A Non-Resident's View Of The Colleges

The following article was contributed by Stephen Paine at the Thresher's request. It discusses the plight of the nonresident in a predominantly residential college system. Although not all non-residents will agree with Mr. Paine's views, we believe that a sizeable majority share his judgment that the college system has not met its obligations to the off-campus student. Whether the colleges, by their very nature, are capable of meeting these obligations is another question; as Mr. Paine says, the time is long overdue for a re-evaluation of the resident-nonresident relationship.

The author is a non-resident member of Hanszen College, a member of the Student Center Board, and a former member of the Hanszen Cabinet.—Ed.

By STEPHEN PAINE

The "college system" has been a part of Rice life since 1957. It has provided the student body with a new structure through which to program additional activities of a quasi-and non-academic nature. Its general purpose, as the Board of Governors has said, is to "provide the maximum benefit in the way of social and cultural development for each student" (Committee on Student Housing, page 17).

THE PLACE OF the resident in this system is obvious. He lives (in) the system, he can't avoid it. He participates in those things that interest him, and, for the college's sake, some that don't. He is aware of the college's activities simply by going to meals. If a college program is really important to its planners, they will encourage attendance by constantly reminding (resident) members.

By its nature, this is a residential system. To say that someone is a "non-resident member" of a residential college is self-contradictory. Nevertheless, when the colleges were established, it was recommended that "town students should be regular members of the college to which they are assigned..." (Committee on Student Housing, page 37).

UP TO NOW the colleges have done little in the way of a conscious effort to attract the non-resident to the college. For the most part, the colleges do not even ask non-residents to participate in committee work of the college. It should be obvious that it is easier for the non-resident to find an outlet for his abilities and/or his energies in other activities on- or off-campus, rather than try to break into the residential college governmental circles.

But the non-resident can benefit from the general nature of the system, and, at the same time, lend strength to the college without necessarily working on a specific job. This can be done if the non-resident would simply spend more time around the college—eat a few meals a week in the commons, take advantage of study rooms, and at the same time cultivate a few friendships.

YET, IF A non-resident does not do this when he is a freshman, it is very unlikely he will begin to at a later date. Consequently, the colleges need to develop, besides or in place of "guidance," a positive program which will involve non-resident freshmen in the life of the college. In this way the colleges would benefit from a larger number of non-resident upperclassmen participating in college activities through the years.

For a program such as this, a bi-weekly "newsletter" wouldn't do the trick; the contact must be more frequent, and less formal. For example, the colleges might invite (or require) all non-resident freshmen to eat lunch in the commons (at the college's expense) for a period which the college deemed feasible under the budget.

Regarding the budget, it should be pointed out that approximately one-third of each college's budget is derived from the dues of the non-resident members. Thus, one would think that "the governing bodies of the colleges" would recognize an obligation, if not a responsibility, "to make a special effort to include non-resident members of the college in all functions" (Committee on Student Housing, page 49).

SINCE "DEVELOPMENT for each student" is the overall purpose of the system, the administration apparently has an interest in the non-resident as well as the resident. The College Master, as a continuing influence on the college, might be expected to provide positive counsel toward the re-examination of this problem. Given the present implications of college membership for the non-resident, it is apparent that the Masters have not been fulfilling this role.

Before the non-resident will be able to benefit from the college system, the University will have to re-evaluate the relationship between the colleges and the non-residents.