Woodward Defends Proposals in Debate at Wiess

By Allan Blackburn
Thresher Staff Reporter

Dr. Val Woodward announced last Thursday that work was complete on his committee's study formulating proposals for revamping undergraduate education at Rice. The full report will be made public early in January.

Speaking at Wiess College, Dr. Woodward explained the proposed plan briefly and defended it against objections brought forth by other professors.

As proposed, the plan consists of a new curriculum divided into four broad areas: science, math, western civilization, and reading, writing, and reasoning. One general comprehensive lecture per week would be given in each area.

Freedom To Work
The lectures are to be augmented with seminars, papers, and private consultations with professors. Placed on his own initiative, the student would be free to choose his own topics in the four areas and pursue them through independent reading and research. No tests or grades would be given.

The only requirement, aside from periodic consultation, would be an annual statement of "pass work accomplished" which is to be the student's "best scholarly effort."

Freshmen and sophomores would follow the pattern above, with the remaining two years of university life being spent in concentration on the individual's field of interest.

Target Is 1966
Dr. Woodward said that the proposed target date for a trial program of some 50 students chosen from volunteers among entering freshmen is fall, 1966.

Before preparations can begin, administration approval is necessary. Also funds, presumably from some foundation such as Ford or Guggenheim, must be found.

Woodward said the objective of the new program is to free the students from the pressures of examination and "forced learning," which he called detrimental to the educational process.

The student would be allowed full freedom to "read, think and learn as he will." In short, the individual would fit the educational system to his own personal need; and thereby, according to Woodward, open fully the worth of university life and education.

Self Discipline
The program assumes a great deal of self discipline on the part of the student. With no tests, required papers, or mandatory lectures, the student is completely on his own to spend his time in anyway he pleases.

Dr. Roy V. Talmage, Master of Wiess, posed the question whether freshmen students were mature enough to enter such a program, especially at Rice where entrance requirements are based on the test and grade oriented student.

Dr. Paul Pfeiffer of the Electrical Engineering Department asked how students could possibly know how they stood in such a curriculum. Fears and apprehensions as to their abilities, he suggested, would be heightened by the fact that they had no grade through which they could evaluate their performance.

Modify Admissions
Woodward allowed that certainly there are those to whom this program would be a detriment under present admission policies. Some new method for admission would have to be found, he suggested.

Another point discussed centered on the fact that the program demands a great deal from the professor. In order to conscientiously evaluate his students, give each individual attention, and prepare seminars and lectures, the professor will have no time for private research.

Since research publications are the only means for advancement in professional circles, it was suggested by Dr. Talmage that the professor would be stagnated in his position, relegating simply to the task of teaching.

With the Rice administrative policy concerning faculty publications and original work a problem might well arise, though occasionally a semester leave of absence for research could alleviate the problem, Dr. Woodward felt.