Needham Defends ‘Orthodoxy’ Charges At Baker

By JIM ZUMWALT
Thresher Editorial Staff

Wiess Junior Ray Needham defended himself Monday of Thanksgiving week against a trio of faculty members who were invited to discuss with Needham the issues he had raised in an article in the November 12 Thresher.

Needham had charged that many Rice faculty members force their own personal views on their students under the guise of teaching.

The discussion, held at Baker College, involved Needham, Economics professor Gaston V. Rimlinger, Dr. Allen J. Matusow of the History Department and English professor Gerald O’Grady.

Rebuttal and Discussion
Each spoke ten minutes, Needham was allotted five minutes for a rebuttal, followed by a general discussion with participation from the floor.

Needham led off with the assertion that “there exists a certain orthodoxy to which the student is subjected” at Rice.

He acknowledged that he was restricted to his limited academic experience here at Rice and that this limitation is dangerous because it leaves him open to the charge of being petty.

“Average freshmen come to Rice expecting to here find the truth. Here instructors often fail to present the complete truth,” Needham charged.

Value Judgement
“A professor can only assert that he attempts to be fair.” An intelligent man cannot avoid forming value judgments, Needham pointed out. But some assume that “if these facts are good enough to convince me, they’re good enough to convince you.”

As an example of a value judgment which is part of the academic orthodoxy at Rice, Needham named Keynesian economics which he said assumes the goal of full employment as a supreme value.

Keynesian Defense
Dr. Rimlinger followed Needham and spent most of his ten minutes defending Keynesian Economics. “If you don’t want full employment, if you want six to ten million unemployed, then ignore Keynes.”

In response to Needham’s charge that Keynes is overemphasized in the Economics Department Rimlinger pointed out that he had polled his Economics 200 class two-thirds of the way through the course and half of the students had never heard of Keynes.

Although strongly disagreeing with Needham’s views, Rimlinger stated “if you’re being ridiculed when you challenge incompetent teaching, Rice has come to a very sad state.”

Personal Obligation
Dr. Matusow, speaking third in line, assented that he felt obligated to express his personal views.

“I think they tell me what they think about my ideas. I defend them with vigor and I hope my students attack them with vigor.” Matusow stated, “I’m one among equals, I learn from my students.”

Matusow pointed out two dangers inherent in this approach to teaching. “Some students do take a religious attitude toward their convictions. This is OK, but not in the classroom.”

In other instances the student has been conditioned to accept his teacher as an authority figure. “I hope I’m not an authority figure. I try not to be one.”

AAUP Representative
Dr. O’Grady participated in the debate as Chairman of the AAUP Committee on Faculty Responsibility for Student Rights.

He disagreed with Matusow’s advocacy of classroom debate claiming the professor “has a responsibility to keep his own feelings out of the classroom.

In his rebuttal statement Needham recognized that it is necessary for the instructor to show undergraduates where their views are incorrect. “In some ways I’m indicting undergraduates. In some cases a professor can say anything and get no response.”