

# Hafter cites active, geographically unbiased admissions

By JERRY HAFTER

In my year as Student Association President I have had the opportunity to gain some insight into the essential policy commitments which set the structure of the University. In some of these areas I have made proposals for structural changes; but one year is barely time to learn the outlines of university policy and to understand the levers of change. With the hope that my efforts will not leave the university with me, I have submitted the following critique of admissions policy.

My challenge is that if you agree with the ideas, do something about them. If you have better ideas (which is highly probable), express them.

Miss Coyner and others of her ilk are absolutely correct about the triviality of most student government in the colleges and in the Student Association. But triviality is not inherent in the system. It is the product of small minds unwilling to challenge the real problems at this University.

Our time here is limited, so we should spend resources on major problems.

Students can gain a great deal of respect by demonstrating their concern with significant matters, rather than with the petty concerns which administrators are accustomed to hear from students and their representatives.

## Admissions Policy

The tone of a university is set by its financial commitment to different departments, its physical facilities, its faculty, and its admissions policy. These factors are interrelated, and changes in one policy area will have ramifications in other areas and in the overall structure. A great deal about undergraduate education at Rice can be explained in terms of its admissions policies—policies written or unwritten which produce the undergraduate student body with which the university will work.

The essential aspect of Rice admissions policy is its laissez-faire outlook. It is assumed that a number of reasonably bright high school students will apply each year, from which annual admissions quotas can be filled without dipping deeply into marginal cases.

Over this procedure certain quantitative categories are set, such as ratios of male to female, in-state to out-of-state, and science-engineering to academically prospective students. Then the slots in the matrix are filled with the applicants available. The outcome is the Rice student body.

## Recruiting Students

This is the gross picture and is admittedly complicated by other factors like the annual over-acceptance presuming a number of rejections and the influence of early acceptance.

Within this structure a number of elements are detrimental to the University's best interest. Of course, this evaluation is based on assumptions about the university and its undergraduate student body which are not in accord with the specific views held by the Board, members of the administration, or the Admissions Committee.

First, Rice should recruit the specific types of high school students it needs. The athletic department does not just

wait for a certain number of football and basketball players to apply and then select among them. Should the academic departments be denied the same privilege?

## Seeking the Best

Most Rice students, having been National Merit Semifinalists, are aware of the outstanding recruitment programs of schools like Michigan State. As a Westinghouse Science Talent Search winner, I was personally exposed to the excellent public relations work of schools like MIT, Cal Tech and Case Institute. Rice was notably absent in making overtures to this group.

Whereas other great universities like Harvard, Princeton, and Stanford place several admissions officers in the field to look for the specific students those universities need and to offer them advice, admissions information, and scholarships, Rice waits for students to come to it.

## Fund Commitments

This is a good system, but it is not the best way to insure that the University receives its share of the most talented students in the nation.

Some efforts have been made in this area in the last year, notably a trip by Dr. Castaneda to the East coast. But more commitment—especially of funds because this is an expensive business in which to compete—is needed.

Breaking down the omnipresent homogeneity of the Rice student body is a vital necessity if we expect educational diversity to develop here. It is apparent that the present unimaginative curriculum reflects the passive desires of most Rice students.

## Social Homogeneity

The outstanding feature of Rice's social homogeneity is the extremely middle-class intellectual and economic background of most students. (Scratch a Rice student and you'll find the son of a technician, a CPA, or a small merchant who was pushed to do well so he might someday come to Rice.)

This pattern of selecting students from homogeneous family backgrounds is enforced by admissions standards and needs to be broken both at the top and at the bottom. Recruiting the sons of a few wealthy families might solve the longstanding problem of lack of alumni support, since middle class children tend to stay in the middle class and seldom break into the income categories which permit real support of their alma mater.

Most important, Rice should open its admissions to lower socio-economic groups, even at the expense of a few points on the average SAT scores. In a state which has a high concentration of Spanish-Americans, Rice should recruit a substantial number of the most promising among such children.

## Token Integration

The same indictment should be given regarding the token admission of Negro students. At present, the best products of the local Negro high schools leave Houston for elite Northern schools. The average WASP at Rice needs exposure to a diversity of cultural, social, and economic groups. Universities, including this one, are places to learn about the diversity of society, not places to look at society in one's own image.

Homogeneity is also apparent in the students' regional backgrounds. Although changed somewhat in recent years, the percentage of students admitted from Texas high schools is more than 60 percent. This is conscious choice of a regionalism which has been rejected by most great national universities.

## Geographical Distribution

Rice, at worst, ought to admit the type of students it desires academically, without regard to home region. At best, it should encourage diversity by biasing admissions toward non-Southwesterners and by active recruitment in other regions.

Finally, Rice should undertake a major review of its criteria for admissions. High school grade averages and test scores are valid criteria, but they

have a limited effectiveness. We can probably say that anyone with CEEB scores over 750 should be admitted and that anyone under 550 probably will not succeed at Rice.

But further use of these criteria is extremely arbitrary. Scores form an undesirably easy escape from the marginal decisions which take up most of the admissions committee's time. For further distinction, marginal mathematical distinctions could be totally disregarded and choices made on personality, extracurricular activities and achievements which show potential for future creative development.