

# Colby



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## Letters

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**Professor Benbow's Good Work**

Charles Bassett departed Oct. 19, 2010. Bob Strider left us Nov. 28, 2010. Mark Benbow slipped away Oct. 18, 2011. In the short span of less than a year, Colby College lost a century's-worth of dedicated service from three legendary educators who contributed more than perhaps any other triumvirate of contemporaries to the blossoming of Colby into one of the world's great small liberal arts colleges.

Colby's loss is my deep personal loss. Each of these men was a lifelong friend. Among the many joys of these relationships: Bob gave me my first job out of grad school. Charles officiated at my (re)marriage. And Mark once wrote on one of my papers: "This is good work," four words that have meant more to me than anything any teacher has ever said or written about my efforts. To turn Bassanio's words to Portia on their head: "These are a few of the pleasantest words that ever blotted paper."

I am holding here a folder of all the papers I wrote for Mark. Most of them are from English 394B, a course Mark designed as part of a rigorous curriculum that would lead to an Honors in English distinction. The syllabus contains an apology for the cost of books and an implicit warning about the difficulty of the course. I remember looking around the

seminar table with what must have been the same blank expression that stared back at me. Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*? What?! But this was the price the dozen of us gladly paid to have Professor Benbow to ourselves for a semester.

English majors were disappointed the next fall (1970) when President Strider elevated Professor Benbow to dean of the faculty, which meant Mark would continue to lecture, but not grade papers, for perhaps the most legendary of Colby classes: Shakespeare I and II. But the silver lining was Mark's walking to Dana Hall for lunch after those classes. He became a fixture at our table, a motley crew of English majors and fraternity brothers. And we all, despite the political and social upheaval around us, got along.

But back to that syllabus. Mark laid down the ground rules—what was, in essence, the touchstone of his scholarship, and ours: the primacy of the text. Words matter. And therein lies Mark Benbow's greatest contribution to his students: He treated our essays and exams, our texts, as seriously as he treated—and expected us to treat—the great texts of literature. To see and read his comments on our papers was to realize that he respected our texts—and us. So to have someone of Mark's intelligence and stature write those four simple words—"This is good work"—on

one of my papers left me, and continues to leave me, rapturously speechless.

Well, not exactly. I was an English major and therefore am never speechless. Let me conclude with my four simple words to my beloved Professor Benbow about decades of dedication to Colby inside and outside the classroom: *That was great work.*

*Tony Maramarco '71  
Los Angeles, Calif.*

**Forest May Pay Price for Biomass**

You have made a very nice argument for biomass harvesting systems and for the new plant at Colby. In truth, it probably is a great, efficient power generator for a small college campus. However, it is important to not be dismissive of the myriad reasons to not use biomass.

First and foremost, the stuff "left on the forest floor" is the organic material that is most vital to sustaining forest soil health. The small woody debris that is left behind in traditional forestry harvests contains an overwhelming majority of the recently felled tree's nutrients. Those nutrients are returned to the soil during decomposition. When you remove all that slash and chip it for biomass those nutrients leave the forest system. Too often the word "waste" is applied to bark and tree tops; they are anything but waste. Secondly, biomass production often coincides with heavy-handed forestry practices. In order to produce enough chips to pay for millions of dollars of equipment and trucking, loggers and foresters have to move a lot of wood. By no means are all loggers producing biomass doing a bad job, but the economics of biomass demand a HUGE amount of wood be cut. So one has to question the ecological sustainability and social feasibility of these sorts of logging systems. I think that this sort of information is important to the discussion surrounding power generation. That said, I'm happy to see that Colby is trying something, and for all good reasons.

*Andy McEvoy '09  
Pownal, Maine*

 From facebook.com/colbycollege

**Post: A question for Colby students and alums: "What's the most memorable course you took outside your major?"**

Any English class with Professor Bryant and any American Studies class with Professor McFadden. Both amazing and dynamic educators who are passionate about their subject matter and more importantly seeing their students succeed!  
*Kate Trainor '03*

Macro principles with Dave Findlay. Almost made me switch from bio to econ.  
*Eddie Plantilla '94*

Old Testament and New Testament as taught by the late and great Dr. Gustave Todrank!!!!!! 1964-65  
*Laurence Sears '67*

Microorganisms and society—non-major science class that I still think about all the time. I even explained the other day to someone why an antibiotic doesn't work on a virus (because viruses are acellular!).  
*Susanna Montezemolo '97*

I was a Math major. Took Contemporary Asian American Women's writing for literature requirement, loved it!  
*Rumbi Sundire '04*