SA Group To Study Rice’s “ills”

By EDDIE PRICE

Five floors up in the new tower of Hanszen College, sat affable, earnest Doug Johnstone, chairman of the Senate Committee on Student Responsibilities. Questioned about the nature of his project, he reassuringly drawled, “There’s no need for a crusade in a place like Rice. Our purpose boils down to a study of the ills of the University.”

The origin of the Committee was a controversy in itself. Perhaps due to wind of Reed Martin’s Declaration of Student Rights, last year the National Student Association this fall asked Rice to be a “pilot campus” in its Academic Freedom Project. Its letter noted persuasively, “... your student government has the reputation of being dynamic, imaginative, and basically sound...”

THE MILDEST ASPECT of the NSA project was an “analysis of those student rights presently in force on campus.” The Senate turned down the offer to be a pilot school, but voted to submit a report on its own. Johnstone and committee were later delegated to prepare the report. The other members are Fryar Calhoun, Eugene Keilin, Malcolm Butler, and Doty Murphy.

George Sawdy, who moved to reject the NSA project, said he and the other Senators balked at the clause directing pilot schools to “Work to obtain a formal, written, guaranteed bill of student rights and responsibilities from your administration.” Sawdy said, “The Senate meeting was dominated by the shadow of Reed Martin.”

JOHNSTONE AGREED. “Our system is based on an informal, tacit code—policy can be changed without legislative action of any sort. The administration can heed subtle expressions of feeling on the part of the students without red tape.

“To arrange something as complex as a complete written code is hopeless. No two cases are ever alike—a code would become inhuman. There are things which are tacitly condoned which could not be written down; often the administration gives the students a period of grace to correct their offenses but to codify this would invite abuse.

“The administration’s policy has changed quietly over the past year—controversial disciplinary cases are now referred to the colleges, which have taken on new responsibilities,” said Johnstone, who is an Associate Justice on the Hanszen Supreme Court.

“Our system is worthy of being reported as it is,” he emphasized. “What we want to do is put vague ideals into workable terms—in expressing the system, we hope to create it.

“We plan to sound the feelings of the administration, faculty, and students about what they think we’ve got and what they think we ought to have, to ask questions and use the information we get to suggest improvements. The committee has talked to, or plans to talk to Dr. Higginbotham, Mr. Thompson, Dr. Pitzer, Dr. Cronels, and perhaps Mr. J. R. Sims.

“The University is trying to keep order and maintain a moral, gentlemanly standard of conduct—so off-campus offenses may need to be disciplined. Ungentlemanly conduct is not a civil offense but it is a university offense; on the other hand, in all cases of off-campus altercation with police, the students have come out better off by virtue of being from Rice.”

“We need to determine the intrinsic value of a student or faculty share in the responsibility for discipline perhaps on a parallel to the Honor Council. Some feel it serves to enhance a purely academic education. The question we have to ask is what the students think the function of the students is.”