Colleges can create a university

By RICK HEIDNER
Will Rice College President

Everyone has heard the phrase, "You can’t pour new wine into old wineskins." I found out the meaning of that phrase just recently. The college system is the new wine. The old wineskins are the establishment (perhaps that “e” should be capitalized) of Rice University (nee Institute) located in the context of Southern society.

I see the ten-year plan, as presently conceived, bringing Rice into line with the standard of excellence achieved at Cal Tech. In case anyone remembers, we were supposed to be "the Harvard of the South" instead of "the Cal Tech of the Southwest." I remember.

Colleges Have Tried

The colleges are the flickering spark that gives Rice the opportunity to be a University. The colleges have made an attempt to establish faculty-student relations. To this point the attempt has been a failure, but at least the colleges have tried, and they may some day succeed. Has Rice University attempted to do so? Isn’t it the mark of a real university that it should try to do so? The colleges have tried to broaden the intellectual horizons of its members by speaker programs. Has Rice University attempted to bring men and women of letters to the campus comparable to those who attended the semi-centennial?

Educated Man

In rare instances the answer is yes. If a speaker chairman for Will Rice College can aspire to asking Nobel Prize Winners to speak (and succeed), is it too much to ask that a University should be constantly and energetically pursuing such people? If millions of dollars can be poured into scientific research, is it not possible that a small portion of that sum be used for special research? The topic of that research project would be the following: In the southwest region of the United States, is it possible to take several hundred very intelligent, but not necessarily cosmopolitan students, associate them closely with great minds, place them in an environment in which individuals initiate ideas and pursue them to their completion, and thereby produce a truly educated man or woman?

Potential There

I will state that the answer to this proposition is yes. I think it is a yes that should be unqualified by any thoughts of making the colleges a money-making proposition and especially by any prejudice against the "typical" Rice student as being an inherently unimaginative future cog in some technical organization. The latter description is the most ridiculous misjudgment of potential imaginable, yet I have heard it from professors in some instances. The potential is there, despite the initial lack of a cosmopolitan outlook, for these people to become scholars. This is a qualitative goal in the midst of a hodgepodge of quantitative data concerning more facilities, more colleges, more students, and more teachers.

Came Too Soon

Perhaps the new wine came too soon. The pursuit of this new wine has broken the idealism of many fine student leaders. For those in the colleges who inherit the sense of "the college," I say, "You are right." Believe that what you are doing is right despite numerous mistakes, and despite less than perfect organization. To those persons on the faculty and in the administration who feel that the colleges could perhaps be a significant contribution to student life and student education, do not desert them if they occasionally pursue false goals. Someone must build a University from an Institute, and everyone must do so in the best way he knows how.