Biochemistry Now Open As Major To Rice Undergrads

By SHIRLEY JONES

Biochemistry is now an available major at Rice for the first time. Very few other schools offer it as a major to undergraduates because the field is rather new even to knowledgable graduate students.

"Biochemistry was first taught in medical schools, about sixty years ago. It was originally a narrow amount of physiological chemistry," explained Dr. Jorge Awapara, biochemistry professor at Rice. "The field now has relations to genctics, microbiology, organic chemistry, and even physical chemistry."

BIOCHEMISTS have changed the direction of biological study from describing organisms to analyzing life processes on a molecular level. So much of future research is now uncharted that collectively academic institutions are unsure what is the best program of training.

At Rice the plans are for the biochemistry student to follow a schedule similar to that of Science-Engineering biology majors, but since biochemistry is an inter-disciplinary major there will be three courses required in chemistry and in biology. The graduate of this program would thereby have some understanding of the biological questions to be answered and the tools of chemistry with which to do it.

NOT JUST FUTURE biochemists will be interested in the courses of this new major; pre-medical students, future organic chemists and molecular biologists will also want to have an introduction to this field.

Dr. Awapara has therefore suggested that such a beginning course be taught to second semester sophomores: these enrollees would be half-way through a year of organic chemistry. An expanded offering of higher level biochemistry courses would then be available for those who want to concentrate in this field.