

## THOUGHTS ABOUT NRT

During the past two years I have asked myself many questions such as these:

What are the present aims and purposes of the NRT?

To what extent are these currently being realized?

Should we abolish NRT? Or modify it?

How do the students feel about it? How do we know?

What do we think of as a good NRT? A poor one?

How much importance do we attach to the job itself?

I realize that answers to such questions cannot be arrived at overnight but do suggest that this would be an appropriate time to review the whole NRT program. We should attempt to clarify and re-state our objectives, to devise ways of evaluating present operations and then institute whatever changes seem to be best to serve the purposes of Bennington College. If the verdict is to continue things as they are, the new Director will have a clear mandate on how to proceed. In the event that changes are planned, it would be desirable to have them identified with the new staff person.

Conditions have changed in a great many ways since the Non-Resident Term was officially scheduled as a work term in 1943. I mention some obvious ones: length, variety and quality of work experience, the qualifications of the students, changes in attitudes toward NRT, and changes in motivation.

The original length of NRT was three months. A few years after the close of World War II it was reduced to ten weeks. For the past three years, due to the Christmas holidays occurring in the middle of the week, the time of NRT has been nine weeks. As might be expected, each decrease in time has had an adverse effect on the supply of jobs, especially the more desirable ones. Of course, several other factors have affected this picture.

During its first few years of operation the Non-Resident Term provided an initial work experience for the majority of students and as such had a particular value. Now the picture is largely reversed. A large proportion of our students have already worked summers or part-time during school before they entered Bennington. This background is reflected in the job requests of freshmen, who feel that now they are in college, they are entitled to something much better than they had when they were attending high school.

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The prevailing pattern of early marriage has a definite effect on the NRT objectives of students. Whereas formerly there was considerable interest in vocational exploration, there is very little of that today. The social pressure is directed toward prospecting for husbands. For many students the NRT has been a productive time in this respect. While this attitude is understandable, it poses some problems in operation. The desire of students to be located in Boston or New Haven irrespective of interest in what sort of work they do does not always enhance their opportunities for employment nor does it provide the best sort of attitude for a satisfactory work arrangement.

The next point I want to make in contrasting the situation today with that of ten or fifteen years ago has to do with the ever increasing pressure upon students who need to earn and save money during NRT. In many instances, often among our better students, the pay check takes priority over the quality of the experience. These students are often a bit disgruntled, especially upper classmen.

I would like to mention now some problems in administering the Non-Resident Term which are largely inter-related and might all be alleviated if there were a change

in the calendar. The first of these is the students' ever present dissatisfaction with the jobs which are available. The second is the number of employers each year who are disaffected by their experience with Benn-ington students. It is our feeling that we could improve both situations if more time could be spent in placement.

It has often been suggested by employers that they could provide more interesting and responsible work for students to do during NRT if they could know by October just which students might be interested and available. They could then set certain tasks aside to be done during the winter by these students according to their qualifications. In some instances there has been an attempt to do this but with little success. This has been partly due, I think, to group pressures which have nothing to do with the job. Students wait to see where their friends will go. Oftentimes the final objective does not become clear until late November. The logical result is that the work students are able to get is menial and boring. There may be some instances where this might be considered an ideal experience, but it is more apt to leave students with prejudices which limit their view of the over-all situation and their ability to evaluate it.



I feel that the problem of dealing with freshmen is the most critical one. Here we are charged with placing more than a hundred new students who are in the throes of making all sorts of adjustments to college life. We would like to be able to help each one individually but time does not permit this. These girls are changing almost daily in their interests and ideas and also in their requests of the Non-Resident Term staff. Right away they want to live away from home, earn money, and find an exciting job. But they are actually the least well equipped to do this. They are also often under pressure from their families as well as their counselors and the NRT office. All told, I think the problem which NRT poses to freshmen is very real and oftentimes very upsetting to them.

Of course, there are always those substantial characters who can carry on their social, academic and job activities simultaneously and successfully. And there are those who are more job-conscious than they are study-conscious and take a serious interest in planning for their Non-Resident Term well in advance. But these are not always our best students.

Of course, it is neither possible nor desirable to give each of our 330 students individual advice and placement. We try to encourage them as much as possible to locate their own jobs. Unfortunately, the way in which some students go about this is not always helpful to the cause at Bennington.

If there were fewer students to deal with at one time, and if it were not for the fact that the whole student body is going away at one time and are trying to complete their term's work, pack, think of Christmas activities, and plan for a job all at once, I believe both the student and the NRT staff could deal with the problem of placement in a much more satisfactory manner.

I have suggested here two plans which would change the operation of the Non-Resident Term in various ways and which I feel would result in a more effective operation of the program. I am not in a position to suggest a solution to the problems of class schedules, faculty schedules and other serious disruptions which would naturally follow a change in the calendar. But I am aware that some consideration is already being given to a tri-semester calendar and would like to comment on this from the Non-Resident standpoint.

# NON-RESIDENT TERM VARIATIONS

## PLAN I

This plan calls for three semesters, approximately equal in length, and two groups of students, A & B, who would alternate between being on campus and away on jobs or other approved projects. The time spent away during the first two years would be in general work experience similar to what occurs under the present arrangement. Two consecutive terms would be spent away from college during the third year of college. This would provide a choice of study abroad or elsewhere or of working in a job related to the student's academic interest. During the fourth year all students would be at the college.

Group A - enters in September, finishes in March

Group B - enters in January, finishes in June

		<u>Term I</u>	<u>Term II</u>	<u>Term III</u>
I year	A	College	College	Work
	B	--	College	College
II year	A	College	Work	College
	B	Work	College	Work
III year	A	A job related to academic interests-- approved study elsewhere (possibly abroad)		College
	B	College	A job related to academic interests-- approved study elsewhere (abroad ?)	
IV year	A	College	College	--
	B	College	College	College

## TOTAL FOR BOTH GROUPS

Terms in Residence - 7  
 Non-Resident Work Terms - 2  
 Non-Resident optional  
 work or study away - 2

## PLAN II

A variation of Plan I which would maintain the present calendar but require only two work terms, one each in the 2nd and 3rd years of college. The College would be kept open during the winter for freshmen and seniors. Freshmen could do intensive reading and writing; seniors work on theses and projects. This plan would help solve the problems of dealing with freshmen and the boredom and dissatisfaction of seniors.

		<u>Fall Term</u>	<u>WRT</u>	<u>Spring Term</u>
I year	A	College	College	College
	B	—	College	College
II year	A	College	Work	College
	B	College	Work	College
III year	A	College	Work	College
	B	College	Work	College
IV year	A	College	College	(Transfers replace group A)
	B	College	College	College

### TOTAL FOR BOTH GROUPS

	<u>Work</u>	<u>College</u>
A	2	9
B	2	9

## PLAN III

The one submitted by Anne Schlabach two years ago has considerable merit as far as WRT is concerned.