NSA membership will entail responsibility, involvement

An all-school referendum next Monday, February 6, will decide if the Rice Student Association will join the United States National Student Association. The following article is designed to present as objectively as possible just what the organization is, what it does, and the benefits and obligations of membership—the factual information which is necessary for students to make an “informed” decision. The statement has been approved by both those favoring and those opposing membership—ed.

By CHARLES SHANOR

USNSA is a confederation of some 500 college and university student governments. As such, USNSA is often recognized as a voice for students, not only because of the nationwide publicity it has received about the stands it has taken at its annual National Student Conference, but as the organization from which representatives are selected to serve on such national policy boards as the American Council on Education, the U.S. Commission for UNESCO, and the Peace Corps Advisory Board.

It has also participated in meetings of the American Association of University Professors, the Association for Higher Education of the National Education Association, and the White House Conference on Higher Education. Thus, despite the fact that a number of the nation’s colleges and universities do not belong to NSA and ignoring any imperfections in the representation of schools which do belong, NSA claims to speak on behalf of the American student.

However, despite this quasi-political involvement, NSA also claims to be a “non-profit, non-partisan, non-sectarian, educational association.” Its own constitution explicitly states that “Nobody acting on behalf of USNSA shall participate in sectarian religious activities or partisan political activities; they shall not take part in activity which does not affect students in their role as students.”

Education and Service

In fact, the great majority of NSA time and money is spent on educational and service programs for students, despite the policy stands of the National Student Congress.

What, then, are some of the non-partisan benefits accruing to NSA members?

Individual students belonging to NSA-affiliated schools are eligible for special life insurance plans, summer tours and jobs in Education via NSA’s Educational Travel, Inc., as well as domestic Student Discount Cards good for lodging, retail, and service merchants across the country. NSA is the sole agent for the International Student ID Card which enables students to obtain large discounts on travel, goods, and services in Europe. It also publishes a directory of summer jobs in community action and anti-poverty projects. These services, however, are available to students attending non-member schools.

Relevant

Special services more directly beneficial in NSA Senate are also provided. Among these are: the Student Government Information Services, which researches and answers some 1000 annual requests concerning student government programs, plans, and tactics, incorporating a broad base of experience on which a school may draw; and NSA regional and national conferences, which not only provide training in the mechanics of student government operations but also serve as forums for inter-school cooperation and idea exchanges. (Non-member schools may send observers to these conferences but may not vote.)

Each NSA affiliate is also provided with an official campus representative who disseminates pertinent NSA data to the proper student government officials.

Responsibilities

What responsibilities would NSA membership entail for the Rice student body?

Each school is assessed for dues on the basis of its student body size. Our dues would be $15 for the first year and approximately $60-90 for each succeeding year. Though NSA operates on a total budget of $825,000 a year for all activities, only 9% of this amount comes from private foundations and from government grants for special projects, rather than from member schools’ dues.

In order to make even this small investment worthwhile, however, Rice would have to take the initiative of utilizing the resources made available by NSA and the Student Senate would have to disseminate information provided by the national office which might be of interest to individual students.

Incidental

Rice would, by its membership in the organization, be associated with the positions assumed by the NSA Congress. Though Rice delegates might vote against a specific action taken by the Congress, the names of schools voting on either side of an issue are not recorded. The names of member schools are not, however, generally published except in NSA publications and the organization is often thought of as including all student governments.

The trend during the early sixties, largely because of the liberal political stands of NSA, was for southern schools to withdraw from NSA. Rice left the organization in 1963 partially for this reason, getting in on the tail end of the exodus. By the fall of 1965, of the ten Greater Southwest Region schools in NSA in 1962, only Austin College and Our Lady of the Lake remained.

Reputable

Since last spring, however, Texas Southern University and St. Thomas University have rejoined; and Southern Methodist University, the University of Houston, and the University of Texas are reconsidering their relations to NSA. Since the leading schools of this area are not now represented in the national group, Rice might assume a position of regional leadership if it were to join at this time.

Outside the Southwest, a number of reputable schools have remained in NSA, including Stanford, Harvard, Princeton, Swarthmore, Oberlin, Rutgers, Tulane, Davidson, the University of North Carolina, and most of the Big Ten schools. On the other hand, the reputable schools which have remained outside of the organization include Yale, Dartmouth, Cornell, Ohio State, the University of Virginia, Duke, Vanderbilt, the University of Maine, and the University of New Hampshire.

Will the Rice Student Association be willing to jump the hedges and assume a responsible role in supra-Rice student affairs? That is the central question which you must answer before you vote, weighing carefully both advantages and drawbacks to such a move.

(Two articles representing both positions on NSA appear on this page. Letters follow on page 10. — Ed.)