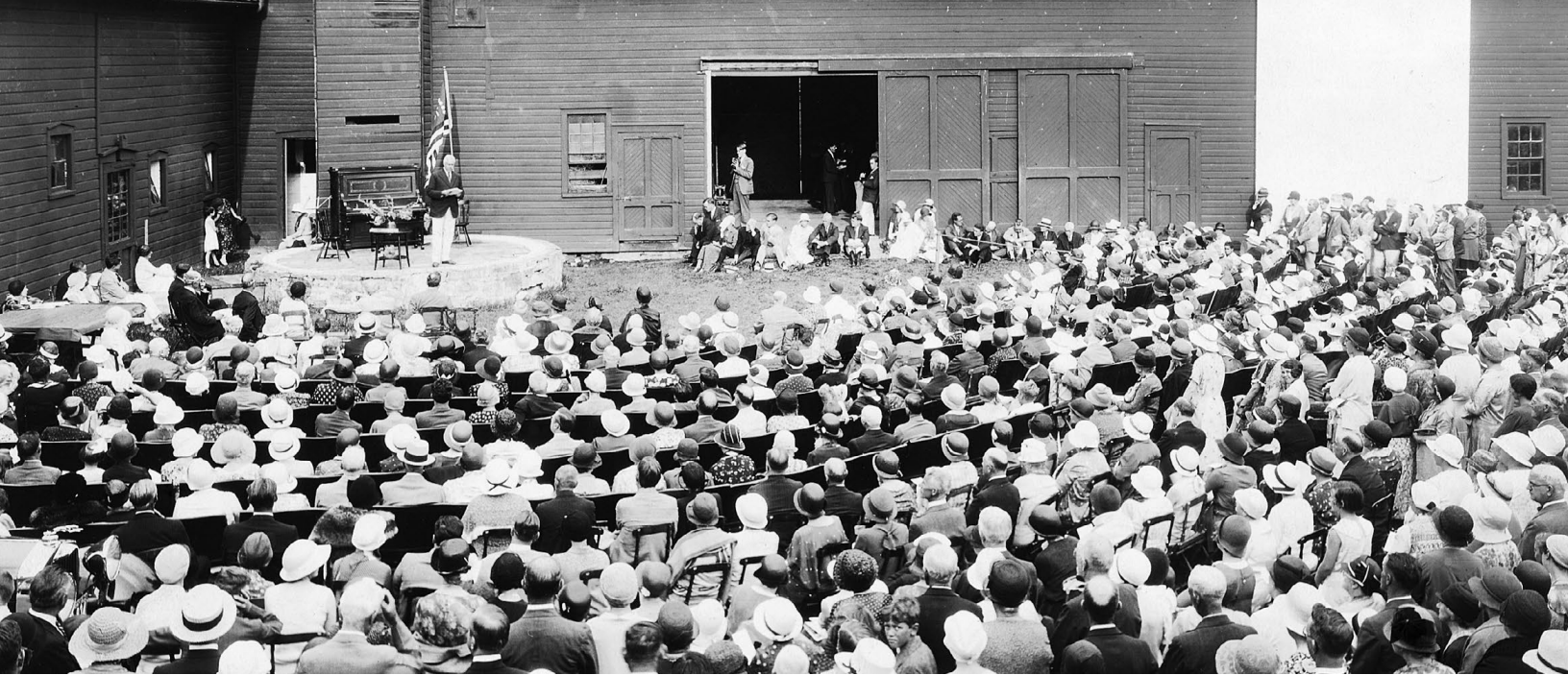


BENNINGTON COLLEGE

Strategic Plan 2024-2029





INTRODUCTION

The Bennington commencement statement brilliantly captures what sets Bennington apart:

Bennington regards education as a sensual and ethical, no less than an intellectual, process. It 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. We believe that these educational goals are best served by demanding of our students active participation in the planning of their own programs, and in the regulation of their own lives on campus. Student freedom is not the absence of restraint, however; it is rather the fullest possible substitution of habits of self-restraint for restraint imposed by others. The exercise of student freedom is the very condition of free citizens, dedicated to civilized values and capable of creative and constructive membership in modern society.



THE CHARGE

How do we build on that bold tradition in this changing world and with a radically different student body—more diverse, global, and intersectional—than when it was founded? Our students are entering a very different world with more complex, interdisciplinary, and technology challenges that require original thinking, interdisciplinary approaches, deep curiosity, and critical thinking. It requires that our students design their lives, their creative pursuits, and their approach toward making an impact. It is our pleasure and our challenge to continue this vision in new ways as Bennington nears its centennial.

We believe the tenets of Bennington's education—self direction, interdisciplinary innovation, close faculty mentorship, and real world experiences are needed—especially today. The experiment continues. Our task today is to give students the confidence and courage to design their academic work with rigorous creativity and intellectual inquiry. With this education, students will craft their life's work, participate actively as citizens of the world, and confront and shape solutions to the world's vexing problems while bridging divides and working "toward a world more beautiful, sustainable, democratic, and just."



THE PROCESS

To think about our challenge, we convened a cross-constituent strategic planning steering committee made up of faculty, students, staff, and the Board of Trustees in February 2022. They worked together for the past two years on a strategic plan for the College's next five years. Provost Maurice Hall chaired the committee, which included meetings with the community and students. (See the complete description of the process [here](#).)

The goals for our strategic plan process were as follows:

- Put forth a unifying and shared vision for Bennington's future, a mission statement, and set of values
- Create a shared understanding of Bennington's strategic challenges and identify opportunities that will be inspiring and compelling internally and externally
- Articulate and evolve our unique model of teaching and learning and examine our commitment to individualized study relative to the collective, as well as the realities, opportunities, and challenges of an increasingly technology-driven world
- Identify areas of focus: "signature" areas that will position Bennington to attract students
- Create a rigorous financial model and an approach to fundraising



THE MISSION AND THE VALUES

The work began with crafting a new mission statement for Bennington College. Bennington College's mission was developed and shared in 2023 and provides the north star for our work:

Bennington liberates and nurtures the individuality and rigorous creativity of its students, supporting them as they forge their own paths and work toward a world more beautiful, sustainable, democratic, and just.

You can read the values statement that was developed with community participation [here](#).

In order to support a caring community, the College commits to the following Core Values:

- Progressive Education, Creativity, Independence, and Experimentation
- Antiracism and Social Justice
- Sustainability, Wellness, and Regeneration
- Democratic Community

SUMMARY OF THE PLAN

In December 2023, a draft of the strategic plan document was shared with the Board of Trustees as summarized below. To lead at the frontlines, Bennington will:

- Build a strong and sustainable financial model through a capital campaign and new revenue sources, increased alumni engagement and fundraising, and improved operational capacity.
- Reinvigorate our core academic and curricular model by attracting, retaining, and supporting our extraordinary faculty—who serve as not just teachers, but advisors, innovators, and thought leaders; broaden the Bennington curriculum through partnerships that expand our knowledge-base, and be a magnet for the world’s best thinkers, scientists, artists, and makers who will use Bennington as their own innovation lab.
- Double down on interdisciplinary innovation to empower students to think creatively and across disciplines and to solve the most urgent social, political, and environmental problems of our time from climate change to the intersection of arts and technology.
- Provide clear and potent pathways to purposeful work lives, including building a stronger bridge from students’ Field Work Term experiences to work after Bennington and ensuring that internships are equitable, relevant to students’ plans, and lead to a fulfilling and purposeful life after Bennington.
- Strengthen our global diverse community through scholarship support; attract a growing pool of extraordinary students, and support our vibrant community of learners through focus on students’ first-year on campus and increased emphasis on wellbeing, faculty support, and antiracism.
- Expand the audience for Bennington educational experiences by developing new programs and adapting to student needs through flexible experiences as well as exploring potential ways to use the campus.

See the [complete strategic planning document](#) that was shared with the Board of Trustees. This plan lays out the work that needs to be done over the next five years. Some of the work provides inspiration and possibilities for the future. Others we have already started to advance.

FIRST STEPS: GOALS FOR FY25

Working from the strategic plan, we have set goals for this coming academic year. We aim to energize the core residential undergraduate program and innovate for the future, while embracing our core values and a commitment to “work towards a world more sustainable, beautiful, democratic, and just.”

With this input from the entire campus community and direction from the Steering Committee, I put forth and the following goals for this fiscal year based on the Strategic Plan:

- 1.** Strengthen the financial sustainability of the College and provide scholarship support for students by launching a Comprehensive Campaign, growing net tuition revenue, developing new revenue streams, and exploring new partnerships.
- 2.** Energize Bennington’s distinctive educational approach through support of the faculty and a focus on the evolution of the Bennington Plan, particularly around interdisciplinary innovation and student design.
- 3.** Strengthen the student experience from beginning to end with a focus on the first-year experience, mental health/wellbeing, the Field Work Term experience, and life after Bennington. Strengthen community and DEI for students, faculty, and staff.
- 4.** Bring Bennington to the world, and the world to Bennington. Expand the curriculum and the audience for Bennington programs through innovative partnerships, new interdisciplinary programs, and degrees.
- 5.** Invest in capital improvements that support the work of students and faculty, preserve the beauty of the campus and accommodate new initiatives.



Work in several key areas—including First Year Forum, Field Work Term, strengthening the Plan, fundraising, marketing initiatives, and new health and wellness programs—is already underway.