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(DATE)

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Dear Tom:

I am scribbling a reply to your query of November 9th with regard to my experience in the operation of the 1-1-3-5-5... faculty tenure system.

First as to the original appointment of faculty members on a one-year basis: I have no record or list of the people interviewed for appointment during the 12 years 1930-41 when I was participating over in making appointments. But I have gone in memory, subject by subject, my experience. I do not believe there was a single case of anyone we wanted to appoint ^{to help} because of the 1 year initial appointment ^{rule} decided not to come. I don't even remember ^{any} whom we didn't want but with whom I talked and ^{to help} indicated that the 1 year rule was a bar to considering the job. There are some factors to be considered in connection with this experience. First, in recruiting new faculty members for a new college ~~it was~~ ^{it was} the part of wisdom without any security of prestige or tradition, it was the part of wisdom to look for young people with their ~~then~~ formal training completed, with 1-4 years experience, enough to indicate their potential ~~general~~ ability as teachers, scholars or artists. So the large majority of people ^(over) people of high quality with their reputations still to make.

sought were on one year ^{academic} appointments, or at most ^{always} three year appointments. To most of these, Bennington had the risks ~~and excitement~~ of a new venture; but our budget was such (in the depression period) ^{as} to offer, usually, a larger initial salary than they were getting ^{elsewhere. It also gave} and more security of tenure in the sense of ^{permanent} periodic decision during ^a the first five year period rather than continuing for indefinite periods in the large universities without decision regarding acceptance for a permanent ^{position} decision.

The only exceptions to recruiting from this age group on clearly equal terms ^{and} as better security ^{than} except ^{for} the newness of the College (a positive selective factor on the whole) were a ⁽¹⁾ number of older people in music, the arts and literature none of whom were in positions where the tenure was as protected by regularity and continuity as at Bennington (Schindler, Taggard, Park, Ch. Smith, St. Hirsch) and for whom Bennington offered greater security and tenure. The other ~~or~~ and ⁽²⁾ a few who were ^{our} strong first choices for the jobs and left full professorships or ^{more than} positions of more than one year tenure ^{elsewhere} without any qualms or reservations: Harold Cross, ^{Otto Gruening} George Lundberg, and Bob Woodworth.

So, in summary, the 1-1-3 tenure provision never seemed to present any problems to me in making appointments.

As to persons leaving ^{Bennington} because they had only five-year appointments, I am equally sure that no one left for that reason. It is easy to recall the people who left from 1933 to 1941 when I was president. Practically

all who left did so because they were not reappointed or ^{were} encouraged by me to resign because they were not up to the standard of performance we set for ourselves in those perfectionist years. Some of these did pretty well elsewhere and were pretty good people - but not good ~~for~~ ^{enough} for the exacting Bennington job. A couple of the very desirable faculty members, however, left ^{voluntarily, but} for purely personal reasons: one on because she married a man tied to N.Y. City, ^{regard} another because he divorced his staff member wife to marry a faculty colleague and felt it necessary ^{for all concerned} to locate elsewhere ^(P. Doughty) (his decision not mine). And no one else left voluntarily that I know of.

That is the record to 1941 so far as I can recall it. May I add a few observations of a more general nature?

Recently I had occasion to sample the actual tenure system as applied to a professional school faculty group in 34 colleges and universities of all grades - 1/2 of them the bigger and better universities. I was assured the group in each case was under the same tenure provisions as the other university faculty members. Whatever these provisions are, the 200 faculty members whose records I collected showed ~~to~~ what seemed to me great irregularities and lack of system in progression to a system of more than one year appointments, or 1 and 3 year appointments. There were cases in good places ~~and~~ (some of the best 10 in general reputation) with faculty members on 1 year appointments after 6-10-15-20 years and ^{then} on 3 years after 10, 11, 15 years. (over)

Further inquiry of some of the university officers revealed that ~~this~~ these people by a kind of unwritten law had earned a shadowy, common-law tenure "unless severe budget reductions forced necessary reductions of staff". I came to the conclusion ^{that} compared with most places Bennington was and, I presume still is, a model of regularity and security in progressing rapidly to acceptance as a permanent staff member. This along with the consistent ~~record~~ ^{and} record and machinery for protecting faculty members against arbitrary dismissal makes me feel that the existing ^{Bennington} system is pretty sound in protecting both the faculty and the College.

One problem I did not face, however, because of the faculty age and age of the college. This is the possible worry that the continued five-year term might have ^{for} the faculty member in his late '50s or early '60s. In some of these cases we might expect diminished energy or ability as a teacher (all of us now 60, as I am, would say the opposite is more likely in the salubrious Bennington atmosphere). Such a person, if left out at that late period at the end of five years might not be in a good position to get another good position. To let him out would be an obvious injustice and morale-destroying act. I have always assumed that after the first five years, or certainly 10 years, a faculty member ^{at Bennington} had virtual permanence, and that the five year renewal was only a protection against

severe physical or character or mental disability where the College would have to provide financially ^{for the person} but would not be bound to keep the person on the faculty teaching. I've known cases ^{in other colleges} where faculty people who got practically psychotic were almost impossible to remove from teaching chairs. But in the case of the gradual curve down of ability in the last years, if it occurs, I should think the College should absorb the liability as a family does its aging parents.

But if confidence in such treatment ^{at Bennington with a real feeling} doesn't exist, ~~an expectation~~ of permanence, something might be done by trustee declaration or regulation to create the confidence.

Fundamentally, I suspect the insecurity felt at Bennington is the actual insecurity of non-tax-supported colleges these days, and especially a college like Bennington with no endowment. No tenure system under the sun can protect against this insecurity. I wish I knew what could alleviate it.

I hope this letter is of some help in its report of experience and that my general observations have some relevance.

My very best wishes to you in your job.
Mildred joins in regards to you and Jean.
Sincerely, Robert