Guidance Out, Turks In: Direction of Development Changes

AFTER SIX YEARS AT RICE

The following article was contributed by Mr. Bill Heyck at The Thresher's request. While a student at Rice during the last six years, he has witnessed some of the most dramatic changes in the school's history.

Mr. Heyck entered Rice as an Architecture major, and switched to History in his sophomore year. During his undergraduate career he was a member of the Rice varsity tennis team.

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By BILL HEYCK

I first came to Rice in the fall of 1956. The changes that have taken place since then are astonishing, and I think it is time that we reflect a little on where Rice has been and where it is going now.

Although I was a little skeptical of the photograph of the living quarters published in the Catalogue, I was not prepared for the slum to which I was assigned.

MY ROOM was in the West Hall, now known as the old wing of Hanszen College. If only people realized how old it really is. West Hall had been constructed in 1917, and it was obvious that the school hadn't wasted any money on it since then.

The hall walls were painted battleship grey—the same coat of paint that had been put on in 1917. The hall lighting was miserable, but at least it was electric and not candle powered. Dim as the halls were, they were like Christmas trees compared to the rooms.

DURING THE first week, as I groped around in 403 West Hall, which was illuminated by one bare 75 watt bulb dangling from a hairy wire in the center of the room, it really sank home what dungeons the dorms really were. There were three of us living in a room that wouldn't pass for a broom closet.

THE FLOOR was absolutely black with thirty-nine years of grease and grime. The furniture, too, was black with age; but it had even more rare qualities. It was falling apart. Each time one of pulled open a drawer, he got the drawer front, or the handles, or both, right in the teeth. But we fixed that; we opened the drawers and left them open.

What with their antique plumbing, peeling paint, and holy screens, the dorms were amazingly bad; but the Institute had bigger and better ways to welcome freshmen.

THEY CALLED IT Freshman Guidance.

Now, I'm not sure in what way I was guided, but I'm damned sure how I was hazed. The Sophomores, of course, claimed that Guidance was completely voluntary, but they let it be known that the social stigma forced on any dropout meant permanent ostracism from Rice social and political circles.

THE MAIN activities of Guidance were planned around the weekly section meetings, held Monday evenings from the beginning of school till Thanksgiving. Each Monday we were subjected to horrors that would have astonished Adolf Eichmann. Broomings were regular fare, as were assorted "games." Since most of the games that we played cannot be described in this respectable gazette, it must suffice to say that they were humiliating, degrading, and dangerous.

GUIDANCE had the happy effect of turning most freshmen into beasts; we stole opponents' band hats, damaged the Loews Theatre, wrecked two high school band buses, and ended the madness only after the deaths of two sophomore students. Why the school allowed such incredible brutality to continue for so long, I can't imagine, unless it was that the powers were simply unaware of what was really going on.

At any rate Guidance is gone now. I say the school is much better off without it; what elements are left, such as the grooming of freshmen athletes, should be ruthlessly dealt with.

THE INSTITUTE in those days was really an institute. The curriculum is rough now, but in those days it was absurd. Coupled with the living conditions, the irrationalities of the course requirements were indeed a severe test for young America.

For example, in the freshman year, there was Math 100 for everyone, bar none. In their first two years the architects had to take, in addition to their present requirements, Math 200, Physics 200, and French 100 and 200. And yes, SE's, there was a whole year of E. D. for everyone.

THE TOTAL EFFECT of the system was to atomize the freshman class. Students were completely individualized, and it was no accident that the school slogan was "screw your buddy."

Furthermore, there were few bright lights on the faculty to make it all worthwhile. We talk about apathy and lack of culture now; this place now looks like Harvard (genial but and cross yourself) compared to the Institute.

RICE BEGAN to break out of the Dark Ages in the Spring of 1957, when the Colleges were first opened. Over the Summer of 1957, the old dorms were completely renovated: repainted, refinished, and refurnished. The new living quarters and the College system itself have humanized the living conditions. With the result that there has been a spectacular change in the outlook of the students, for the old bitter cynicism has given way in most cases to an attitude of cautious hopefulness.

THE CHANGE in the academic side of the Institute has been no less astonishing. The curriculum was rationalized for 1957-58, with further improvements coming in the next few years. A few Young Turks were brought in who have made a great difference in the faculty: Loewenhein, Cope, Mackey, Aubrey Williams, Galambos—I can't name them all.

One very important product of the change was the appointment of Dr. Masterson as Rice's first Dean of Humanities; since his appointment (and I'm sure before) he has contributed an enormous amount to the continuation and direction of Rice's improvement.

AT LAST, at long last, the Institute became a university. It is not perfect, but it is one hell of a lot closer than before. What's more, the change is still going on. Good professors are still being lost; but the same spirit which brought them will bring others.

The question for this academic community now is, has the direction of Rice's development changed? Do we like the new direction in which the school is moving?

IT IS NO secret that President Pitzer is intent upon making Rice the home of a high-powered graduate school. Now this seems to be a fine goal. But is it possible? Is it wise? Aren't funds too short? Will this program increase the chances for undergraduate tuition? Or is Rice's most natural policy to present a really first class undergraduate education, with a limited, but also first class, graduate program in a few feasible fields?

You had better decide now. You won't get a second chance.