt from Grand Rivers Solution, the College will host a **virtual webinar on "Sexual Misconduct and the Title IX Process" on Tuesday, November 30 from 12:30-1:30 pm EST**. Please [register](#) to attend this event. This webinar will answer students' questions, and help students understand the process and mechanisms available to them.
- **Restorative Justice**—Li-Chen and Alfredo and the Student Life staff are working with [Alisa Del Tufo](#), a visiting faculty member whose career has been dedicated to ending violence in the lives of women and girls and addressing racism and other deep social challenges. She will be running restorative circles and a webinar/community forum on the restorative justice approach **before the end of this term**. In addition, she will provide training for House Chairs next term and consult with Student Life on incorporating restorative practices in the Student Conduct process, including sexual misconduct.

- **Title IX Coordinator**—Bennington will hire a full-time Title IX coordinator who will report to Alfredo Medina, Jr., Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the College Diversity Officer. We are in the process of finalizing the job description, and will post the position and launch a search in the first week of December. We anticipate having the position filled by the early part of spring 2022 term.

The search committee will include students and there will be community meetings with final candidates. Thank you to those students who have already volunteered to serve on the committee. Any students who are interested in participating in the search process, please [email Alfredo](#).

Efforts will be made to ensure a diverse pool of applicants. We will employ a proactive recruitment process that will attract female applicants and those from minoritized groups.

- **Transparency in Title IX**—By the end of the term, we will create a flowchart that illustrates the avenues students can choose to seek help and support—including Title IX and ways to support students who have been victims of sexual misconduct and assault. In the flow chart, we will clearly illustrate which parts of the processes can be public and transparent. These procedures will be shared publicly.
- **Reporting misconduct**—We encourage community members to report specific information about sexual misconduct to the offices of the Title IX Coordinator, Student Life, or Campus Safety so that the College can investigate through procedures required by law and/or College policy and take action as appropriate to promote the safety and well-being of the campus community. Anyone with specific information to share should contact any or all of those offices by text, email, phone or in person.

Support for Students who have Experienced Sexual Misconduct/Assault

There are a number of resources available to students who have experienced sexual misconduct or who are involved in a Title IX or conduct investigations. You can find out more about our policies and resources at <https://www.bennington.edu/title-IX>.

Specifically, Ali Tartaglia, the Director of Student Health Promotion, serves as a confidential resource for students and often is a first point of contact for students experiencing sexual misconduct. She can offer emotional support and advocacy, and help students to understand the options available including but not limited to SAFE exams (Sexual Assault Forensic Exams), the Title IX process and reporting to law enforcement.

Additionally, students can access support for their health, safety, residential living, and academic needs through the following campus resources:

- **Campus Safety**—If you are in immediate danger, contact Campus Safety by dialing 767 (SOS) from a campus phone or 802-447-4250 from any non-campus phone. Campus Safety staff will provide assistance to you and can help you make connections to medical, psychological, and other staff and resources, as needed. The Director of Campus Safety can issue no contact orders to restrict contact and communication between a complainant and a respondent for the duration of an investigation.
- **Psychological Services and Health Services**—All clinical staff in Psychological Services and Health Services are confidential resources who can offer assistance and support.
- **Academic Services**—At the student's request, Ali or the Title IX investigator can connect the student with a member of the Academic Services staff to provide academic support. The Academic Services staff member can assist in communicating with faculty about attendance and coursework, arranging for flexibility and extensions on assignments if possible, and determining other appropriate actions that might support their academic progress. All of these communications maintain respect for the student's privacy; no personal information about the student's circumstances is shared with faculty during this process.
- **Student Life**—The student can also connect with Housing directly or through Ali, the Title IX investigator, or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator Christine Winget to request temporary or permanent changes in their housing. Student Life staff can also assist with other concerns related to engagement, dining, and other aspects of life on campus.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

- **Community Forum**—Michael Cohen, a psychologist and researcher from New York and his team are conducting a study on the future of mental health and wellbeing. They will present preliminary directions and hold a community forum before the end of this term. **The exact date and time will be announced after students return from Thanksgiving.**
- **Access to Psychological Services**—As a part of the study, Michael Cohen and his team are reviewing access to psychological services and best practices around the country. The findings will be released at the beginning of the next term.

- **Psych services process**—Psych services has a triage model. Students can email psychservices@bennington.edu to request therapeutic support at any time while on campus. You will receive a return email within a work day giving you the opportunity to use a calendar link and reserve a triage time to meet and speak with a therapist. Triage and drop in times are available virtually or in person; there are multiple options of different days and times to connect every week. **All triage and drop in services are free and accessible.** The intention of this initial conversation is to understand what each student needs and help make referrals for ongoing support from there.

There are a wide range of therapeutic services available, both on campus and through telehealth options. All students have access to therapeutic services on TimelyMD while on campus and in the United States during breaks. Students can engage solutions focused, short term therapeutic support (up to 12 sessions a year), health coaching, and access to groups and workshops. All therapeutic services on TimelyMD are free. There is also an option to chat with a mental health professional any time day or night through Talk Now; this chat is also available internationally.

There are confidential, private spaces students can reserve for any telehealth sessions in the Student Health Center; please email healthservices@bennington.edu to request to reserve a room for your telehealth care.

- **Individual and group therapy**—We continue to provide individual and group therapy options on campus. We work with each student and their individual considerations, including insurance, needs, and preferences about provider and form of therapy as much as possible. Psych services is currently conducting a search for a full-time counselor/therapist/psychologist--multicultural and diversity specialist. We anticipate having the position filled by the start of the next term. Students interested in being involved in the search process please reach out to Kat Daley, Interim Director of Psychological Services.
- **Mental Health Emergencies**—Immediate support is also available to anyone experiencing a mental health emergency. Students can contact campus safety at (802) 447-4250 anytime while on campus and ask to speak to the on call therapist. Students provide their number and/or name and a therapist will call them back within a few minutes and provide support and create a follow up plan as needed. This crisis support is also free and available to all students while on campus.
- **Access to Female Healthcare Providers**—In response to a question about the availability of female healthcare providers, we wanted to make sure students know that the College has a relationship with Planned Parenthood in Bennington and can connect students with care there if they do not want to access services here. We have also advocated for the Nurse Practitioner at Planned Parenthood to have a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, or SANE, trained to conduct sexual assault forensic exams and provide prophylactic medication. These services are available at Southern Vermont Medical Center Emergency Department currently.