New Dean Victor Jones: In Search of a Medici

By Helen Hershkoff

On his first day of tenure as dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GASA), R. Victor Jones, Gordon McKay Professor of Applied Physics, asked that “God have mercy on us all.”

Jones sees good reasons to ask for spiritual help.

During the past ten years Harvard witnessed a flowering of the GASA. This was a response, Jones said Monday, to “a tremendous national manpower shortage.” Not only did GSAS enrollment more than double, from about 1400 in 1955 to nearly 3000 in 1970; during that time, according to Jones, “an excitement, a Renaissance spirit” developed in many departments.

For the past ten years, Jones continued, “we have had a Medici in Washington. But how can you maintain a Renaissance spirit in a conservative financial environment?”

The crucial issue facing Jones is how to support graduate education. With a tightening job market converting the increased number of Ph.D’s into a scholar surplus, the GASA no longer can depend on the Federal government or even on private foundations to support graduate education enthusiastically.

According to Jones, the GSAS must convince “an external world retrenching from the standards of university life” that graduate education is still important.

“In the past, we liked to think of Ph.D.’s as scholars who really didn’t care whether they made a living. But I don’t think

(Continued from page 1)

people are disinterested in eating,” Jones explained.

“If you don’t have a continuing crop of bright young people, this place will tumble,” he said. “A cutback in Ph.D’s will kill this place. But most people won’t want to spend seven, eight years to go nowhere.”

Jones considers the situation especially serious for female graduate students, who face a far tighter job market. “Harvard must be cognizant of the fact that it will produce women with high degrees while jobs are not being made available,” he said.

The Risks of Education

Jones suggested that the University compile statistics on national employment and graduate work trends, in order both to appraise realistic employment needs and to make its students more informed on “the risks of graduate education.”

He also suggested that Harvard explore the possibilities of alternative degrees. He spoke of the possible resurrection of the M.A., as well as of certification programs in which students pursue graduate work for two or three years without writing theses.

Jones is uncertain how Harvard will respond to these ideas. “Given the Harvard tradition, I’m not sure Harvard will want to pursue them,” Jones said. “They are intriguing ideas. It will be easy to see the destructive elements, but one must be careful not to lose the advantages.”

“For the past ten years, questions regarding patterns of education have been frozen. They may come unstuck. But it isn’t easy to finance,” Jones said.

A California native, Jones concentrated in physics at Berkeley. He had two years of experience in industry before coming to Harvard 15 years ago.

Jones became associate dean of Applied Physics in 1969.

As the new assistant dean of the Faculty concerned with graduate education, Jones will work with Dean Dunlop on money allocations to the GSAS departments.

Jones Is New Dean

(Continued on page 6)