

Expectations of a Bennington Education

“Bennington...seeks to liberate and nurture the individuality, the creative intelligence, and the ethical and aesthetic sensibility of its students, to the end that their richly varied natural endowments will be directed toward self-fulfillment and toward constructive social purposes.”—from the traditional Bennington statement read at every graduation since 1936

I. Introduction

Bennington expects its students to accomplish substantive work in their area(s) of interest as well as to understand that work within a larger historical and contemporary context—a balance representing the tension between depth and breadth that is central to a liberal arts education. Both are essential to achieving the “self-fulfillment” and “constructive social purposes” to which the College has been committed since its inception. As such, they are central to the Plan process, each student’s self-defined trajectory through Bennington.

This document drafts a framework to support Plan development, with emphasis on defining a range of fundamental expectations that will allow students to realize these complementary aims. Given the individualized nature of the Plan process, the relationship between Plan and curriculum is necessarily complex. Rather than narrowly prescribed “general distribution requirements,” we seek a framework that serves the broad needs of individual Plans and provides guidance for curriculum development.

The outline below aims to serve as a Plan blueprint for students and faculty members:

- * We begin with the premise that students come to us with diverse learning styles and a wide range of capacities.
- * We aim to build upon these styles and capacities to develop, in each student, a body of fundamental skills.
- * These skills can be applied in multiple contexts; we expect students to explore this breadth of application in sophisticated and integrative ways.
- * By the time they graduate, students should be able to employ these skills individually and collaboratively, demonstrating a capacity to act creatively and effectively.

II. Fundamental expectations

An ideal list of basic expectations should be succinct, universal, easily integrated into institutional structures, linkable to curriculum, and simple to assess. It will also be, necessarily, broad. The five categories below are best seen as a spectrum rather than as discrete classes. Each might be realized in sophisticated work in most or all disciplines; however, we reemphasize that students should not be limited to their application within a single discipline.

- * Formulating an inquiry
- * Identifying, analyzing, and using resources
- * Creating and revising work
- * Presenting and explaining work
- * Connecting work to broader contexts

Each Plan should address how each student’s work has brought these expectations to bear on his or her particular pursuit.