O'Grady 'Debunks' The Rice Myth

BY DR. GERALD O'GRADY
Assistant Professor of English

It is almost inconceivable that one should agree to contribute to "Faculty Sound-off" unless one hoped to provoke a discussion, but, quite frankly, my sole intention is to end one; I should like The Thresher to declare a moratorium on the Harvard-Rice issue.

IT WAS AMUSING, in the beginning, to hear about the 'Harvard of the South,' but somehow the joke did not retain its flavor when The Thresher, two weeks ago, introduced Dr. Amos Wilder as Visiting Professor from the "Rice of the North," the reason being that one feared that people were actually beginning to believe it. For, in the meantime, one had learned, without quite believing it, that a faculty member had actually appeared at Wiess College and, from all accounts, quite seriously concluded that "Rice was not the Harvard of the South" (Thresher, No. 9). Yet the assumption seemed to remain that the two schools had something in common, and even in H.R.K.'s intelligent editorial in last week's Thresher, one read: "At Harvard College, half of the student body is on the Dean's list; forty per cent graduate with honors." One wondered what in the world that had to do with Rice.

IN AN ADJOINING column, Professor Gaston Rimlinger was looking at the students' "IBM cards with all those high College Board scores" in order to determine what was not on them, and concluding that what was wrong with the Rice student was that he worked too hard: "If we cut the assignments in half, they would still overwork themselves." Meanwhile, on page one, the Mathematics Department pitchers were admitting that the 22% strikeout rate in the Math 101 was "unpleasantly high." Indeed, it seemed to be when one looked back to an earlier Thresher (Nov. 1) and found that 87% of the incoming freshmen scored above 130 on the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test, and that their mathematics aptitude tests on the College Boards averaged 701. The argument seemed to be that students entered Rice with a remarkable potential, worked harder than they should - and flunked. Perhaps one should return to the cards and ask why that potential does not seem to develop.

IN ATTEMPTING to answer such a question, it is considered good form to remain within the confines of one's own division, and thus I shall restrict my attention to the humanistic education of the Rice student. Briefly, the student in the humanities in interested in what man is, how he feels and how he acts; he is interested in the changing record of man's relations to metanal forces, whether demonic or divine, to his fellow men, to his cosmos and his environment (the effects of the radiation belt as well as the urban highway belt), and especially to himself. His secondary materials include everything that has been written; his primary data, finally, is his own experience; and his most searching question is: who am I.

IT IS NOW generally agreed upon that, if a University is concerned with developing all the potencies of its students, it should offer them a faculty-student ratio, an excellent library, an adequate counseling and guidance program, and an opportunity to observe and participate in the performing arts. How does Rice measure up?

My own freshmen classes have forty and thirty-seven students, and the general average, I am told, is somewhere in the thirties. For most of my freshmen, this is the smallest class which meets regularly. Their reward for this will be sophomore English classes of from sixty to ninety students. Let it be clear that this is not a complaint on the part of an overburdened faculty; it is rather an argument that the student is not being allowed to develop his potential. At the University of Texas, not to mention Harvard, no freshman English class exceeds twenty-five students; more than 18% of the students receive advance placement in English, and for the capable student - those of Rice ability - there are small classes of fifteen students who meet with the best available instructors. It is not only the Ford Scholar who decides to specialize early who is given additional attention; the point is that every student is being given the opportunity to fulfill his personal abilities. Moreover, it should not be argued that graduate students are used extensively at Texas, for they are used at Rice too, and will be used more and more extensively unless some radical policy decision is made very soon.

AS FOR THE library, I think it best, again not to mention Harvard. Of thirty-nine major university libraries in the South, Rice ranks twenty-sixth (Statistics of Southern College and Libraries, 1961-62.) One is not talking here about its use.
nullfulness for a rapidly expanding graduate program nor even its adequacy for handling the current Ford program, in both of which cases it leaves a great deal to be desired; one is simply defining the Rice University student, Commute's library. The University of Texas, incidently, is second in the ranking referred to above.

AGAIN, O'GRADY needs venture now into the most state universities to find extensive systems of guidance and counseling. I am most familiar with that which operates at the University of Illinois where it is taken for granted that the university is responsible for the total welfare and fullest possible development of all its students. Perhaps Harvard must be envied in this respect, for the myth persists that counseling is not necessary at institutions which have highly selective student bodies. The Bureau of the South of the North has four full-time and two part-time members available for daily consultations with students. Beginning last week, Rice announced the appointment of one person full-time, to serve its fifteen hundred students.

As far as the performing arts are concerned, it would be invi- dious to mention the Loeb Drama Center or even the new million-dollar center of the performing arts built this year at the University of Texas. Those interested in the revolution in this area on major campuses throughout the country might consult Mr. Howard Taubman's article in the New York Times of November 18, 1962. The less said about the "Harvard of the South" in this respect the better.

CONSIDERING the humanities, then, one can hardly agree that Rice's undergraduate program is first class—as good as any other school in the country" (Thresher article No. 6). Indeed, the problem may be that the Rice student is intellectually unique, but even Professor Rumliger was kind enough to admit that his was "intentionally a one-sided portrayal." Since, in comparison to major universities in the country, Rice is quite small, even Rice (and one hopes that this will become the rule), Rice does not, in my opinion, offer the student a very good opportunity to develop himself in the Theological School. In the future, might rather place its emphasis on helping him to realize Who and, if possible, Where he is.