Intercollege Court Tests Responsibility

By TIM MOCK

The Inter-College Court began in the spring of '62 as an idea — more a principle than a tangible object — in the mind of a would-be college senator. After tentative approval by the Dean, the idea was publicly introduced in the senator's election night speech.

After elections the idea gained its first solid base when the senator was appointed chairman to create a new Senate judicial committee. In a short meeting of the committee just before summer, a tentative outline of the Court was presented and the support of the college chief justices obtained.

THE FIRST TANGIBLE work on the Court appeared the following August — a proposed structure which was mailed to various campus leaders for comments. In his letter of reply the Dean made the prophetic remark, "On the whole, I think it is a very good proposal and certainly one upon which discussion and recommendation can be based in achieving its final creation."

The Court was much discussed! Chiefly because of the constructive criticism of the Senate and the chief justices, there were no less than two major revisions of the initial structure and countless minor ones. On November 14, 1962, the Senate finally approved the Court constitution by a vote of 14-1 — the one vote against representing a remnant of dissatisfaction with some specifics of Court structure and not with the principle of the Court.

WHAT IS THIS principle that has guided the Court and kept it alive for over eight months now? It is complex and difficult to delineate, but a good starting point is the word "responsibility" from the Court constitution preamble. From his earliest days an individual is taught that he is responsible for his own actions, but only after he reaches the magical age of 21 does this democracy say that he shares in the responsibility for the actions of his group — be it city, state, or nation. Yet there are two advantages for a person assuming his "civic" responsibility at an earlier age.

First, assumption of responsibility carries with it a measure of power to shape one's society. Second, the ability to exercise responsibility is a talent that is developed by use, not by the mere passage of years. The establishment of the college courts and residence committees is the most important step toward the assumption by the student body of its "civic" responsibility. In essence the Inter-College Court completes the sense of responsibility of Rice students for their own actions.

THE SPECIFICS of the Court structure were drawn from many sources, most of which are integral parts of Rice. The Court has been studied by such varied people as a veteran trial lawyer, a 27-year-old housewife, a freshman English professor, a dean of students, and a professor of economics — all of whom contributed something. Indeed, probably the only original contribution of the senator who proposed the Court was the idea of organizing the chief justices from each college to handle matters that the separate college judicialities could not.

From the theory of courts throughout the ages come the words "... the Court shall strive to protect, to interpret, and to further the idea of the individual ..." In the Court's power to "... Recommend action in connection with the student organization ..." can be seen the ghosts of the Archi-Arts dance and the Alpha Gamma Rho stepping account. The paragraph which states "The Court shall evaluate ... shall study the degree of responsibility ..." and may recommend "... further privileges ..." contains the idea of a Senate judicial committee and of the student rights committee without its overburdening formal trappings.

PHRASES SUCH AS "... express desire of all the College judicialities ...", "Inter-College Court ... shall not have jurisdiction over an area ... reserved to the College's ..." and "... shall not act as a Court of appeals ..." recognize the autonomy, individuality, and importance of the college judicialities.

Making the Dean of Students a non-voting member of the Court, though subject to exclusion in a closed meeting, typifies the student body tradition of working with the administration whenever possible. The important contributions of the Honor Council both to the spirit and structure of the Court are too numerous to mention without unduly lengthening this article, but they are readily apparent, especially in Articles IV and V.

HOWEVER, despite the many parallelsisms, the Court differs in one important aspect from the Honor Council. Whereas the Honor Council is restricted solely to the field of academic violations, the Court is flexible enough to deal with a wide range of problems.

Assuming the Court gets the (Continued on Page 7)
COURT--

(Continued from Page 2)

necessary three-fourths approval, it is interesting to speculate where this flexibility could lead it in the future. Currently, the Court as a study group could be of considerable help to the college presidents in the matter of open house rules. If there is ever to exist a faculty board of appeals to protect the students from any disciplinary arbitrariness—especially involving expulsion, the Court should be the body to do the necessary groundwork.

THE DEAN himself made an interesting, though unintentional, prediction on the Court when he said at Autry House, “The students are basically idealistic, placing exaggerated emphasis on the absence of restraint.” It is indeed probable that the Court will be more liberal than the administration. But, strangely enough, responsible students can also do a better job than the administration.

The students know better and sooner than the administration where the ugly spots in their own society are, and many students realize that by acceptance of their own group self-discipline they can more easily create the kind of university life in which they want to live.

Whether these “many students” constitute a three-fourths majority is a question to be answered December 11.