

## The Mission of the College

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IT IS THE MISSION of the College to engage students of uncommon promise in an intense full-time education of their minds, exploration of their creative faculties, and development of their social and leadership abilities, in a four-year course of study and residence that concludes with a baccalaureate degree in the liberal arts.

Two guiding ideas suffuse Bowdoin's mission. The first, from the College of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, defines education in terms of a social vision. "Literary institutions are founded and endowed for the common good, and not for the private advantage of those who resort to them . . . but that their mental powers may be cultivated and improved for the benefit of society" (President Joseph McKeen's inaugural address, 1802); "To lose yourself in generous enthusiasms and cooperate with others for common ends. . . ; this is the offer of the College" (President William DeWitt Hyde, 1903). The second idea stresses the formation of a complete individual for a world in flux: there is an intrinsic value in a liberal arts education of breadth and depth, beyond the acquisition of specific knowledge, that will enable a thinking person "to be at home in all lands and all ages" (President Hyde).

At the root of this mission is selection. First, and regardless of their wealth, Bowdoin selects men and women of varied gifts; diverse social, geographic, and racial backgrounds; and exceptional qualities of mind and character. Developed in association with one another, these gifts will enable them to become leaders in many fields of endeavor. Second, it recruits faculty members of high intellectual ability and scholarly accomplishment who have a passion for education both of undergraduates and of themselves, as life-long creators and pursuers of knowledge.

The College pursues its mission in five domains:

### 1. Intellectual and Academic.

The great mission of the College is to instill in students the love, the ways, and the habit of learning.

*General education in liberal arts.* The academic disciplines are specialized modes of inquiry through which human beings perceive and intellectually engage the world. Both their power and their limits have led the College to make a long-standing commitment to general education. Specialist faculty cause non-specialist students to become critically acquainted with the perspectives and methods of disciplines in three general divisions of learning: the natural sciences, the humanities and the arts, and the social sciences. The College also sustains programs of interdisciplinary study, to reveal complicated realities not disclosed by any single discipline. It requires study outside the perspectives of Europe and the West; and it encourages study abroad to foster students' international awareness and linguistic mastery.

*The major field of study and independent work.* Bowdoin places particular emphasis on the academic major, a concentrated engagement with the method and content of an academic discipline, in which advanced students take increasing intellectual responsibility for their own education. The College provides opportunities for honors projects and independent study, enabling students to engage in research and writing under the guidance of faculty mentors. The arrangement of teaching responsibilities of Bowdoin faculty presupposes professional duties not only of original scholarship and creative work but also of supervision of advanced student projects.

*Essential skills.* The unevenness of American secondary education, the diversity of student backgrounds and the demands of college-level work and effective citizenship all require that the College enable students to master essential quantitative and writing skills and skills of oral communication, with the guidance of faculty, other professionals, and qualified student peers.

The College believes that technology is not education, but that it is changing both education and society; and that it must be embraced by pedagogy and research and made easily and dependably available to students, faculty, and staff.

## 2. Social and Residential.

Bowdoin students are selected from a large pool of applicants for their intellectual ability, seriousness of purpose and personal qualities. By design, they differ widely in their backgrounds and talents, be they artistic, athletic, scientific, or otherwise. To enable such students to learn from each other, and to make lasting friendships, the College is dedicated to creating a rewarding and congenial residence life, open to all students, which, with communal dining, is at the core of the mission of a residential college. Bowdoin's system is based on residence halls linked to restored, medium-sized, self-governing former fraternity houses.

The College devotes the talent of staff and faculty, and of students themselves, to the creation of opportunities for student growth and leadership in these residential contexts, reinforced by many volunteer programs and activities, student-run campus organizations, and opportunities to plan careers.

## 3. Athletic.

Intercollegiate athletic competition against colleges with shared academic values, and other non-varsity sports, can foster self-control, poise, leadership, good health and good humor. Bowdoin encourages student participation in professionally coached varsity and club programs, as well as intramural sports, and in an outing club program that enables students to explore and test themselves in Maine's rivers and forests and on its seacoast and islands.

## 4. Esthetic and Environmental.

The College is dedicated to constructing and preserving buildings and campus spaces of the highest quality, believing that their beauty and serenity shape campus intellectual and esthetic life and inform the sensibilities of students who as graduates will influence the quality of spaces and buildings in their towns, businesses, and homes. A quadrangle of oaks and pines, ringed with historic architecture, and containing two museums with major collections of art and Arctic craft, deepens a Bowdoin student's sense of place, history and civilization.

As a liberal arts college in Maine, Bowdoin assumes a particular responsibility to use nature as a resource for teaching and engaging students—notably to help them obtain a broad sense of the natural environment, local and global, and the effects and the role of human beings regarding it.

## 5. Ethical.

Implicit in and explicit to its mission is the College's commitment to creating a moral environment, free of fear and intimidation, and where differences can flourish. Faculty and students require honesty in academic work. Coaches instruct that fatigue and frustration are no excuse for personal fouls. Deans and proctors set standards of probity and decency and enforce them, with student participation, in College procedures. Yet, recognizing that life will present graduates with ambiguities that call for certainty less than for balance and judgment, Bowdoin makes few decisions for students, academically or socially—perhaps fewer than do

many other residential colleges. It does so believing that students grow morally and sharpen personal identity by exercising free individual choice among varied alternatives, curricular and social. But the College also causes these decisions to occur in a context of density and variety—of ideas, artistic expression, and exposure to other cultures and other races—so that personal identity will not become an illusion of centrality.

Bowdoin College seeks to be a fair, encouraging employer of all those who serve the institution, providing opportunities for professional development, promotion and personal growth, and recognizing the value of each individual's contribution to its educational mission.

From its history of more than two hundred years and its inheritance of buildings and endowment that are the gifts of Bowdoin alumni there derives a corollary. If the College is to pursue its educational purposes in perpetuity, its mission is also a provident and prudential one. Succeeding generations of members of the College must carry the costs of their own enjoyment of its benefits; as alumni they remain a part of Bowdoin, assuming responsibility for renewing the endowments and buildings that will keep Bowdoin a vital, growing educational force for future generations of students and faculty.

Finally, Bowdoin's intellectual mission is informed by the humbling and cautionary lesson of the twentieth century: that intellect and cultivation, unless informed by a basic sense of decency, of tolerance and mercy, are ultimately destructive of both the person and society. The purpose of a Bowdoin education—the mission of the College—is therefore to assist a student to deepen and broaden intellectual capacities that are also attributes of maturity and wisdom: self-knowledge, intellectual honesty, clarity of thought, depth of knowledge, an independent capacity to learn, mental courage, self-discipline, tolerance of and interest in differences of culture and belief, and a willingness to serve the common good and subordinate self to higher goals.