Rice’s Ills — A Failure To Develop Standards

By BOB CLARKE

Part of the strength of the college system since its establishment at Rice has been the willingness of the members to discuss and evaluate its progress. In this regard, the colleges have established committees to examine goals which they hope to attain. I have also noticed that in recent weeks this topic has sparked many informal conversations over the campus.

For what they are worth, I should like to make some observations about the college system today and offer some suggestions which will perhaps be relevant.

The colleges and their goals committees too often speak in generalizations about how they should enhance members’ to have social and academic development. They talk of the creation of individual responsibility and closer relationships with the faculty, but the unfortunate fact is that these ideals are not being accomplished.

It is disheartening indeed to find those freshmen who have been abandoned by indifferent senior advisers or those who are discouraged when they attempt to find even the slightest academic atmosphere at something so informal as a dinner table conversation. It is embarrassing to bring guests to dinner in the colleges and find such a gross lack of concern for table manners and personal appearances. It is disappointing each spring to find lagging spirit in college and all-school elections.

Although relatively simple in themselves, I feel that these weaknesses are symptoms of a general attitude which is prevalent in the colleges and which is hindering their progress.

As a solution, I contend that the colleges have to expect more of their members. Unless they are willing to make certain demands, they must call a spade and stop pretending to be something which they are not.

Each freshman entering this University can expect to encounter here many of the most important influences of his life. The colleges must recognize this fact, and make their goal influencing this individual and contributing positively to his development.

My sincere belief is that residence in the colleges will have to become contingent upon the agreement of their members to abide by a few generally accepted standards. If the colleges are to progress, the members must make some sort of contribution to their college—not necessarily a contribution measured by the number of committees on which they serve, but one indicated by a loyalty and a willingness to support the standards which I am urging the colleges to establish. If members of a college do not respond or are not willing to make an effort, they should be

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This approach may sound cold-blooded to some, but it is the only way the colleges can achieve what they are trying to build. Payment of room and board cannot be carte blanche to completely unrestricted living in the kind of operation which the college seems to desire. If a person seeks freedom from restrictions, he should move off the campus where his living is not only unrestricted but less expensive.

If a project of this magnitude is to be effective, it cannot come from the leadership of the colleges alone. This year's leaders have understandably been frustrated at times because of the lack of cooperation from their college members. The entire membership must decide on a direction for the college and then must work together to make the change a reality.

Each college will have to consider each of its member's relation to society: his contribution to the society will depend not only upon his having something to offer, but upon his winning acceptance of that offering. This acceptance is not likely to come unless he pays some respect to the customs of society. Certainly the questioning of many of these customs is often desirable, but an arbitrary flaunting or neglect of them is likely to prove unsatisfactory.

I have outlined an immense problem and a long-range one. It will require leadership which is willing to withstand much criticism and many charges of discrimination and persecution. Only if the leadership together with the rest of the college believes in what it is doing can such an undertaking succeed.