

The Bowdoin Learning Community

A residential college adds significantly to the education of students when it provides the opportunity for a distinctive and dynamic learning community to develop.

In such a community, Bowdoin students are encouraged, both directly and indirectly, to engage actively in a quest for knowledge both inside and outside the classroom, and to take responsibility for themselves, for others, and for their community. They are challenged to grow personally by constant contact with new experiences and different ways of viewing the world. Simultaneously, they are supported and encouraged by friends, faculty, staff, and other community members and find opportunities for spontaneous as well as structured activities. Such a community promotes the intellectual and personal growth of individuals and encourages mutual understanding and respect in the context of diversity.

A learning community has a distinctive set of values and qualities which support individual growth and development. These values emerge from and reinforce the finest traditions and heritage of the College. By creating and maintaining rich relationships with the world beyond, the College prepares students for engagement in the local, national, and international communities and connects them with the larger Bowdoin family.

1. **Engagement in active learning and inquiry:** Such a community is characterized by a lively intellectual life of inquiry, discussion, debate, and respectful disagreement;

vigorous pursuit of knowledge and understanding both independently and collaboratively; the highest standards of academic and intellectual honesty; and celebration of the arts through creation, performance, and appreciation.

2. **Challenge and growth:** A residential community brings together people of varying experiences, values, beliefs, and interests in the recognition that much learning and personal growth come through the creative friction created in contact with difference. Such a community also encourages its members to develop their own interests and talents as individuals and together in groups and provides opportunities for leadership and collaboration
3. **Freedom of inquiry and expression:** A learning community encourages free expression of widely varying views; it challenges assumptions and values.
4. **Mutual respect and civility of discourse:** In a learning community, differences are prized and respected and disagreement is not meant or understood as personal animosity.
5. **Concern for others:** In a learning community, members care about their neighbors, encourage their achievements, and support them when they need assistance.
6. **Shared responsibility for the community:** A learning community requires honesty, high integrity, and personal responsibility of its members and expects that they will hold one another accountable for living up to these values. Members of such a community learn to collaborate with one another in solving community problems.
7. **Friendship and fun:** In a learning community, members find close and life-long friends, relax together, meet new people, and enjoy life. Active and varied athletic, recreational, and social activities provide a context for healthy fun, as do the spontaneous activities of students.
8. **Connection to the larger community:** A learning community thrives in its relative isolation from the immediate demands and commitments of the world but cannot accomplish its mission without meaningful connections that link it to that world outside. Learning is enriched through bonds between alumni, parents, and the College, through voluntary social service and political and social action that teach students by engaging them in the world, through appropriate opportunities to study in other settings, and through a lively parade of visitors to campus to share talents, views, and experiences.
9. **Commitment to serving the common good outside as well as within the College:** The learning community to which we aspire at Bowdoin values and supports the

activities of its members which contribute to the quality of life at the College, in Brunswick, in Maine, and in the world beyond. The community offers opportunities to serve and celebrates the work of those who do so.

10. **Affirmation of Bowdoin's history and its finest traditions:** In a learning community at Bowdoin, members join together in solemn ceremonies such as Convocation and Commencement; at celebratory events such as Homecoming and Reunion Weekend; in myriad other recurrent events that remind the community members of their connections to one another and to the past and future of their College.

*Excerpted from *Building Community at Bowdoin College, An Interim Report of The Commission on Residential Life to The Board of Trustees of Bowdoin College*, February 22, 1997.

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