

ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT & CHRONICLE (NY)
16 February 1986

Secret research draws RIT students

By Eugene Marino
Democrat and Chronicle

Tom Johnson, a 22-year-old math major at Rochester Institute of Technology, helped develop a computer model for a new war game a couple of years ago.

The game wasn't for fun. It was for the Pentagon — and classified.

Geoffrey Welch, another 22-year-old math major at RIT, performed accuracy studies for the Trident nuclear missile. Those studies included statistical research and writing computer programs for simulated flights. His work also was classified.

Johnson spent six quarters at the U.S. Army's Concepts Analysis Agency in Bethesda, Md., as a cooperative education student. Welch spent four quarters at the Naval Surface Weapons Center as a co-op.

Neither is a rarity on RIT's campus these days.

RIT co-op students — juniors and seniors who alternate quarters of full-time work with quarters of study — are going to work for U.S. intelligence-gathering and defense research agencies in numbers that might shock their older brothers and sisters from the Vietnam War era.

Those numbers put RIT in a class with only a handful of schools in the nation.

In the last year and a half, about 30 RIT co-op students have gone to work just for the National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency, said George T. Georgantas, a professor who is head of the math department.

Four or five other defense research agencies are actively and successfully recruiting RIT co-op students.

The students, most from computer science, math, engineering and imaging programs, become involved in work ranging from cryptology studies for the National Security Agency to photographic analysis for the CIA to analysis of kitchen facilities for the Army. Many of these students go on to work full-time for a defense agency.

Because much of the work co-op students do is classified, the agencies perform a thorough security check on them before they are accepted for employment.

The agencies themselves probably find RIT students "to their taste" because the students are

more conservative than most college students, said Prof. Wiley McKinzie, director of the Center for Computer Science and Technology. The campus is "quite conservative," said Angela Strode, a senior who is chairman of the Student Directorate, the student government.

EMPLOYERS, BOTH private and governmental, find RIT's career-oriented students attractive because of the emphasis the school puts on applied learning.

The agencies with the most active, organized recruiting efforts are the NSA and the CIA, said Beverly Gburski, director of the co-op program at RIT.

The NSA is probably the most secret agency in the U.S. government. It owes its existence to a top-secret order signed by President Harry S. Truman in 1952. Its mission is twofold: to secretly gather intelligence through technological means, such as satellite eavesdropping systems, and to protect the government's confidential messages through encryption. The NSA is based at Fort Meade, Md., and has listening posts in many nations.

Recruiters from the NSA and CIA visit the RIT campus twice a year each and give presentations for interested students, Gburski said.

The NSA received 30 co-op "placements" from RIT in the 1984-1985 school year, according to Bonnie Salem, a coordinator in RIT's co-op program. That would translate to about 12 to 15 students, because a placement equals one three-month stint and one student often takes more than one in a year.

AN NSA SPOKESMAN, who said his name could not be used in print in connection with the agency, said there were "a lot" of RIT students in the NSA's co-op program. Schools typically have two or three or, at most, five students in the program, he said. About 300 students from 50 or so schools are in the NSA's program at any one time.

Robert Chico, the coordinator for student programs at the CIA, said a "good number" of RIT students were in the CIA's program. RIT had 10 placements there in the 1984-1985 school year. Chico

would say only that "several hundred" students were in the CIA's program and that they represent a cross-section of schools.

Among the other active defense agencies on the RIT campus are:

- The Naval Surface Weapons Center in Dahlgren, Va., and White Oak, Md., which had 15 co-op placements from RIT in 1984-85. It has about 225 students overall.

- The U.S. Army's Armament Research and Development Center in Dover, N.J., which had 14 RIT placements. It had between 20 and 100 students overall.

- The U.S. Army's Concepts Analysis Agency in Bethesda, Md., which will have 10 RIT students out of 79 students total in the 1985-1986 school year, according to Johnson, the math major who worked there.

THE VAST MAJORITY of RIT's 3,000 co-op students find work with private employers. In 1984-1985, for example, there were almost 4,600 placements of RIT co-op students overall. The five most active defense agencies received 76 of those placements, Salem said.

Though RIT is well represented in the co-op programs of these defense agencies, it apparently is not disproportionately represented if RIT's technical orientation and the size of its co-op program are taken into account.

Drexel University in Philadelphia has a similar technical orientation and a larger co-op program, one with more than 4,000 students. It sends what appears to be a much larger number of co-op students to these programs. In 1984-1985, 43 students worked for programs just within the Department of Defense, including 17 at the NSA, said Gary Hamme, head of the center for cooperative education at Drexel. A total of 278 other students worked for a wide range of other defense-related agencies.

Northeastern University in Boston, on the other hand, has 9,600 students in its co-op program, but has a liberal-arts orientation. It sent no students to the CIA in 1984-85, two to the NSA, none to the Concepts Analysis Agency and

Continued