Faculty Group Seeks Educational Innovations

By JOHN DURHAM
Thresher Editorial Staff

A group of Rice faculty organized by Dr. Val Woodward, is currently undertaking a study to formulate proposals for revamping the nature of Rice undergraduate education.

Formed last April at the request and suggestion of several Will Rice College members, the committee is not an official University organ, but Woodward has received encouragement from University President Kenneth S. Pitzer to continue the study of Rice's educational problems.

The purpose of the committee plans, according to Woodward, is two-fold: to change the attitude toward teaching and learning at Rice, and to change the curriculum to make this new attitude possible.

Woodward feels that these objectives can be accomplished by the introduction of three measures: reducing the number of lectures and giving the student increased opportunity to articulate his views; reducing the external pressures of grades and examinations; and increasing the time and opportunity for the student to read and discuss.

The specific proposals of the committee will be put forward in a report in about a month. If approved, these proposals will be instituted in a pilot program to begin in September of 1965 with approximately 50 freshmen and 10 to 14 faculty members.

These freshmen, all to be volunteers, will participate in the program which bears scant resemblance to the current freshman year. The concept of the proposal is based on individual work — reading, consultation, and papers.

The new "curriculum" will be divided into four broad areas — science; mathematics; Western civilization; and reading, writing, and reasoning. These fields, Woodward said, will cover the entire range of man's knowledge.

Each of these areas would offer one general, comprehensive lecture a week, which would be open to the public as well as the members of the pilot program. The lectures would contain ample reference to books and authors which would amplify the subject, and which the student would be encouraged to consult.

Seminars will be scheduled to provide a diverse free flow of ideas between students and staff. "The student can teach as well as learn, and the professor can learn as well as teach," Woodward commented.

There will be no mandatory subjects for the students in the pilot program to follow. Each student will be free to choose his own topics in the four broad areas outlined in the program.

Woodward emphasized that grades and examinations will be nonexistent in the new program. Attendance at the lectures and seminars will be voluntary. All that will be required is that the student show that he is maintaining interest and making progress in his chosen fields.

This progress, Woodward feels, can be demonstrated just as well in conferences with professors and in papers as in exams, class attendance, and seminar discussion.

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WOODWARD COMMITTEE—

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The program in the sophomore year would be much the same as the first year, except that students who have little interest in science or mathematics would be allowed to substitute other fields for these two. The student's last two years would be devoted to concentration in the student's major areas of interest.

Woodward pointed out that the program "will demand a different attitude on the part of the staff and the students."

The initiation of the program is contingent on the approval of the University administration and receipt of necessary funds. Woodward said that the committee's plans would be presented to several foundations in an attempt to draw a grant.

Money will be needed to pay the salaries of visiting professors who will fill in for Rice professors who become a part of the pilot program and to acquire and duplicate reading materials.

In discussing the plans for the proposed changes, Woodward commented that "Rice has the greatest potential of any institution I have worked for or visited—a high quality staff and student body. But with this potential, the educational format is the same as it is at Oshkosh U."

The proposals of the committee are not borrowed in their entirety from any other institution. Woodward himself feels "sympathetic to the educational philosophy espoused by Alfred North Whitehead."

The committee members are not unanimous in their support of all the points in the program, Woodward said. "We wish to emphasize that participation in the pilot program will be completely voluntary, both on the part of the students and staff."

Committee members are Louis Mackey, Ronald Sass, James Heath, Konstatin Kolenda, J. Street Fulton, Calvin Class, William Akers, Leonard Marsak, Louis Galambos, Allen Matusow, and Charles Neu.

Other members are Walter Isle, Gerald O'Grady, John Robinson, Jasper Rose, Franz Brotzen, Gaston V. Rimlinger, Gilbert Cuthbertson, John Rogers, Jean-Claude DeBremaecker, Alan Grob, and Woodward.