Vandiver Criticizes Accelerated Education: Ph.D Becoming ‘Pedagogical Technician’

By JEAN KITCHEL

Rice students concerned with graduate school missed a good bet in Frank E. Vandiver’s entertaining consideration of the question at the Autry House last Wednesday night.

Dr. Vandiver represented the Dean of the Graduate School “unencumbered by the prejudices of previous knowledge,” and came armed with some thought-provoking analyses of the present day race for the Ph.D.

DR. VANDIVER began his discussion by pointing out that the justification of a University is to push back the boundaries of ignorance; to teach only existing knowledge is to be only a glorified high school.

Therefore, research is indeed the essence of a University, research motivated by the need to answer a question. The motto of the PBK magazine summarizes this: “Scholarship is a man thinking! The greatest possible achievement for a University is to contribute a man thinking.”

TO THIS END, we share learning—through teaching, through publishing. While the latter reaches more people and is financially more profitable, it is teaching which yields the important spiritual profit with the transfer of the excitement and fascination of learning.

Especially important to this transfer is the graduate student—master of more and more about less and less on his way to becoming the specialist considered necessary today.

MANY PROFESSORS prefer to teach graduate students, both because of a “disciple complex,” and because it keeps them on their toes. This has spurred the development of graduate schools, often for no other reason than a sham prestige and the desire for money.

After all, as Vandiver pointed out, “NASA will give $8 million to build four cubicles to store graduate students.”

The great problem is that this gearing of graduate schools and graduate study to money has denatured the quality and meaning of advanced degrees. The age of the universal scholar, the truly well educated man, is dying and no one takes the time to care.

THE ACADEMIC world hasn’t the time to think and to learn—just to hurry. “The National Defense Fellowship ‘issues’ USG-approved Ph.D’s in three years. Everything—language exams, for example—have been watered down to get the Ph.D. out in just three years. The Ph.D. has become a pedagogical technician.”

Asked about the state of affairs in the Rice graduate school, Dr. Vandiver answered in one word, “terrible.” He went on, though, to report that we are trying to establish the school on the proper foundation.

Our problems stem from the rapid an expansion, the need for good graduate student (“a universal problem”), and the difficulties of establishing a graduate reputation, he claimed.

SUGGESTIONS MADE toward the solution of the problem included the establishment of a separate graduate curriculum (requiring a larger number of graduate students and faculty) and a college for graduates to bring them into close contact with each other and with the faculty.

The most important concern of advanced education, however, must be to preserve its value and integrity from the encroachments of a social order in a hurry. The suggestions here ranged from the humorous to the very serious and awe-inspiring concept of a degree beyond the Ph.D. to be awarded only after some twenty years of study—a plan already adopted by many European universities attempting to preserve true scholarship.