

## IT'S ALWAYS NEW AT BENNINGTON

Bennington is animated by a spirit of regeneration and renewal. With every new season there is a freshness in our faculty, students, and curriculum, enlivening our essential work of teaching and learning, working and doing, bringing new ideas, projects, programs, and voices to the world. It's my pleasure to take the opportunity to share with you just a few of the highlights of what's new at Bennington.

### Farewells and Welcomes

Nowhere is this spirit of renewal better embodied than in the continual cycle of students arriving on campus and graduating four short years later—and transforming the College in the process. This June, we celebrated the **largest graduating class in Bennington's history**. Perhaps it's no wonder that the members of the Class of 2016 said they feel confident in their ability to pursue their hopes and dreams after college, given [all they've accomplished](#) while they were here. We can't wait to see what they do next.

Their places will soon be filled by the Class of 2020. The buzz about Bennington's innovative model of liberal arts education resulted in a **record number of applications**—a 13% increase in a single year. From among these, we assembled a class that represents a broader cross-section of backgrounds and experiences than any before it: 21% of incoming students come from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, 16% are the first in their families to go to college, and 19% are eligible for Pell grants, a small federal grant that is available to only the nation's neediest families.

Likewise, we also said **a fond goodbye** to faculty member Ron Cohen, who retired this year. Ron has been a profound influence on generations of students, and his presence is already missed.

But our sadness is balanced by excitement about the **seven new faculty members** who will arrive on campus in the fall infusing new perspectives, methods, and subject matters in our curriculum, all while carrying on the legacy of teacher-practitioners like Ron and so many others. [Lopamudra Banerjee](#) (economics), [Ella Ben Hagai](#) (social psychology), [Josh Blackwell '95](#) (painting), [Maya Cantu](#) (drama), [John Hultgren](#) (environmental politics), [J. Vanessa Lyon](#) (art history), and [Brando Skyhorse](#) (literature) will expand and enrich the already vast range of work that happens here among our faculty and students.

## Accomplishments, As Ever

As always, the **list of faculty achievements** is long, as our teacher-practitioners continue to shape their respective fields at the same time as they mentor and guide our students. This June, the first museum retrospective of the work of Liz Deschenes opened at the ICA-Boston, and within days of its opening began appearing on “must see” lists of publications across the country. David Bond, associate director of CAPA, been awarded an NSF EAGER Research Grant to support his ongoing work on the role of fossil fuels in driving contemporary social and environmental change. You can see more noteworthy news from faculty members Jon Isherwood, Benjamin Anastas, Noah Coburn, and others [here](#).

In June, the US Department of Education [announced](#) that Bennington College was selected from a competitive national pool to participate in the **Second Chance Pell Pilot Program**, an initiative aimed at reducing recidivism and combating the impact of mass incarceration. The program will allow eligible inmates at the Great Meadow Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison in Comstock, NY, to receive Pell grants and take part in CAPA’s Prison Education Initiative for degree credit. The PEI is part of Bennington’s Incarceration in America program directed by faculty member Annabel Davis-Goff.

The work of our faculty and our institution continues to be **supported by major funding agencies**. Three faculty members—anthropologist David Bond, chemist Janet Foley, and geologist Tim Schroeder—[secured](#) a National Science Foundation RAPID grant this spring to mount a course in response to the findings of PFOA in water supplies in the region. The course, “Understanding PFOA,” brought together 20 students and 8 community members, including educators from the region, to learn about the myriad issues that inform PFOA groundwater contamination, and to collect water samples from a variety of sites; it will run again in the fall.

In addition, Bennington has begun work on a **three-year grant from the Mellon Foundation** that will allow us to undertake an activity that has animated the College since its very founding: the thoughtful and rigorous examination of our practice as educators, with the purpose of aligning our curriculum, advising, and student assessment with our goals of providing an education that is on the forefront of progressive pedagogy. Stay tuned for more details.

**The Endeavor Foundation has renewed its generosity** by awarding the College \$825,000. This three-year gift will support Bennington’s curricular innovations, recruitment and retention of our world-class faculty, and assessment of student learning, all with the eye of ensuring student success in their college experience and beyond.

## Forging Partnerships

Bennington College [hosted](#) Vermont's first **Governor's Institute for Young Writers** this summer, a program that gave talented Vermont high school students, especially those from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds, an opportunity to take part in a week-long immersive writing program modeled after the College's MFA in Writing. Bennington has long been a destination for writers—from the master writers who come here to teach, to undergraduate and MFA students, to the high school participants in our Young Writers' Award. This new opportunity to help talented young people in Vermont was a welcome one, and we look forward to continuing a partnership with the Governor's Institutes of Vermont in future.

Bennington College, along with Southern Vermont College, the Bank of Bennington, and other leading businesses and local institutions, will partner in the newly announced [Downtown Revitalization Project](#) to transform the block of historic buildings at the Four Corners of Bennington into a vibrant, mixed-use downtown space with offices, in-town living, restaurants and retail. The College is committed to the life of our community, and dependent on its vitality, and we're glad to be part of this exciting endeavor.

## New and Continuing Initiatives

**Conversations on race, class, diversity and inclusion** continued across Bennington's campus. Lydia Brassard '08, director of diversity and inclusion, worked with the President's Task Force on Campus Inclusivity this year—14 members from across College constituencies and generations, including 4 alumni—to develop a mission statement and make recommendations to ensure learning at Bennington is shaped in the context of the widest possible range of viewpoints and experiences.

In September, Bennington College will host a **symposium on “The Importance of Innovation and Creativity in Higher Education” in Beijing**. I will be joined by Michael Suh, director of the Beijing Museum who spent time at Bennington last fall working with faculty and students, as well as leaders from Bard College, Stanford, and Johns Hopkins to address a group of influential Chinese educators on the future of liberal arts education in the US.

The College has just launched [a new website](#). The refreshed Bennington site will provide a functional and beautiful portal for prospective students to discover the College, and will allow students, faculty, alumni, and friends of the College to connect, discover, rediscover, and engage with Bennington in new ways. We encourage you to explore.

## Renewed Generosity

None of this would be possible without our alumni and network of families and friends who have supported the College in the past and will continue to make so much possible in years to come. Thanks to your generosity, Bennington secured a stunning \$17 million in private support in FY 2016, and the Bennington Fund received a record \$2 million in donations. We thank you for your continued commitment to the always innovative work that happens here at Bennington, and we hope you will come back to see the fruits of your efforts at [Alumni and Family Weekend on September 23–25](#)—an opportunity to reconnect with friends, meet faculty and students, and maybe even experience a spark of the new to inspire your own life’s work.

Best wishes,

Mariko Silver  
President