New roles for faculty associates discussed

By KAREN SAGSTETTER

The educational experience at Rice is often described as stifling and unimaginative, too classroom oriented. The college associate programs, according to a recent series of campus interviews, offer perhaps the greatest potential for expanding the dimensions of the learning process here.

Attempts are now being made, for instance, to involve associates in college sponsored educational ventures ranging from informal B.S. sessions to sophisticated experimental curricula.

Of the six colleges, Jones and Hanszen propose the most extensive academic plans. Hanszen has suggested institution of college-taught freshman courses in which science-engineering students are instructed in humanities, and humanities majors in the sciences. Under the plan, large lecture sessions would be balanced with small tutorial sections in the colleges.

Critics point out that the program might possibly overburden the faculty members involved and that it might be undesirable to restrict the courses to members of individual colleges.

Professor Carl Wischmeyer, Baker master, recalls, for instance, that a project to teach English 100 in the colleges was dropped after a short trial six years ago because students and faculty preferred co-educational seminars for social and academic reasons.

However, the need for more relaxed communication between students and faculty was recognized in the interviews; and the residential colleges—inherently more informal than the classroom—were suggested for course work for this reason.

Jones has proposed that student-taught seminars, involving at least three students and a faculty member in the planning stage, be instituted, possibly for credit. These student-led seminars, developed as an extension of the independent reading idea, would be less time consuming for faculty members since the students would teach the courses.

Two courses already proposed might study the shape of the post World War II novel and music of the romantic period.

Before complex educational plans can be made to work, however, an elementary prerequisite is that the faculty associates and students know each other. Dr. John Rogers, Brown master, suggests that associate involvement in freshman week offers the best opportunity for a faculty member to meet a group of undergraduates and to broaden his circle of college acquaintances in successive years.

A problem now, it appears, is that while a resident associate like Dr. Gilbert Cuthbertson of Will Rice can claim to feel "as much college spirit as some of the boys," many non-residents complain that they neither know college members nor feel welcome in the colleges. Luncheon conversations, they say, are often stilted and uncomfortable or "pseudo-intellectual."

Even when such barriers are overcome, associates point out, communication is limited by the noise, hurried atmosphere, and bad food in the commons, especially in the men's colleges.

Social rapport is more successfully established in the women's colleges, Dr. Roy Talmadge, Wiess master, suggests, because women are simply more socially amenable than men.

Hanszen will attempt to improve the situation by providing a babysitting service as well as official welcoming committee to encourage dinner visits.

Will Rice master J. S. Fulton suggests another aspect of the problem by pointing out the lack of adequate physical facilities "for faculty and students to gather, relax, and just talk to each other."

Will Rice currently plans to refurbish its basement in hopes of creating an environment that will promote casual exchange between teachers and students. Jones and Brown both instituted associate office hours in the colleges for the same reason. The practice has been discontinued by Jones, however, because the times set up often conflicted with morning classes.

Hanszen hopes to encourage relaxed discussion between faculty and students in the new attic coffee house where refreshments and music are available.

Additionally, to help integrate the associates into the colleges and establish continuity of policy, professors are being invited to join standing committees of the colleges as advisors.

Collaboration on committee projects, it is felt, will provide an effective way for students to meet and enjoy the associates.

The value of a healthy associate program is best shown, according to a consensus of associates and students interviewed, by the success of those men who bring a creative and inventive approach to the colleges.

Associates mentioned most often were those who added an original dimension to their role: Professor Stanley Besen of Hanszen who simply spends a great deal of time at the college; Dr. Charles Phillips of Jones who has invited girls and their dates into his home; Dr. Zevi Salzburg of Will Rice who often shines at the college and remains afterwards to help freshmen with chemistry; Dr. Gerald O'Grady, formerly of Baker, who was instrumental in organizing speaker programs; and Dr. Edwin Willems of Will Rice who conducted an informal colloquium on Freud this year.

In order to obtain more associates of similar quality, students have recently taken a great deal of interest in helping select new associates.

All the masters, with the exception of Fulton, emphasized that student opinion is a key factor in their choice of associates.

But revamping of the selection process to eliminate or curtail the opinion of the master would be harmful, according to Dr. Ronald Sass, master of Hanszen. Masters and associates must work together as well as with students.

How the associate programs will develop in the future rests largely on such efforts as the Baker academic innovation committee, the attempt at Jones to define specific roles for associates in the coming year, and the recently appointed masters' associate study committee—prompted by the S.A.

Many members of the Rice community seem to feel that the associate programs hold potential for creating a freer learning situation at Rice.