Free University to serve as forum for creative thought

By BARRY KAPLAN

Thresher Editorial Staff

The grim specter raised by the Houston Post in their reportage of the attempt to found a "Free University" at the University of Houston will not materialize.

The New School will, however, proceed as it had been planned, with the blessings of the U of H administration. Alarmed by the Post's sensational coverage, the faculty of the University had met Tuesday and expressed a desire to see the attempted foundation disbanded.

After consultation with the administration, however, Alan Potter, U of H graduate student in Political Science, and one of the originators of the planned school, has said that the New School will open as announced, with classes and seminars meeting on the U of H campus beginning around the first of March.

Open to All

Intended to seriously study many important aspects of the modern world not covered by existing curricula, the New School (which is called "Symposia of New Thinking") will be open to all people in the Houston area. A planned charge of $5 per subject (with reductions for additional courses) will go toward the operating expenses of the school, with any surplus being used to defray the expenses of future semesters and to build a library.

Among the announced courses this term will be studies in the literature of pacifism and nonviolence, with readings in the works of pacifists A. J. Muste and Mulford Q. Sibley and studies in the life and philosophy of M. K. Gandhi.

The course will be taught by Richard Murray, a student of Sibley.

Alienated Negro

Another projected course will be concerned with the writings of the Alienated Negro in America, taught by a member of the TSU faculty.

Also on the curriculum will be a course entitled "Thoughts of Mao Tse-tung," to be taught by Professor Dae-Sook Suh of the U of H political science faculty. Dr. Suh is an Asian expert well-acquainted with the poetry, essays, and speeches of Chairman Mao, and a supporter of US Asian policy.

A course in modern cinema entitled "The Reel World," taught by Rice English Professor Gerald O'Grady has also been projected.

Other courses will treat situational ethics (taught by a retired Episcopalian chaplain), the relation of existentialism to humanism (a view of the "two cultures" debate), and obscenity in literature.

Asked about the philosophy of the New School, Potter cited the recent trend toward emphasis on research as prompting the move toward increased faculty-student contact. This reaction is seen as a natural consequence of the increasing dehumanization and impersonalization seen by many people, students and educators alike.

"The University, in history, existed for the student," Potter said, "and will exist for the student again." The New School will offer neither credit nor grades ("People around here are grade-nuts... You should see the relief on their faces when they find they have gotten a C."), and (will) exist solely for the diffusion of knowledge.

Provo's Owner

The germ of the School was animated when Potter, fellow-graduate student Gordon Lantz, and Dr. Robert Wren of the English Department were discussing what might be done to infuse life into "a dead campus."

It was decided to attempt to offer stimulating courses and to make the project as accessible as possible, in order to appeal to a wide variety of interests. The dialogue so necessary to successful communication in this age of the alienation crisis might be furthered by such an establishment, and the academic community might gain a bit of the solidarity required for its survival in a world whose demands upon academia have caused it to deviate more and more from its original intentions.

It is a brave start and a hopeful beginning, and the Symposia of New Thinking should be a valuable addition to the intellectual life of Houston and of the region in general.