The colleges: a new enthusiasm

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Will Rice College President

Each of us here has contributed some great or small part to this thing called a College, the students, past and present who saw in the College the chance, not merely to prepare to assume responsibility in the outside world, but to actually assume responsibility for legislating, judging, and in general just plain learning how to get along with other people; the administrators who have given the students here a great measure of personal freedom and now wonder whether rising expectations on the part of the students will outstrip responsibility; the professors, especially the associates who feel a need for some sort of link between a student's formal academic life and his private life, and particularly the patrons who give their wholehearted support to the College although they are, for the most part, unable to follow our day by day progress.

A College is a fascinating institution. Homogeneous by any academic standards, its membership contains all the elements of any society, united, Kierkegaard would say, by their common humanity. There are the recluses, and the hellraisers; those ambitious for power; those with a real thirst for knowledge; those with a purpose in life, those seeking one, those convinced that one does not exist. People with a respect for law and those with none.

They are all here, if one looks. But they are a special group in a way. If they really believe in something, really desire it, then they will work and fight for it. Perhaps this is in the age and nature of college students. If so, it is a quality which should not be lightly waved aside with a label of immaturity upon it. The willingness to defend one's beliefs, to labor to institute them, and yet all the while being willing to modify them if evidence or experience dictates, is a quality to be admired whether discovered in the President of the United States, the administrators of a University, or the membership of a College.

The College System is experiencing rising expectations. Of this there is no doubt. The conversations and editorials of several years decrying the Rice Myth, reminding one of Eliot's "wind in dry grass" have for the most part disappeared. In their place came a successful lawsuit to end segregation of the University, course and grading reforms brought about by the Student Committee on Educational Policy, the Marquette Committee, and possibly in the future the even more far-reaching Woodward Proposal. The students have seen this.

Students Demonstrate Sincerity

The new atmosphere generates new enthusiasm in the student body, enthusiasm looking for expression. We have seen this enthusiasm take on projects ranging from college libraries to student demonstrations. And in both of these cases the students were for the most part sincere and resolute in their purpose.

I speak mainly for this college when I note a new seriousness of purpose. Very few people even believe in hazing freshmen. Advice on ori-