

PROPOSAL

To: Committee on Educational Policy
From: Robert L. Gaudino
Subject: Williams-at-Home II
Date: January, 1973

I propose a second Williams-at-Home program for the academic year 1973-74 open to 24 members of the present freshman and sophomore classes.

This is a second at-home experiment, based upon the experiences and discoveries of the first. The basic framework and conception remain the same: living with families who make their home and work in different parts and places of America. A description of the first program is found in our preliminary report of August, 1972. This proposal follows from that report.

What we want to learn in this experiment is to what degree Williams-at-Home can be institutionalized. Can it function and thrive with its off-campus effort largely dependent on students for arrangements, learning, reflection? If this program has a future at Williams, it must be one in which students themselves carry much of the responsibility in the field both for setting up the home stays and for using their experience to teach each other. Faculty will still be a part of the program: in preparation through courses in the fall, in asking questions where possible in the field and at the evaluation seminars, in thinking through the experience and relating it to study at Williams. Very important to this kind of education is to have students think and reflect together.

What are the major changes recommended for Williams-at-Home? These include: the use of students from the first program to set up the contacts and arrange for families in the summer of 1973, the use of teams of six students in each location to take responsibility for settling in and sustaining learning throughout each location, long seminars of 10 to 12 days between home stays where the writing and the discussing will be done, and a course together in political philosophy on the return to Williams in the fall.

What are the changes which accompany this new structure?

Two courses will be required in the fall: one on public authority and the other a workshop for writing papers, discussing film documentaries, talking with faculty and students. There will be three home stays instead of four, which will involve a conscious comparison of three kinds of association. Students will no longer be alone in their reflections; they will put together their individual experiences and insights with other students on the team. Papers will be due at the end of each seminar period; the students will not write during their home stays. The previous emphasis on the three institutions of school, police, health, will give way to a study of the way that families associate, how they deal with certain life situations and problems, how they see things close by and things far away. The students will begin with a description of the local and individual situations and move through them to some understanding of their setting and history, and go on to the more systematic analyses of the seminars. Faculty will not always be present in the field, though it would be helpful to have one present at seminars. Students will be encouraged to keep a journal throughout the program. This kind of writing will be contrasted with that of the written reports of the teams. The faculty advisor and assessor for each student should be continued and encouraged to involve himself with each student's progress in learning and insight. Students will be reading each other's papers and writing comments on them right from the beginning in the fall. They will rewrite their first papers on the basis of these comments and further reflection. Parents will receive copies of the papers and will be encouraged to respond to them. The parents will meet together with the students on a weekend late in the fall of 1973 and in September after the program. They will be encouraged to take part in every phase of the program, and be sent all the materials. The students from the previous program will be a part of the discussions when possible.

We haven't really worked out clearly yet the relation between what is learned in the fall and what is learned in the spring. We are aware conceptually of the difference between Williams and "at-home," but we haven't quite solved the problem of how practically to relate one to the other, to get them to inform each other. The kind of sensitivity and skill involved in both questioning and responding to people has been too little developed in the students' education. The normal modes of academic questioning are not appropriate to the living situation, but are essential to the seminars. A person at ease and creative in the Williams classroom and in the seminars may have trouble with the home stays. And vice versa. The students will have a chance to see the special qualities of each other in wholly different situations.

The way we teach and study at Williams produces very little guidance or direction or example for fusion of the at-home kind of learning with our usual kind of study. Our means of proceeding, the kind of knowledge we seek, the performances we reward are not dictated by at-home standards. Discovery and understanding of the person on his own home grounds is not just asking him what he thinks about work, old age, politics, marriage, leisure, authority. It does involve asking questions, but in a special way and not until one has penetrated the density of local things, of being with a person at home, of seeing him with his family, among his peers, at work. The questions must arise out of trust and understanding, not just out of a desire to have objective knowledge about the family's condition. Categorizing and generalizing as academic tasks have very little standing with families. They criticize the students for the time taken in writing papers. But questions which follow from a trusted association do get a response. A question about age does not follow directly from just talk on aging but from observations about what is said and done with old people in the family and in the community. Also, the student is expected to share his life and values with the family. And it is hoped that the association will extend beyond the time limits of this program.

The Williams-at-Home student enters the home not for purposes of research or to poll opinion in any formal sense. But he should enter the home enhanced by the study of the background of the situation he is entering: history, economic conditions, institutions, class structure. This study will equip him with words and concepts and analyses that the family would not use. The student who has only his Williams education has trouble understanding locality; just as the student who is solely interested in particular people will have trouble reaching beyond the individual to a different kind of insight and comparison. This program thrives on both of these kinds of knowing. The aim is to have each student become aware of these two elements, of these two ways of seeing, and to understand which has priority and value for him.

One of the courses in the fall will be a workshop course. Each student will write a paper during the first week on himself, his background, his education, his experience with different kinds of people and institutions, his grounds of judging authority. These papers are read by other students in the program. They comment, criticize, perhaps even celebrate. The paper is rewritten later in the course and again criticized by his fellow students. For the second paper, four groups of 6 students are formed to study a special kind of association in the area: old people in North Adams, the Polish community in Adams, the faculty in Williamstown, professionals in Pittsfield, blacks in Albany, or whatever they decide. They write

their papers in the teams. Each team makes its presentation to the other 18 students, receives criticism, and then the papers are rewritten. Through this process of writing, then discussing together, and finally rewriting, it is hoped that the students will become conscious of what they are doing, what they are seeing, how they are putting it together. There will be some reading on various ways of observing and describing people and situations. Students will be encouraged to start a diary on their observations and judgments. It is a very effective instrument for reflecting, although every student doesn't use it as well.

There will also be a required course in public authority, for which the students will be split into two discussion sections of 12. This course will stress the issues and claims of authority in contemporary America together with analyses and descriptions of groups and people like the ones the students will encounter in the spring.

The central theme of WAH II will be association, the way people come together in specific localities, how they see themselves and others, the differences within their association, and the consequences of association for what is outside it. The first home stays will look at groups of people who are alienated from the processes of public and economic life. The setting will be middle sized towns in the south and west. There will be, as in all phases of the program, 4 groups with six students in each. Six will go to live with different members of the black community in Savannah, Georgia, six will live in Chicano families in El Paso, Texas, six with American Indians in Gallup, New Mexico, six in rural areas around Whitesburg, Kentucky.

The second group of home stays will emphasize loyalty. The settings will be towns in rural areas and ethnic families in larger cities. The students will live with people who come together with some sense of durability of place and neighborhood. Six students will go to a small town in Iowa surrounded by family farms; six will go to a small town in Nebraska or the Dakotas surrounded by corporate wheat farming, and two groups will go to live in ethnic neighborhoods in Cleveland and in Saint Louis.

The third and final phase of home stays will emphasize power and professional values. The students will be placed in situations involving the planning and sustaining of large productive and financial enterprises. The groups will go to Chrysler and the UAW in Detroit, to bankers in Chicago, to corporation lawyers in New York, to the steel industry in Pittsburgh. The groups will change their composition

in each of the three phases of the program to allow new combinations of students to work together.

The papers will be written by the students in touch and in consultation with each other. As a group, they will work out the form of the paper and the contribution of each member. Because it is difficult to write in the home, and the hosts are not at all enthusiastic about this writing, 12 days of discussion and writing will take place at the end of each of the three phases. Each set of papers will be read and discussed by all participants in the program. The locations of these seminars should be away from outside distractions, probably in some natural area. The first stay will be at Big Bend Park on the Rio Grande in Texas.

after last stay?

no group work?

Although it is difficult, perhaps impossible in some cases, some effort should be made to involve the families in these discussions and papers. Several families can meet with students in discussions during the six weeks, and read some of the papers written after the students leave. Students should be encouraged to continue contact with their families.

Each group of students will be given briefings and contacts for their placements by the previous WAH students who will set up the program in the summer of 1973. The students of WAH II will then arrange the home stays on arrival in the areas. They will seek out families in very different situations, classes, employment, and with contrasting judgments. The students in one location should keep in touch with each other: listening, making distinctions, forming judgments, criticizing each other, exchanging insights. But it is essential to avoid too much interaction, to close off outside contacts through their own close association. The kind and length of contact with each other will have to be worked out. Hopefully, there will be as full an exchange as possible within their families in ways in which both the family and the student show themselves to each other.

The "re-entry" to Williams has its own problems and difficulties. The students return with a greater consciousness about their education. This is a good thing, but it needs some encouragement and scope. The experience of the spring should be more directly tied to the analytical methods of Williams. For this effort, it is recommended that the students take together a course in political philosophy in the fall of their return, with the specific intention of relating theory to practice.

The students of the first program are very ready and willing to talk about any part of the program or these recommendations with the Committee and with the faculty.