

ACCELERATE

THE PHILANTHROPIC MAGAZINE OF RICE UNIVERSITY

Faculty Chairs Leading the Charge

GUIDING TEACHING
AND RESEARCH AT
THE HIGHEST LEVEL



Contents

SUMMER 2025



2

Faculty Chairs Leading the Charge

Three of Rice's named chairs showcase why dedicated teaching and trailblazing research go hand in hand.



10

The Vision Behind the Shepherd School's Next Act

David Whitney '74 and Juliana Chyu support rising opera stars.



14

Redefining Global Citizenship

With philanthropic support, two students embark on transformative journeys abroad.



18

Rice Breaks Ground on the Moody Center Complex for Student Life

The long-anticipated space will be a new hub for student connection, engagement and growth.

20

Pushing Bold Ideas Forward With Graduate Fellowships

Barclay Jemet and Melanie Ford are changing the way we see the world.

26

Larissa's Legacy

A family creates a lasting tribute for a beloved sister and daughter.

28

From Student to Steward

Cordell Haymon '65 and Walter Loewenstern '58 share what inspired 45 consecutive years of giving.

32

News & Notes

Rice shares campus updates from the university's philanthropic community.

ACCELERATE

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OF RICE UNIVERSITY

Accelerate is a biannual publication celebrating the culture of philanthropy at Rice and the remarkable supporters who move Rice forward.

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At the close of the academic year, we reflect on a season of remarkable milestones: the graduation of another exceptional class of Owls, a groundbreaking for the new Moody Center Complex for Student Life, and 50th anniversary celebrations across engineering, natural sciences and music. With campus settling into the rhythm of summer and our fiscal year drawing to an end, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for your generosity and thoughtful engagement. Your support fuels Rice's future, opening doors, advancing discovery and nurturing the brilliant minds that move our world forward.

Throughout my career in higher education, I have learned that truly great institutions are built and sustained by extraordinary people. Among the most vital investments we can make in academic excellence are endowed faculty chairs. These positions are key to attracting and retaining world-class scholars and educators, and they are critical to Rice's ambition to be the premier teaching and research university in the world. In this issue, you'll meet three outstanding faculty members whose work is transforming their fields and inspiring the next generation of thinkers and leaders.

As we celebrate the impact of our faculty and students, we are also mindful of the broader forces reshaping higher education today, from shifting federal policies to evolving expectations around access, affordability and innovation. In this changing landscape, we have the unique opportunity to lead — and to define excellence and impact in a way that only Rice can. You'll see this reflected in the stories of our thoughtful and generous donors, graduate students who are shaping the future of technology and urban development, and students who are immersing themselves in global experiences. In each story, philanthropy is a catalyst, empowering discovery, expanding opportunities and strengthening our community and the world beyond.

Thank you for being a part of this important work. With your support we look to the future with optimism, ready to build on our momentum and embrace the possibilities ahead.

Sincerely,

Stephen Bayer

Vice President, Development and Alumni Relations

FACULTY CHAIRS LEADING THE CHARGE

Guiding Teaching *and* Research at the Highest Level

By Sarah Brenner Jones

At Rice, excellence is not an either-or proposition. While some universities prioritize teaching and others focus on advancing research, Rice aspires to lead in both. This dual objective is at the heart of Rice's 10-year strategic plan, which aims to elevate Rice as the premier university for teaching *and* research.

Fueling this ambition is an extraordinary faculty that specializes in the power of “and” — scholars who are advancing the frontiers of knowledge and preparing students to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Their ability to innovate as scholars and inspire as teachers is what sets Rice apart.

Endowed chairs are critical to attracting and retaining these visionary scholars. They provide the resources, recognition and freedom to pursue ambitious research, mentor future leaders and elevate entire fields of study. Because they are permanent, they represent a legacy of excellence

— a single chair can influence generations of students, research and public discourse.

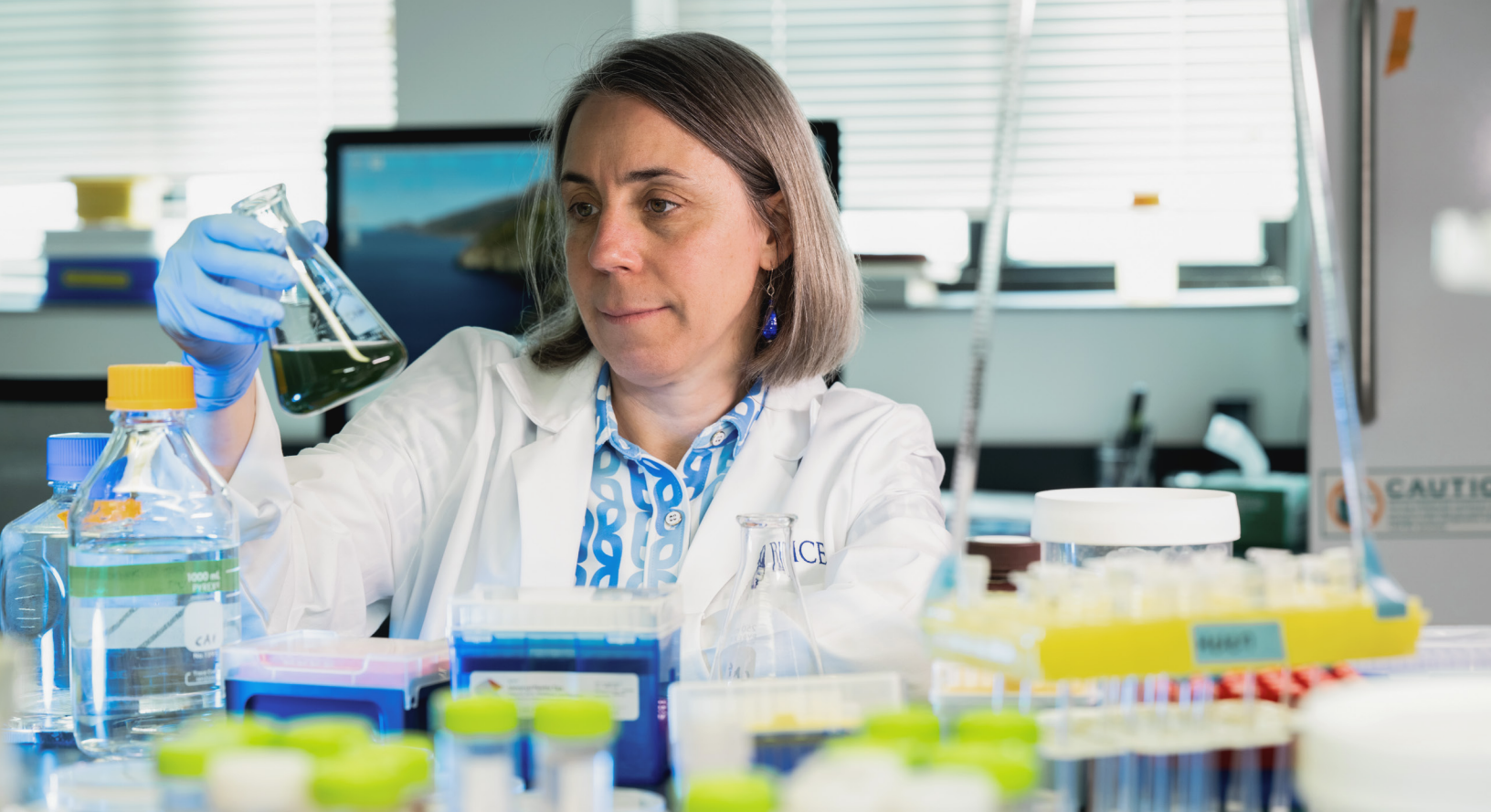
The impact of endowed chairs is best illustrated through the work of three remarkable Rice professors. In biosciences, a trailblazer is unlocking how life works at the cellular level, while mentoring the next generation of leaders in synthetic biology. In economics, a leading researcher unpacks the forces behind inequality and opportunity in the global economy. And in the humanities, a Shakespeare and environmental studies scholar explores the role of bees in Elizabethan England, offering fresh insights into how we perceive nature and society today.

Each of these faculty members brings extraordinary vision and dedication to their work, and each is empowered by the support of a named chair. Their stories reveal how philanthropy fuels excellence today and for generations to come.



ACCELERATE THE VISION

Endowed chairs ensure that the brightest minds have the freedom to teach, mentor and innovate at the highest level. The following stories highlight how these faculty members, backed by the generosity of the Rice community, are moving the world forward. If you are interested in supporting exceptional scholars through endowed chairs, please contact Ginny Jones, executive director of development, at gbyones@rice.edu or 713-348-2096.



Photography by Jeff Fitlow

From Molecules to Materials

Caroline Ajo-Franklin and the Future of Engineered Biology

In Caroline Ajo-Franklin's lab, biology isn't just studied — it's imagined, engineered and brought to life in surprising new forms. A single cell becomes a stretchable rope. Microbes are programmed to sense toxins and respond with precision. At this intersection of nature and technology, Caroline is reimagining what biology can do and is mentoring the next generation of scientists to do the same.

Recently, Caroline was named the Ralph and Dorothy Looney Professor of BioSciences. For Caroline, the chair is more than an accolade. "Being awarded the Looney Professorship is a great honor," she said. "I appreciate the respect of my colleagues and the administration, and a chair shows that you have that. It also gives you freedom."

Freedom, Caroline explained, is what lets science move at the speed of curiosity. "Sometimes you have an idea for a collaborative project and just need a little data before writing a grant. Or you meet a student or postdoc whose skills are exactly what your lab needs. Discretionary funding from a chair lets you take those small but crucial steps. It's a little investment that can yield much greater scholarship and research."

Though all of her degrees are in chemistry, Caroline has always been driven by scientific curiosity across disciplines. Her Ph.D. focused on biophysical chemistry, blending biology, physics and traditional chemistry. But it was the early days of synthetic biology that caught her imagination, when researchers began programming

cells to do things like store memory or carry out computations.

"What drew me in was the richness," she said. "Nature does extraordinary things — just look at a tree. Trees turn carbon dioxide, water and sunlight into wood, a material that's stronger and more flexible than much of what humans can manufacture. My lab asks, 'How can we use biology to build better materials, and how can we do it sustainably?'"

Caroline's team designs living organisms that function in surprising ways. In one example, they engineered a single bacterial cell to grow — over the course of just two days — into a centimeter-scale rope with remarkable stretch. Cut a piece of that rope, leave it out for weeks, then place it back in a culture and it will grow again. It's like a biological 3D printer. "We're interested in how these materials could be useful in low-resource settings," Caroline said, "whether that's space travel, disaster zones or parts of the world without infrastructure. If you need a strong, elastic material, you can grow it from a seed."

Her work also bridges the natural and the fabricated. The lab explores how to make biology "speak" the language of electronics. Cells might sense environmental hazards and trigger useful responses, like releasing a polymer to trap pollutants or making enzymes that neutralize toxic compounds. "We're trying to understand how biology can sense, respond and communicate," she said. "That opens up all kinds of possibilities,

especially as we think about the needs of a growing population and a planet with finite resources."

Mentorship is central to Caroline's work. She leads a lab of 14 students — three undergraduates and 11 Ph.D. students — along with five postdocs, and she sees guiding their growth as one of her greatest responsibilities. "One-third of my time is spent meeting with people in my lab, making sure they have space to talk — not just about science, but their careers, classes and lives," she said. "It's a joy to collaborate, and it keeps me grounded." For Caroline, training future scientists isn't just about technical skills, it's about cultivating curiosity, resilience and the ability to solve complex problems. When students are empowered to follow their questions in the lab, they're better prepared to think creatively and critically long after they graduate.

She also works to raise funds, advocating for and championing the work of her team. "Running a lab of this size is like running a small business," she said. "I'm the HR department, the communications director, the one who makes sure the world sees the amazing work my students and postdocs are doing."

Caroline added, "Biology is incredibly powerful. As researchers, we're constantly toggling between discovery and invention. Endowed chairs help make that possible. They support risk-taking, collaboration and the mentoring that ensures science keeps moving forward."



Stretchy rope grown from a single bacterial cell

The Economics of Words

Flavio Cunha Makes the Case for Early Childhood Investment



In the quiet hum of a university office filled with papers and data sets, Flavio Cunha is leading a revolution — not with fiscal policy or stock market models, but with bedtime stories and family dinners. The Ervin K. Zingler Chair of Economics at Rice, Flavio is redefining how we think about economic opportunity: Long before a child enters a classroom, their potential is being shaped — not by wealth, but by words.

A pivotal moment in his intellectual and academic journey came during his doctoral studies at the University of Chicago when he encountered the landmark 1990s study by Betty Hart and Todd Risley, which revealed the so-called “30 million word gap.” By age three, children from higher-income families had heard roughly 30 million more words than their lower-income peers — a disparity with lifelong implications. Economic policy, he began to understand, is not simply a tool to manage markets, but can be a lens to understand and improve the conditions that shape human potential from the very beginning.

“I was so interested, because conversation isn’t income dependent,” Flavio recalled. “Conversations don’t cost parents money. A lot of the gaps we see arise from environmental issues that we don’t have to pay for. I wanted to know how we could use economic policy to improve those environments.”

That curiosity sparked a mission to implement real-world programs that empower parents and support children. “I don’t just want to write papers,” he explained. “I really want to change policy.”



Photography by Priscilla Bosma

To do this, Flavio knew he needed to teach parents what researchers already knew about child development and brain science. This led him to co-design programs that deliver this knowledge directly to families. He works closely with community organizations and school districts to design, implement and evaluate parenting interventions that can scale without requiring enormous resources.

One such program, the Jumpstart Program (JSP), was launched in partnership with Alief Independent School District in the Houston area. A seven-month initiative, JSP provides group and center-based training for parents of 3-year-olds to promote at-home learning and prepare children for pre-kindergarten. Families meet regularly at their local elementary school with the district’s family liaison, and children participate independently in monthly sessions.

Unlike many parenting programs staffed by highly trained researchers, JSP is implemented entirely by school district personnel using standard resources, making it both accessible and sustainable. “Our research asks a crucial question,” Flavio explained.

“Can scalable programs implemented in real-world settings improve the home environment and enhance the school readiness of economically disadvantaged children?”

The answer, so far, is promising. A three-year randomized controlled trial of JSP found improvements in curriculum-based assessments and measurable gains in cognitive readiness. Perhaps most importantly, parents in the program reported reading more frequently to their children, with data showing that 75% of the program’s impact came from direct effects and 25% from changes in parenting habits.

Flavio’s goal is to move his research beyond academic journals and policy briefs. His work is a powerful reminder that economics, at its best, is a human science — it’s about people. As his research continues to influence policy and practice, the potential for broader impact is just beginning to unfold. The future he envisions is one where economic policy empowers parents, supports children and transforms opportunity from the ground up.

Where Bees, Books and the Bard Collide

The Scholarly World of Joseph Campana

For Joseph Campana, poetry, scholarship and teaching are tightly woven together — a triad inspired by the extraordinary educators who once showed him that literature is both art and a way of seeing the world. “My practice as a poet, my practice as a scholar and my love of teaching really goes back to having had extraordinary teachers for whom literature was deeply important,” he explained.

This commitment to teaching has guided his nearly two decades at Rice, where he is now the William Shakespeare Professor of English, director of the Center for Environmental Studies and co-director of the environmental studies minor. In each of these roles, Joseph fosters an intellectual community where literature, research and multidisciplinary thinking intersect. He is also co-principal investigator of Diluvial Houston, a Mellon Foundation-funded initiative examining climate, culture and community.

As both a scholar and an educator, Joseph is shaping a broader academic conversation. When he began teaching Introduction to Environmental Studies, he led a course of about 70 students from 25–30 different programs — 70% from STEM fields, alongside students in architecture, social sciences, humanities and even music. “What is fascinating and inspiring, as a writer, researcher and teacher, is grappling with subjects that are beyond all of us,”



Photography by Priscilla Bosma



he said. “The scope is massive. The complexity is massive. And there is no single discipline that will have all the answers.”

It is precisely because environmental issues are immense and multifaceted that he sees environmental studies not just as an academic pursuit, but as a crucible for cultivating what he calls critical imaginations for the future. “Teaching about environmentalism,” he said, “is about various kinds of knowledge about how we live now and the realities of our world today. But it’s also about equipping students to ask informed questions and to imagine alternative futures.”

Joseph’s scholarship on early modern literature also focuses on environmental questions. His current monograph is a study of bees in Shakespeare’s England, a fascination that began in graduate school and has evolved into a rich scholarly inquiry. “People in early modern England

were writing natural histories about insects, while at the same time, they were theorizing society,” Joseph said. “Bees became a metaphor for order — industrious, disciplined, collaborative. Virgil saw them as models for self-sufficient societies.”

Joseph’s methodology is rooted in close reading, but his questions reach far beyond the historical page. “My tactics as a scholar are about looking very closely at works in their historical moment and then asking interesting questions that have an urgency in our own.” Whether he’s writing poetry, teaching Shakespeare’s plays or exploring how those plays have been adapted over time, Joseph sees literature as a record of human possibility. “I love the opportunity to have a little window into

another moment,” he reflected. “History gives us a sense that the world was different once and that it could be different again. But it also reminds us how deeply connected we still are to those pasts.”

Joseph’s work resonates in the classroom, in academia and in the art world. At a time when environmental crises demand new ways of thinking, his scholarship and teaching model how the humanities can contribute to urgent global conversations. By drawing connections between Elizabethan bees and today’s ecological or societal challenges, or by guiding students to imagine alternative futures, he demonstrates that literature is not a retreat from the world but a tool for engaging with it.



The Vision Behind the Shepherd School's Next Act

By Sophie Kidd



On March 29, 2025, the Shepherd School of Music welcomed families from across Houston to celebrate the school's 50th Anniversary Community Day. Attendees enjoyed behind-the-scenes tours of Brockman Hall for Opera, hands-on conducting experiences, and performances by the Rice Chorale and a harp ensemble. Designed to welcome the community and spark curiosity, the celebration gave many attendees, especially younger

guests, a memorable introduction to the world of classical music.

"It's incredible how far the Shepherd School has come in 50 years," says Dean Matthew Loden. "We've gone from a regional gem to a top-tier global institution for musical training. That evolution has been fueled in large part by philanthropists who believe in our mission, who understand the power of music to change lives and communities."



Photos courtesy of Brandon Martin





David Whitney and Juliana Chyu at the Dallas Opera's production of *La bohème*

For donors Juliana Chyu and David Whitney '74, the 50th anniversary is more than a celebration — it's an opportunity to invest in the school's future. The couple recently established the David Whitney and Juliana Chyu Fund for Opera, aimed at bringing in visiting conductors, directors and vocal experts to enrich student training. Their gift reflects a shared passion for music, a deep appreciation for mentorship and a commitment to making classical music more accessible for the next generation of performers and audiences.

"We've been involved with Chicago's Ryan Opera Center for the past decade, and one of the first performers we supported there was actually a Shepherd School graduate," Juliana recalls. "It felt like everything just lined up. When we had the chance to support a specific program at Rice, it was clear that Shepherd — and opera — were where we wanted to focus."

David, a Rice alumnus and retired dermatologist, recalls his own musical awakening at Rice — spurred not by formal classes, but by friends and the ever-present hum of classical radio. "I didn't play an instrument, but music found me," he says. "That experience stuck with me through medical school, through raising a family and through what became a lifelong love of opera."

Juliana, who immigrated from Korea at age 16 and later became a dermatologist after studying at Johns Hopkins, had a similar path. "I was in choir as a child and learned a Korean

string instrument called the gayageum, but I've always been more of an observer," she says. "Still, music has been part of our lives — from taking our children to concerts, to keeping opera subscriptions through all stages of life, even when we were so tired we'd fall asleep in the seats!"

David and Juliana believe that opera holds a unique power. "Opera is the ultimate art form," Juliana says. "It combines music, theater, visual arts, movement. It's immersive. And now, with the addition of new technologies and contemporary stories, it has the potential to reach even more people."

In recent years, the Shepherd School has embraced this contemporary evolution, and the school's opera program has grown under dynamic leadership and partnerships. The hiring of Director of Opera Studies Joshua Winograde, formerly with LA Opera and one of the nation's most respected casting directors — signals Shepherd's continued ambition to be not just a training ground, but a cultural force.

David and Juliana's gift supports that vision by giving students access to working professionals. Last fall, the fund was used to sponsor Louis Lohraseb as the visiting conductor for the school's performance of "Alcina." David and Juliana had the opportunity to meet Louis and saw the importance of visiting artists firsthand. "There's no substitute for young artists rubbing elbows with people who've made it," David says. "Those conversations, that mentorship — it changes everything."

For Dean Loden, this kind of investment is essential to achieving the highest level of excellence and innovation at the Shepherd School. "We're not just training musicians. We're preparing creative leaders who will shape the future of the arts," he says. "Philanthropy makes that possible by giving us the flexibility to bring in extraordinary talent and by showing students that their dreams matter."

For Juliana and David, the impact they hope to make is both personal and far-reaching. "We want to see students explore beyond traditional roles," Juliana says, "to try new repertoire, to collaborate across disciplines, to think outside the box." David adds, "I hope they become ambassadors for classical music. It doesn't have to be exclusive or intimidating. We need more voices making it accessible and essential again."



Juliana Chyu at the Vienna State Opera

"Opera is the ultimate art form."

It combines music, theater, visual arts, movement. It's immersive. And now, with the addition of new technologies and contemporary stories, it has the potential to reach even more people."

— Juliana Chyu

ACCELERATE THE VISION

To learn how you can help shape the future of music and support the next generation of artists, contact Nancy Giles, senior director of development for the Shepherd School of Music, at nancygiles@rice.edu or **713-348-4992**.



Summer 2024 Rice in France students

Redefining Global Citizenship

By Sophie Kidd

“Being a global citizen doesn’t just mean traveling abroad,” explained H  lade Scutti Santos, teaching professor of Spanish and Portuguese and director of Rice’s Center for Languages and Intercultural Communication (CLIC). “It means expanding your perspective through genuine exposure to other languages, cultures and ways of life. It’s about reflecting on one’s identity in relation to others — and rethinking what you thought you knew.”

That philosophy is at the heart of Rice in Country, a School of Humanities program supported by the Elizabeth Lee Moody International Fund in the Humanities and Art, which sends students abroad to live with host families, take classes at local institutions and engage directly with the communities around them. What began 10 years ago as a faculty-led initiative to deepen language instruction has evolved into a transformative experience that bridges cultures and reshapes futures.

“Students come back with a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them,” she said. “But the biggest challenge is access.”

Even when tuition is covered, additional costs — airfare, meals or lost income from summer jobs — can be prohibitive. “Some students support their families during the summer. Others just can’t afford to travel,” H  lade explained. “That’s where travel stipends and scholarships come in. They can make all the difference.”

With rising student interest, H  lade hopes to expand funding to ensure that every student who wants to participate can have a life-changing experience. “We’re lucky to have generous donors and endowments, but demand always outpaces what we have.”



Photo courtesy of Phoebe Yoon

Fluency in Care

For **Phoebe Yoon '27**, global citizenship is deeply personal. Inspired by her mother's battle with and recovery from cancer, Phoebe was determined to pursue a career in medicine. A summer volunteering in underserved communities in Nicaragua inspired her interest in global health, and when she arrived on campus, she declared as a biosciences major and got involved in cell research, with the goal of becoming a pediatric oncologist. It wasn't long before she learned about the Rice in Spain program, a unique opportunity to combine her passions for medicine and language.

"I was drawn to the idea of using my language skills in a real clinical setting," she said, "and I knew that this was something that I could not miss out on."



With the help of financial aid, Phoebe was able to take advantage of this incredible experience. "CLIC covered half the cost, and Rice provided the rest through scholarships and a travel stipend for Pell Grant recipients like me. Not only did that support make it possible for me to go to Spain, but it also relieved so much pressure and allowed me to really focus on learning."

Led by Rice faculty and coordinated in partnership with local health organizations in Pamplona, the program placed Phoebe and other students in community clinics where they shadowed doctors, practiced bedside manner, learned how to perform small procedures and discussed public health systems in classroom seminars — all conducted in Spanish. Students also lived with host families and took language classes at a local university.



"Going there, my Spanish was pretty basic," Phoebe said. "But when you're immersed in the language, whether in lectures, at the clinic or talking to friends, you can't help but grow. By the end, I could hold full conversations, even about health care topics."

Reflecting on her experience, Phoebe said that her time in Spain changed her view of health care — and her own role in it. "In Spain, there's this sense that everyone looks out for each other, like one big family. That really affected me. I started thinking more about how community shapes care and how we can bring that spirit into the U.S. health system."

While Phoebe is still early in her medical journey, the experience has given her a clearer sense of purpose. "I hope to return to Latin America as a physician one day," she said. "I want to use my language skills and understanding of community-based care to build trust and connection."

She also hopes others can have similar life-changing opportunities. "A lot of students worry about the cost," she said. "Donor support makes all the difference."



Building Cross-Cultural Community

Before studying in France with Rice in Country, **Paige Matthys-Pearce '26** had never left the U.S. for an extended period of time. However, growing up in a diverse multilingual neighborhood in St. Louis, Paige developed an early love for languages and cultures — a passion she now pursues through her linguistics major at Rice.

"On the street where I grew up, there's a Hindu temple, a mosque and a Catholic church, so there's a lot of religions, cultures and languages close together. Even though my family only speaks English at home, I wanted to learn my friends' languages," Paige explained. "I was already fluent in French and Spanish when I got to Rice, but I wanted to go deeper and explore Arabic, Persian, Hebrew and German."

In France, Paige spent her days immersed in language and community: playing soccer with university students, volunteering in local schools and sharing meals with her host family.

One encounter, in particular, stood out. "I wandered into a Persian rug store one day and met a woman who struck up a conversation with me," Paige recalled. "We ended up speaking in a mix of Persian and French. She made me tea, we danced to Iranian music from her childhood, and she invited me to lunch the day before I flew home. We still keep in touch."

That experience changed the way Paige thinks about what it means to be part of a global community. "It's one thing to



Paige Matthys-Pearce (pictured far right) with French studies lecturer Nelly Nilufar Ossia and fellow students

study a culture in a classroom. But when you live it, when you share tea and stories and laughter — that's what makes it real," she said. "This trip deepened how I understand my role in building a stronger, kinder intercultural community and helping to better our world."

Paige is grateful for the generous financial aid that enabled her growth. "It's because of the financial support of donors that I can participate in Rice in Country, and even attend Rice at all," she said. "I'm so grateful for donor support because it helps people like me learn about themselves and other cultures so we can go on to truly better our world."

Paige is now preparing for her next journey: learning Arabic



through the Rice in Jordan program this summer. "I'm nervous," she admitted. "But I'm also excited to see how this new cultural experience will help me grow and contribute to the world community."

ACCELERATE THE VISION

To help make life-changing global learning experiences accessible to more Rice students, or to learn how you can support programs like Rice in Country, contact Emily Stein, senior director of development, at emily.m.stein@rice.edu or 713-348-3424.



A NEW CHAPTER:

RICE BREAKS GROUND ON THE MOODY CENTER COMPLEX FOR STUDENT LIFE

“When we put more Rice graduates into the world, we all reap the benefits, and this complex will help us do that by enhancing access to all that Rice has to offer.”

— Reginald DesRoches, Rice President

Renderings courtesy of Olson Kundig

Rice University marked a major milestone May 8 with the groundbreaking of the Moody Center Complex for Student Life (MCCSL), a bold step toward enhancing the student experience through connection, engagement and growth. Hundreds of students, staff, faculty and alumni joined together to celebrate a new 75,000-square-foot facility, which will anchor a newly envisioned student hub at the heart of campus.

“Our ultimate goal is to prepare students to make a difference in their communities, and this facility is dedicated to supporting this journey from the moment they set foot on campus to the time they exit the Sallyport and even well beyond,” Rice President Reginald DesRoches said. “When we put more Rice graduates into the world, we all reap the benefits, and this complex will help us do that by enhancing access to all that Rice has to offer.”

The MCCSL is made possible by transformative philanthropic support, including a historic \$100

million commitment from the Moody Foundation, which remains the largest single donation in Rice’s history. Announced in 2021, the gift not only supports the construction of the complex but also funds 12 endowments focused on advancing student opportunity and success, collectively known as the Moody Experience.

Complementing this landmark contribution, The Brown Foundation provided an additional \$15 million to support the project. A key feature of the new facility, The Brown Foundation Pavilion, will open directly onto the Central Quad, offering a dynamic venue for indoor and outdoor events, including performances, lectures and multicultural celebrations.

Inside, the building will also house a variety of spaces tailored to the needs of Rice’s diverse and growing student body — including a café, coffeehouse, meeting rooms, study areas and student services offices — all designed to foster community and collaboration.



Photos by Jeff Fitlow



Pictured in left photo (L-R): Ross Moody, Moody Foundation trustee; Isabel Lummis, president of The Brown Foundation; Elle Moody '14, Moody Foundation trustee; and Reginald DesRoches, president of Rice University



Pushing Bold Ideas Forward With Graduate Fellowships

By Emily Gaines

From developing a haptic sleeve that augments human capabilities to exploring the complex intersections of conservation and human rights in Guatemala, graduate students at Rice are transforming lives and communities in countless ways. Investing in their success is central to Rice's bold plans for the future.

Momentous, the university's 10-year strategic plan, outlines a vision where research and discovery are fostered by a personalized approach to graduate education. By attracting top-tier students, Rice strengthens its academic community, draws world-class faculty and enriches undergraduate learning through mentorship and teaching.

Fellowships play a pivotal role in this vision. More than just financial support, they fuel boundary-pushing research and empower students to share their discoveries with the world. Among these prestigious awards is the Lodieska Stockbridge Vaughn Fellowship, a highly competitive honor recognizing graduate students who demonstrate exceptional achievement and promise. Each year, five fellowships of \$16,750 are awarded: one in the social sciences, one in the humanities and three open to any discipline. The funds offer flexible support for travel, research, prototyping and more.

On the following pages, meet Vaughn Fellows **Barclay Jumet** and **Melanie Ford**, whose research is advancing their fields and reshaping how we understand the world and our place in it.

Pictured: A haptic sleeve developed by Barclay Jumet can enhance mobility for people with disabilities and boost performance for soldiers and athletes.

CREATING NEW PATHWAYS



Barclay Jumet

Ph.D. candidate **Barclay Jumet** is on a mission to expand the way humans interact with the world — not through sight or sound, but through touch. A 2024–2025 Vaughn Fellow and doctoral student in Rice’s mechanical engineering program, Barclay is using his lifelong interest in textiles and engineering to create wearable technology that’s as functional as it is innovative.

“The bulk of my Ph.D. has been spent working on haptics, or touch-based communications, and developing haptic systems made entirely from textiles,” Barclay explained. “It’s a good communicative pathway beyond sight and sound.”

That work has become the foundation for Actile Technologies, a startup Barclay is co-launching with Dan Preston, assistant professor of mechanical engineering at Rice. Actile is developing wearable devices that use haptic feedback to support and enhance human capabilities, particularly for athletes, soldiers and pilots, and people with disabilities.

One current prototype is a soft, fluidically controlled haptic sleeve that can guide a user by applying

directional pressure to the arm. “The path we’re on right now is trying to bring our prototypes out of the lab and give people something that can improve their day-to-day lives — whether that’s helping people with disabilities navigate the world more easily or enhancing abilities on the playing field or in the battlefield.”

Actile is developing its devices to now test with football teams at Rice and the University of Houston. One use case is helping quarterbacks receive directional cues through haptic signals rather

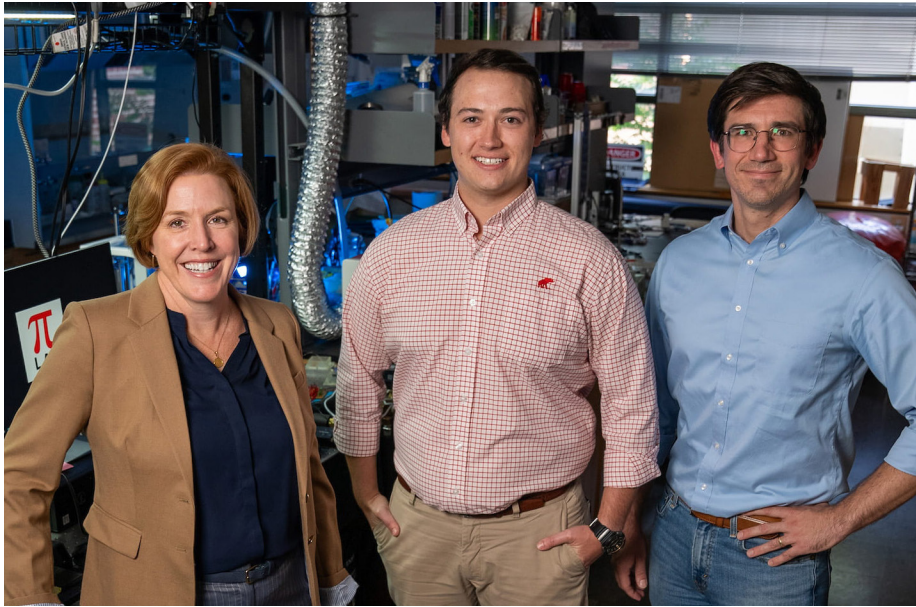
than audio. “A quarterback may struggle to hear a coach through their headset over the screaming of the crowd,” Barclay said. “But with haptics, the coach could communicate which side of the field the quarterback should prioritize by applying pressure or an electrical signal to an arm or thigh, reducing their decision-making time.”

Beyond sports, Barclay and his collaborators at Actile are also working with the U.S. Department of Defense and Special Operations Command, where the same concept — minimizing reliance on sight and sound — can improve situational effectiveness in the field.

The Vaughn Fellowship has played a critical role in this work, supporting the transition from lab-based

research to real-world applications. “It has helped fund a lot of the final stages of our prototype,” Barclay said. “That means turning benchtop prototypes into refined, wearable formats. We’ve also used that funding to create a more realistic aesthetic for the product, such as camouflage-enameled sleeves for direct integration into military gear.”

For Barclay and his team, the support is about more than funding — it’s about possibility. “We’re currently seeing a lot of tightening of the purse strings, so the funding one needs to advance science and society is harder to come by,” he said. “Funding these fellowships means a lot to us and, most importantly, to the people we’re helping.”



Pictured from left: Marcia O’Malley, chair of the Department of Mechanical Engineering; Barclay Jumet; and Dan Preston, assistant professor of mechanical engineering

Photography by Brandon Martin

WHAT IS HAPTICS?

Haptics is a form of mechanically or electronically generated feedback used to communicate with a user through the sense of touch. One of the most common examples of haptics is when your phone vibrates to indicate you’ve touched something on the screen or received a message.

SHINING A LIGHT ON GUATEMALA’S RAVINE RESIDENTS



Melanie Ford

In the heart of Guatemala City, deep ravines cut through the urban landscape — lush, steep and often overlooked by city planners. To some, they represent ecological opportunity. To others, they are home.

For Rice anthropology Ph.D. candidate **Melanie Ford**, these ravines became the focal point of a critical question: What happens when conservation efforts collide with the needs and rights of the people already living on that land?

Her thesis focuses on urban conservation movements in Guatemala City, where planners and architects are eyeing the city’s ravines as sites of ecological preservation and

potential development. But these ravines are home to tens of thousands of people, many of whom have been displaced by war, poverty and natural disasters.

Among these communities is La Limonada, one of the largest informal settlements in Central America, housing an estimated 60,000 residents in an area approximately one mile long and a half-mile wide. The name comes from the area’s origins as a citrus grove; however, the trees that once inhabited the ravine have been replaced by homes and shelters made from cinder blocks and scrap metal.

“I think the broader picture of my research is to better

understand the ethics around conservation,” Melanie said. “It’s about learning how to think about the environment socially, in a way that doesn’t harm the people already living there.”

Thanks to a Vaughn Fellowship during the 2023–2024 academic year, Melanie was able to travel to Guatemala City and conduct in-depth interviews with architects, urban planners and residents. “I wanted to understand how new conservation policies are being shaped and how people living in the ravines — who are often historically landless — experience and respond to these changes,” she said.

The Vaughn Fellowship provided not just financial support but also the intellectual space to think deeply about the human impact of her work. Fellowship funds covered essential travel and research expenses, including NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software that helped her analyze hours of

interview data and structure key themes for her thesis.

But what Melanie values most is the time the fellowship afforded her to reflect — both on her findings and on how to report them back to the people who trusted her with their stories. “The Vaughn Fellowship gave me the freedom to spend

time thinking carefully about how I write about the details of people’s lives,” she said. “That kind of time is rare, and it’s essential when your work involves people who are so often excluded from decision-making processes that affect their communities.”

Melanie’s connection to Guatemala runs deep. “My family is from Guatemala, so it’s a place I was familiar with,” she said. “But when I started my research, I wasn’t intimately familiar with its politics. During my three years working there, I was able to learn more about the dynamics of urban settlement and displacement.”

Ultimately, Melanie sees her research as part of a broader

movement in anthropology — one that values reciprocity, accountability and social relevance. “To me, one of the most important parts of anthropological research is knowing not only what use the research has for academia in the United States, but also what it can do for the people from where you’ve done your fieldwork.”

In a time when environmental sustainability is top of mind globally, Melanie’s work reminds us that conservation is not just about protecting land, it’s also about protecting the people who call that land home. Graduate fellowships like the Vaughn Fellowship make this kind of thoughtful, community-centered research possible.



El Paraíso, a settlement community under construction alongside a ravine slope



A settlement community that sits under Puente Belice, a popular city bridge

ACCELERATE THE VISION

Rice graduate students like Barclay and Melanie are dedicated to creating a world that empowers all people and communities. To learn how you can support graduate students or establish a graduate fellowship, contact Sara L. Rice, executive director of development, at sdl@rice.edu or **713-348-3189**.



Larissa Charnsangavej '09

LARISSA'S LEGACY

By Emily Gaines

Radiating joy, compassion and a deep commitment to community, Larissa Charnsangavej '09 left a lasting mark on everyone who knew her. At Rice, her impact was most deeply felt at Brown College, where she brought her characteristic energy and care to everything from O-Week to Beer Bike to Brown College theater productions. Now, through a powerful tribute created by her family, her legacy will continue to shape the community she cherished most.

Larissa, a Brown College alumna who studied bioengineering at Rice, was diagnosed with adenoid cystic carcinoma, a rare and aggressive cancer, in November 2022. "After her initial treatment at MD Anderson Cancer Center, we thought the tumor was gone. But six months later, it returned," Larissa's sister, Tonyamas Charnsangavej Moore '98, said. "That's when we started thinking about how Larissa would want to be remembered. It brought me back to how much Rice, and especially Brown College, meant to her. We wanted to make sure her legacy was honored there."

To honor Larissa's enduring impact, Tonyamas, their three other sisters and their mother donated \$100,000 to establish the Larissa Charnsangavej Endowment for Brown College. The fund supports the Larissa Charnsangavej Award for Brown College Spirit, given to a student who embodies

Larissa's dedication to the Brown community. The recipient of the award directs a contribution to a fund or project at Brown, reinforcing a legacy of involvement and care for one's community.

"We wanted to give the award winner an opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way that they might not otherwise be able to do on their own," Tonyamas explained. "And we wanted them to know their contributions to Brown matter. Beyond that, we hope this gift helps make the residential college experience as beneficial for current and future students as it was for Larissa and me."

A member of Baker College, Tonyamas underscored the deep bonds that are formed through the college system. "Your college becomes your family — a place of belonging and community. It's important to support that."

“

We started thinking about how Larissa would want to be remembered. It brought me back to how much Rice, and especially Brown College, meant to her.

”

— Tonyamas Charnsangavej Moore '98

Larissa passed away early on May 9, 2025, surrounded by family in her final days. In the weeks before her passing, she shared how Brown College shaped her. "Being at Brown was a hugely formative part of my Rice experience," Larissa said. "It taught me about inclusive leadership, stepping into brave spaces and using my voice to advocate for better student experiences."

"A person's legacy is the impact they leave on others," Tonyamas said. "Larissa's legacy at Brown is her enthusiasm, compassion and drive to get things done. Establishing this endowment was really important to us as a family because it ensures her spirit will live on and continue to inspire others."

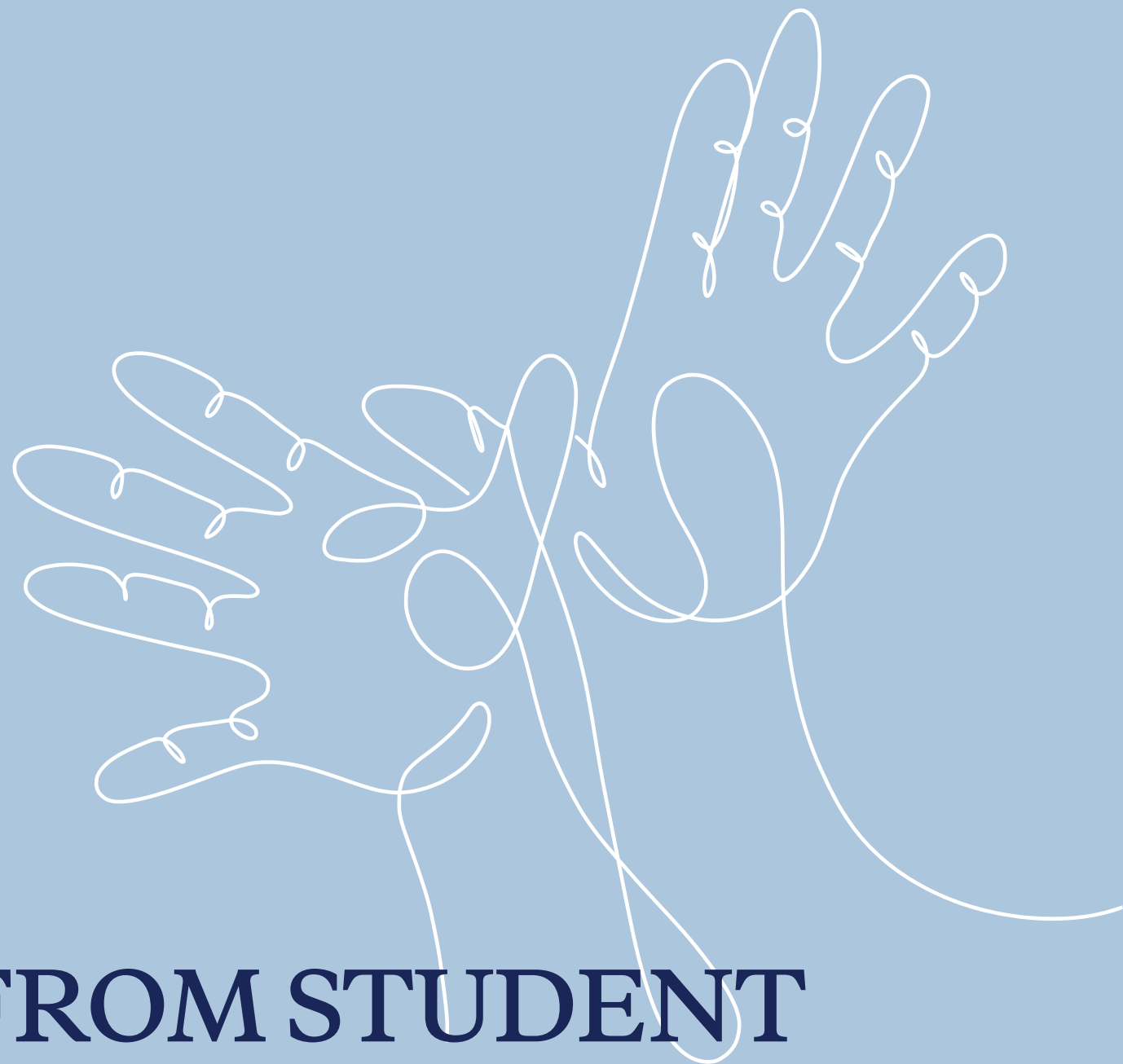


Family photo from Larissa's graduation, 2009



ACCELERATE THE VISION

To learn more about how you can support one of Rice's residential colleges, contact Andrea Sankey, director of development for undergraduate and graduate programs, at andrea.sankey@rice.edu or 713-348-4408.



FROM STUDENT TO STEWARD

45 Years of Giving Forward

By Kara Timberlake

For 45 years and counting, they've never missed a beat. Through milestones and moves, career changes and growing families, two dedicated Rice alumni have made one thing certain: Every single year, without fail, they give back to the university that shaped them. Their remarkable streak isn't just about loyalty — it's a legacy of love, gratitude and belief in the power of a Rice education.

The generosity of Cordell Haymon '65 and Walter Loewenstern '58 goes far beyond numbers. It lives in the scholarships that open doors, the programs that spark innovation and the students whose lives are forever changed. Year after year, they've exemplified what it means to be Owls who give back — not just through philanthropy, but through a lasting commitment to Rice's mission.



Cordell Haymon '65:
A LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO RICE

Photography by Priscilla Bosma

Supporting Rice, for **Cordell Haymon '65**, is his way of ensuring future students benefit from the same transformative opportunities that shaped his own journey. "I've spent much of my life trying to help make the world a better place as a lawyer, businessman and community advocate, and one of the best ways to do that is to support great academic institutions," he said. "Your money helps deserving students get a strong start, and Rice creates the kind of thinkers our country needs." That belief — in education as a force for good — has guided Cordell's decades of generosity and involvement with the university.

Growing up in Baton Rouge, Cordell first knew Rice only as the team that played Louisiana State University in football each fall. That changed when he was selected to attend a National Science Foundation summer program at the University of Houston during high school. "It was the era just after the launch of Sputnik, and the United States

was suddenly very focused on the space race," he said. Among a group of 40 promising math and science students from across the country, Cordell was surprised to hear many speak enthusiastically about Rice. "I thought, 'Really? Is that a good school?'" he recalled. "They said, 'Oh yeah — and it's free.'"

By fall 1961, Cordell was on Rice's campus, enrolling as a science engineering major, but he quickly discovered his strengths lay elsewhere. A switch to economics set him on a new path, and he soon immersed himself in the academic and social life of the university. "My time at Rice was great," he recalled. "I lived with three close friends, all on football scholarships, and we bonded over sports." That passion led him to serve as intramural sports chairman at Will Rice College. Competition was fierce among the university's five residential colleges.

But Cordell's involvement didn't stop there. He wrote for the Rice Thresher, sang in the college chorus and participated in Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) — experiences that broadened his perspective and deepened his connection to the Rice community. "One of the benefits of Rice's size is that you can do a little bit of everything," he said. "That variety really enriched my experience."

The combination of a supportive community, a strong academic foundation and the life-changing benefit of free tuition left a lasting impression. "My experience was very positive," he said. "Rice was challenging, and there was a level of competition, but I thrived on that. It taught me to work hard, and that's served me well throughout my life and career. The fact that it was free made a big difference."

Cordell's relationship with Rice didn't end at graduation — it deepened. Early in his career, he joined the Rice Fund Council, marking the beginning of a decades-long tradition of giving. Over the years, his philanthropic support has spanned campus, benefiting areas like the Owl Club Athletic Fund, the School of Social Sciences and The Rice Investment. "I've always thought it was important to support the university," he said. "I'm very appreciative of Rice and the opportunities I received."

He has been just as generous with his time: Cordell co-chaired his 50th reunion, contributes to the Owlmanac as a class recorder and dedicated 30 years to interviewing prospective students through the Rice Alumni Volunteers for Admissions (RAVA) program. "I met so many bright young people," he said. "Some of those interviews I'll always remember. Staying involved helped me stay connected with the university."



Now back in Houston after years away, Cordell continues to give his time and talents as a member of the advisory board for the School of Social Sciences. "There are some truly remarkable people on that board," he said. "It's been a great way to stay engaged."

Walter Loewenstern '58: APPRECIATION IN ACTION

Walter Loewenstern '58 credits Rice not only with shaping his career, but also with instilling a deep sense of responsibility. "There was no tuition, and I lived at home, so it cost me nothing except for books," he said. "I felt an obligation to pay that back. I've always felt I owed the university a lot."

Born and raised in Houston, Walter applied to just two universities — MIT and Rice. Choosing Rice, he said, changed everything. "MIT would have put a financial strain on my family, and Rice was a great deal, being free," he recalled. "The professors were tough, and my time at Rice prepared me well for my future career. Succeeding in that atmosphere definitely gave me confidence and helped me long term."

Walter described his classmates as collaborative and kind. "There were about 30 of us in the electrical engineering class," he said. "I was also part of the Naval ROTC at Rice, where I met interesting people. Everyone was helpful — if you had a problem, someone would help you, and I enjoyed helping others, too."

As his career took off, so did his desire to give back. In 1969, Walter co-founded ROLM Corporation with fellow Rice alumni Gene Richeson '62, Ken Oshman '62 and Robert Maxfield '63. By the time IBM acquired the company in 1984, it had revenues approaching \$1 billion and was at the forefront of telecommunications innovation. While Walter had only overlapped with Ken at Rice, all four founders were recruited to California by Burt McMurtry '56. "Three of us worked together,"

he said. "We got to know each other socially and professionally."

One thread that connected them all was Rice electrical engineering professor Martin Graham. "He taught me electronics and definitely contributed to my long-term success," Walter said. "When we started ROLM, we hired him as a consultant. He was teaching at Berkeley at the time, and we were so impressed with his capabilities. He was kind of a wizard — if you had an electronics problem, he could solve it."

For 45 consecutive years, Walter has been a steadfast supporter of the university — giving generously, without fail and often without restrictions. He served on the advisory board for the Century Campaign Leadership Committee, was a member of the Rice University Fund Council and is a lifetime member of the Rice Engineering Alumni. "My philosophy is that the people running the university know where the money is most useful," he said. "I'm happy to give and very pleased with what the gifts are going toward. I'm impressed with the administration — and especially with the students. Staying connected through giving has been rewarding. It's meaningful to know I'm



Photography by Gustavo Raskosky

supporting the next generation of Rice students."

His gifts have supported opportunities like the Expanding Horizons Fellowship and the Loewenstern Fellowship, which helps Rice students broaden their

horizons through global experiences — something he sees as crucial to building empathy and understanding across cultures. "I'm pleased that my gifts help students become more worldly and have experiences they wouldn't otherwise have," Walter said. "It's a good export for our country to have our students go to these other countries."

With a granddaughter now attending Rice, Walter's ties to the university continue to grow. "I'll be in Houston more often to visit," he said. "I'm glad my connection with Rice is still going strong."

ACCELERATE THE VISION

Inspired by Cordell and Walter's long-standing commitment to Rice? Support what matters to you most and create your own legacy of philanthropy by contacting Sara L. Rice, executive director of development, at sdl@rice.edu or 713-348-3189.

News & Notes

FROM THE PHILANTHROPIC
COMMUNITY AT RICE



Donor's gift to Rice Architecture builds new opportunities for graduate students

Peter Rowe '71 recently established a \$1.6 million bequest to fund the Peter G. Rowe and Bethany E. Johnson Graduate Fellowship Support Fund in Architecture, which provides essential resources for graduate students, covering tuition, fees, living expenses and more. This fellowship, which benefits international and minority students with demonstrated need, mirrors one that allowed Peter to come from Australia to the United States and join Rice's first urban design graduate program.



Rice announces historic enrollment growth, expanding access and free tuition

The Rice University Board of Trustees has approved an ambitious plan to increase access to a Rice education by growing the university's student body by fall 2028, marking an unprecedented growth trajectory that began earlier this decade. The expansion is part of Rice's commitment to access and is aligned with a strategic vision to solidify its position as a global leader in both teaching and research. With its planned growth in enrollment and its commitment to offering free tuition and loan-free financial aid to qualifying students, Rice will surpass \$1.5 billion in financial aid in the next five years.



Pictured: Kathie Maxfield and Tania Min, past president of the ARA Board

Robert Maxfield posthumously awarded ARA's Gold Medal at Laureates Awards

This spring at the 2025 Laureates Awards, the Association of Rice Alumni bestowed its highest honor — the Gold Medal Award — to the late Robert Maxfield '63. A lifelong advocate for science and education, Robert founded the Maxfield Foundation to channel his support into high-impact projects, including Rice's OpenStax, a revolutionary initiative to provide free, high-quality textbooks. As one of OpenStax's earliest investors and a longtime strategic adviser, Robert helped make education more accessible and affordable for millions of students worldwide.



Erin Chang '00 and Jason Lore rise to the challenge to support Owl Access

During Rice's 24-Hour Challenge in April, more than 7,000 donors came together to raise over \$2.7 million for the programs they love at Rice. Among the community members who participated were Erin Chang '00 and Jason Lore, who pledged a 2:1 matching gift for donations made to Owl Access, a program that invites first-generation, limited-income students and their families to campus during O-Week to highlight the resources and expertise they need to navigate college successfully.



Rice and ExxonMobil collaborate to advance global sustainable energy research

Rice University and ExxonMobil have entered into a master research agreement to collaborate on research initiatives focused on sustainable energy solutions. This landmark collaboration reflects their shared commitment to addressing global challenges in energy, climate and the environment while leveraging their unique expertise and coastal location in the heart of the world's energy capital, Houston.



FOR MORE PHILANTHROPIC STORIES,
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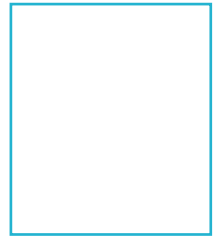


Photo by Brett Beyer

Sarofim Hall, an 80,000-square-foot facility with spaces geared to learning and presenting art, will be the new home for the Department of Art and Rice Cinema. Designed by architecture firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Sarofim Hall stands where Rice's Art Barn and Media Center once stood, next to the Moody Center for the Arts. Construction continues on the building, which will be dedicated Sept. 11, 2025.