Automation reaches out to SCEP; evaluations will be computerized

By CHARLES SZALKOWSKI

Rice computer will be used to help the Student Committee on Educational Policy to compile its annual course evaluation to make it more accurate and more representative, according to Peter Hollings, chairman of SCEP.

Hollings emphasized, however, that all plans are strictly tentative at this time.

Using data provided by the registrar's office, the committee will use the computer to divide the students among each course section into two grid areas: majors and non-majors. Each of the two areas will be further sub-divided into fifteen sections based on the student's major group (A, B, or C) and the student's group in the course. The computer will classify every student in each course and then select, randomly and in proportion to the total in each subsection, a percentage of the students for questioning.

Confidential

Hollings emphasized that all data will remain confidential and that only student numbers will be used for identification.

Students selected by the computer will be asked to complete a questionnaire and return it to the committee. The questionnaire, which has not yet been written, will contain about 70 items, all carefully worded so as to need only multiple-choice answers and yet cover the student's experience in "all phases of the student-teacher experience," according to Hollings.

It is conceivable that some students, especially upperclassmen in small sections, will receive questionnaires for all their courses, while other students, primarily freshmen in large lecture sections, may not receive any.

Improve Instruction

Data received from the returns will be compiled, either by hand or by computer. Final tabulations will then allow prospective enrollees to infer how the course would relate to them, as compared with how it has related to others who have the same major, grades, and interests.

The report will also enable each professor to determine which types of students have the most difficulty with his course, and enable him to improve his technique with those groups, as well as allowing him to enrich his course and inspire his students. "In short, the report will function as an index of teaching at Rice, something which heretofore has been non-existent," said Hollings.

Essays Welcome

While the short answers on the questionnaire will be tabulated by computer, Hollings said that responsible comments and essays on the courses will be welcome to aid the committee in its interpretation of the results. He invited even those students who did not receive a questionnaire to feel free to submit written comment.

Hollings hopes to be able to print about 500 copies of the report, employing the offset process rather than the former method of mimeographing. Plans for the design of the book will come from Steve Wood, a senior architecture major who has volunteered to help the committee. Hollings envisions widespread distribution with student and library subscriptions to defray costs.

Valentine Deadline

The Student Senate asked that the questionnaire be submitted for approval on or after February 14. Therefore, both the question forms will immediately follow and publication of the report will depend on how soon students return the forms.

Hollings emphasized that all students who are asked to complete the questionnaires must realize the opportunity they have and assume the responsibility for prompt and accurate return of the questionnaires, to insure the validity of the re