

The Education of Rice Undergraduates

A Report by the Committee on the Rice Undergraduate Program

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STUDENT INTERNS:

Madeline Currie

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**THE EDUCATION OF RICE UNDERGRADUATES:
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In March 2006, Dean of Undergraduates Robin Forman asked Professor Emeritus Chandler Davidson to form and chair a Committee on the Rice Undergraduate Program (CRUP). The committee's charge was to determine the University's goals for undergraduates regarding knowledge and skills obtained both in the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities. The committee's overarching purpose has been to identify core principles without advocating specific courses or a specific curriculum. Once the committee presents these goals to the Faculty Senate, a second committee will ascertain the extent to which the goals are currently being realized. Finally, a third committee will suggest changes that, in time, will enable achieving the goals.

The reasons for this review process are several:

- (1) A sentiment among many faculty members and students, expressed in various venues in recent years, that we need a careful review of our educational offerings and teaching methods periodically, and that the time for such a review has arrived
- (2) The announcement of President Leebron's Vision for the Second Century (V2C),¹ which contains ambitious goals for the undergraduate program that require further exploration
- (3) The widespread concern on campus regarding the system of distribution requirements as a means for ensuring that students will obtain a liberal education
- (4) The view often expressed by students that Rice is not providing all its students with satisfactory communication skills, critical thinking skills, and leadership abilities
- (5) The fact that many first-tier universities have been actively engaged in such a review, resulting in numerous educational reforms over the past decade
- (6) Finally, the requirement of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) that Rice clarify its requirements for an undergraduate education for accreditation purposes

CRUP originally consisted of twenty members, including two faculty from each of the schools in the sciences, humanities, social sciences, and engineering, and one each from the music and architecture schools, as well as two undergraduate students, three staff members, an alumna, and four *ex officio* members (See Appendix 1 for their names and affiliations).²

The chair met individually with all members early on, to discuss their vision of the University. In addition, the committee as a whole met several times in the 2006-07 academic year. The chair asked members to research via the Web at least three universities among those ranked in the top fifty by *U.S. News and World Report* magazine and to submit their findings to the committee as a whole. He asked Professor Susan McIntosh to attend a national conference of the Reinvention Center, *Transforming the Culture: Undergraduate Education and the Multiple Functions of the Research University*, in Washington, D.C., November 9-10, 2006, and to summarize by memo conference findings.³ The chair also urged the committee to review the V2C document, the result of President Leebron's earlier Call to Conversation. Over forty books and

¹For a statement of this vision, see <http://www.professor.rice.edu/professor/Vision.asp>

²One staff member, University Librarian Charles Henry, left Rice in spring 2007 for another position, after having rendered much useful service to the committee. Henry's leaving reduced the membership to nineteen.

articles on undergraduate education were put on reserve in Fondren Library for CRUP's use (For the list of these items, see Appendix 2). All committee members were given a copy of *Liberal Anxieties and Liberal Education*, a short and lively book by Oxford University philosopher Alan Ryan, who has taught widely in the United States. The chair bombarded members throughout this period with print and internet material he deemed relevant to its task, and the committee responded with numerous on-line conversations.

Finally, CRUP was asked to pay special attention to those aspects of our university that are generally viewed to be essential to Rice, as we know it: its residential college system, its Honor Code, its small size, and the remarkable access students have to their professors. In addition, the placement of Rice in a major city characterized by rapid growth, great diversity, and numerous international connections was pointed to as offering the potential for metropolitan Houston to become a crucial component of the undergraduate experience.

In the late fall of 2006, Web sites were created to register opinions from the Rice community on undergraduate education. CRUP also held several forums in November and December soliciting the ideas of faculty, students, staff, and alumni. People from all four groups responded via the Web, and others wrote letters and e-mails to members of the committee (Web responses are contained on a CD in Appendix 3). Still others met with CRUP or its chair, including the curriculum committee, the alumni board, the college masters collectively and in some cases individually, the deans' council, the staff of the Office of International Programs, the Rice centennial historian, the on-site review committee of SACS, and President Leebron. The chair also sought the advice of others with extensive knowledge of Rice undergraduates, including some award-winning teachers and former deans, as well as students, alumni, and various staff. (The committee itself contained former and current college masters, five former or current Rice students, former and current departmental chairs, several award-winning teachers, a senior member of the admissions staff, and next year's Student Association president.)

As a result of these activities, CRUP has written a statement of goals—the work product for which it was formed. The following document contains two sections: Part I delineates the goals and Part II presents and explains topics for consideration in achieving them. Appendices contain materials that may be useful in future discussion of the goals.

³³ See Appendix 5 for this memorandum and conference materials, as well as the proceedings of an earlier Reinvention Center conference, *Integrating Research into Undergraduate Education: The Value Added* (Washington, D.C., November 18-19, 2004).

Part I
Goals for the Education of Rice Undergraduates

At the dedication of the Rice Institute in 1912, Edgar Odell Lovett memorably linked the core values embodied in Rice's mission with its goals for undergraduate education: "to contribute to the welfare of humankind in freedom, prosperity, and health, by sending forth constant streams of liberally educated men and women to be leaders of public opinion in the service of the people." In his Vision for Rice's Second Century, President Leebron echoed and updated Lovett's words when he called for "a holistic undergraduate experience that equips our students with the knowledge, the skills, and the values to make a distinctive impact in the world." As we face the transformative processes of globalization, as well as the internationalization of our university, *we strongly believe that the Rice undergraduate experience must, above all, prepare our students to be world citizens.* To accomplish this objective, we must provide an undergraduate experience in which all of our students can grow intellectually, ethically, and socially, according to the following principles:

- Understanding born of genuine engagement with science, social science, and technology on the one hand and the history, values, art, literature, and religious traditions of our own and other cultures on the other
- Understanding of the complex nature of today's global challenges, and of the need, if we are to solve them, to think critically and creatively, to integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines and perspectives, and to communicate effectively
- Understanding and concern for the lives and well-being of others, founded on a deep appreciation of the importance of diversity, whether of perspectives, backgrounds, or cultures

We believe that the cultivation of a global perspective, when added to those goals already central to a Rice education, will form the basis of a distinctive signature for the Rice undergraduate experience that will empower our students to make a genuine impact on the world. The core elements of this experience, enumerated below, should take place both inside and outside the classroom and throughout our students' four years at Rice.

1. *Reasoning, critical thinking, problem solving*

Our undergraduates, regardless of their major, should gain an understanding of the processes of inquiry distinctive to different disciplines, enabling them to select and organize knowledge. Such an understanding requires the ability to identify and think through problems, judge factual claims and theories on the basis of evidence, and apply the knowledge thus gained to practical challenges

2. *Integrating knowledge from multiple perspectives*

Many of the most challenging problems we face cannot be solved by single disciplinary approaches or technologies. Their resolution requires the integration of multiple disciplinary perspectives. The need for this integration is as true for understanding global climate change as it is for confronting such problems as AIDS, looming water shortages, and conflicts between

nations. We must provide opportunities for undergraduates to appreciate this need and to think critically about scientifically and socially complex issues.

3. *Understanding the accelerating impact of science and technology on society*

The increasingly rapid pace of scientific discovery and technological innovation is affecting virtually every aspect of human activity in ways that were not imagined a few decades ago and that have profound future implications. Tomorrow's leaders will be women and men who understand these dynamics in some depth and are capable of helping nations and their people capture the opportunities and confront the problems that are fast approaching. Rice is particularly well situated to offer this kind of education to its undergraduates.

4. *Disciplinary knowledge*

Undergraduate education at Rice should include concentrated study in one discipline and a firm introduction to the subject matter and intellectual approaches of others. Our students in science and engineering should be introduced in broad but serious ways to the humanities and the social sciences, and our students in the humanities and the social sciences should be introduced in broad but serious ways to science and engineering. A Rice education should produce students who value all disciplines, not just their own.

5. *Research and experiential learning*

Rice's tradition is to involve students directly in the creation of new knowledge, art, music, literature, technology, and design and to encourage students to pursue independent inquiry and experiential learning. Fostering this tradition remains critical. Such research and learning can provide an illuminating context in which students master techniques of independent inquiry and learn to apply insights gained from multiple perspectives. Whatever form the inquiry takes, whether independent research by the student inside the University or outside in the community or a foreign country, every Rice undergraduate should have ample opportunities for research experience.

6. *Information access and evaluation*

With the extraordinarily rapid increase of new information, information sources, and kinds of knowledge, we must ensure that our undergraduates know both how to obtain and critically assess information. We must direct our students to move beyond today's favorite search engines for their information needs and require them to operate competently in the evidence-based culture of the academic disciplines.

7. *Global culture, politics, and history*

World events today unfold against a backdrop of cultural, religious, and ethnic differences. A world citizen must understand the importance of such differences. We should encourage our students to read deeply in the art, literature, politics, religions, and history of other cultures, to experience other cultures through travel or study outside the U.S., and to realize the value of learning other languages. In addition, they should have a broad knowledge of U.S. culture, politics, and history within the context of world history.

8. *Diversity and differences at home*

We live and work with individuals who differ in terms of ethnicity, religious practice, gender, sexual orientation, and economic background. In their classrooms and residential colleges, undergraduates should be encouraged to recognize the ways in which differences can shape society for better or worse; to think deeply about the role of tolerance and respect in fostering a pluralistic society; and to consider the importance of confronting prejudice.

9. *Communication capabilities, interpersonal skills*

To be global citizens with the ability to effect significant change and to succeed in the workplace, the community, and the world, our students must be able to listen carefully and with discernment; to speak, write, and present clearly, cogently, and persuasively in different contexts to a variety of audiences, and across cultures; and to work collaboratively with others. This goal necessitates providing an undergraduate curriculum that includes many opportunities for the acquisition of these communication capabilities.

10. *Leadership*

Leaders transform ideas into action through commitment, self-confidence, and courage. Leading effectively requires a dedication to ethical values in all spheres of human endeavor. For our students to achieve their true potential in their personal and professional lives, we must provide and support opportunities to nurture these traits.

11. *Community and Civic Life*

To nurture the values of civic engagement, we should provide a wide range of opportunities for students to participate in and shape their residential college community, the larger University community, and communities outside the University. Honesty, self-discipline, and personal responsibility, encouraged by Rice's Honor Code, should be emphasized as fundamental to both civic and academic life.

Given the myriad challenges the 21st century presents, we believe all these elements must inform the Rice undergraduate experience, and that together they will foster the intellectual, social, civic, and emotional development necessary for our students to become world citizens.

Part II Achieving the Goals

It is beyond the scope of this committee to consider how successfully our current undergraduate program meets the goals outlined above. However, the committee's extensive research and discussions with interested members of the Rice community have yielded important information that is key to implementing successfully the educational goals we have identified. The committee outlines below the areas, issues, and changes that subsequent committees must address successfully in order for Rice to realize the undergraduate program that the University community envisions. These growth areas and changes will need to occur in stages. Many of them require new and, in some cases, substantial resources:

Needed University-Wide Curricular Enhancements

The University will need to consider developing the following:

1. A program to increase students' oral and written communication capabilities, perhaps embodying the principles of the current Cain Project
2. A commitment to encourage the development of leadership skills, combined with an inquiry into methods by which such skills can be taught within the framework of regular courses
3. A commitment to teach information-gathering skills—one that may necessitate a sustained inquiry by faculty and staff into how such skills are changing as both libraries and computer information searches are being transformed by the IT revolution
4. A program to encourage student-initiated research, perhaps for university honors, perhaps with special incentives—financial and otherwise—for off-campus or international research
5. A commitment to making more accessible to all students the appreciation of music, art, and architecture, essential components of humanistic learning
6. A commitment to helping students understand the impact of human interaction on the environment, both the natural and the built
7. An increased number of new multidisciplinary courses (defined as courses focusing on a single subject taught by professors in different disciplines) or supervised outside-the-classroom experiences (for example, courses encouraged under the aegis of the Center for Civic Engagement), with the understanding that these are labor-intensive innovations needing to be fully supported and funded
8. Special incentives to encourage all departments to offer new courses that are both intellectually challenging and accessible to non-majors

Recommendations for Greater Cross-Cultural Awareness and Experiences

The University will need to do the following:

9. Explore ways to increase the involvement of students in local, national, and international projects that will benefit people outside the University and engage Rice students in cross-cultural issues and environments
10. Explore ways in which the growing proportion of our international students—as well as other Rice students who have studied abroad—can contribute to all students’ knowledge of other nations and cultures
11. Explore diversity in its manifold forms and how it can be fruitfully addressed in courses and extracurricular activities

Issues Requiring Serious Examination/Discussion

The University will need to examine the following:

12. The effectiveness of the current system of distribution requirements in ensuring a liberal education
13. The appropriateness of allowing credit for high school courses (i.e., AP credit) in satisfying distribution requirements
14. The possibility of enriching the intellectual atmosphere of the residential colleges, focusing on those aspects of college life (such as student-initiated and directed theatrical productions, as well as student-initiated college courses) that currently contribute to this goal, and giving consideration to additional financial costs such enrichment may entail
15. The adequacy of the current system of student advising—both within departments for majors and within the college system for students generally—with special consideration given to how these two types of advising can be successfully coordinated, and how student advising might be enhanced to address more effectively the goals of undergraduate education described in Part I above
16. The effectiveness of the Honor Code, particularly regarding unproctored exams and plagiarism via the Web
17. The adoption of methods by which faculty can evaluate the teaching of colleagues—methods now widely employed in universities—and, as part of this enterprise, the development of ways in which senior faculty can provide moral and intellectual support for younger teachers with little classroom experience who face formidable research pressures
18. The development of a center, a common feature at many universities, devoted to helping faculty at all levels develop new methods of teaching, including the utilization of new teaching technologies resulting from the IT revolution

APPENDIX 1

MEMBERS, COMMITTEE ON THE RICE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

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APPENDIX 2

**ITEMS ON LIBRARY RESERVE AVAILABLE TO CRUP MEMBERS
DURING THEIR DELIBERATIONS, 2006 - 07**

APPENDIX 3

CD CONTAINING WEB RESPONSES TO CRUP QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX 4
MINUTES OF CRUP MEETINGS, FORUMS

APPENDIX 5

MATERIALS RELATING TO THE REINVENTION CENTER

APPENDIX 6

MATERIALS THAT FUTURE COMMITTEES MAY FIND USEFUL

APPENDIX 7

A TRADITION OF INTERNATIONALISM AT RICE

From its beginning, Rice has aspired to a reputation as a university of international status. Its first president, Edgar Odell Lovett, brought with him a cosmopolitan outlook, having obtained one of his two Ph.D. degrees (in mathematics) from the University of Leipzig. Before assuming the presidency, he traveled the globe for a year at the trustees' encouragement to examine the best universities and to talk with their leaders. At Rice's inauguration in 1912, numerous international scholars of renown occupied the rostrum outside what is now called Lovett Hall. One of the first faculty members to publish a book after the university's founding was the philosopher Radoslav Tsanoff, a Bulgarian native. Another early faculty member was a young British biologist, Julian Huxley, whose eminent scientific career after leaving Rice a few years later was shaped by his internationalist bent. He was involved in the creation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) after World War II and became its first director general.

One measure of Rice's current connection to the world at large is the number of its 503 tenured or tenure-track faculty in 2006-07 who hold one or more degrees from a university outside the United States: 139, or 27 percent. The 42 nations represented include Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Hungary, India, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, New Zealand, Pakistan, Poland, Puerto Rico, Romania, Russia, Scotland, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Vietnam. In addition, in the previous academic year (2005-06) there were 393 foreign visitors and scholars conducting research or lecturing at Rice.

Yet another measure is the number of international graduate and undergraduate students enrolled. As of fall 2006 there were 662 graduate and 139 undergraduate international students (defined as enrolled non-immigrants), composing 15.5 percent of the student population and representing 88 nations. The highest number were from China (191 students), followed by India (119), South Korea (46), Canada (41), Mexico (29) and Turkey (27).

It is also noteworthy that 40 percent of our students participate in a Rice-sponsored international experience—33 percent study abroad and 7 percent engage in an international work experience.

Still another measure is the important role the Baker Institute for Public Policy has come to play on campus since its founding in the 1990s. The foreign-policy interests of former Secretary of State James Baker and of the executive director, former ambassador to both Israel and Syria, Edward Djerejian, have ensured that a steady stream of internationally known heads of state, diplomats, and scholars of international policy have been brought to campus, representing forty-eight nations.

A major step forward in Rice's engagement in global education was achieved with the creation in 1999 of Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany. Under the leadership of then-president Malcolm Gillis, Rice, in cooperation with the city-state of Bremen and the University of Bremen, founded Jacobs University as a truly international institution modeled in many respects after our university. There are three schools: humanities, social sciences, and science and engineering. It currently has 1,000 students (618 undergraduates, 382 graduate students) living in three residential colleges. They represent 86 nations on a

campus where English is the official language. The faculty-student ratio is 1-10, and students are accepted on a need-blind basis.

President David Leebron clearly wants to build on this tradition. His “Vision for the Second Century” is imbued with a concern for Rice’s achieving a truly international status. In the section on “International Orientation,” he writes:

We must become an international university, with a more significant orientation toward Asia and Latin America than now characterizes our commitments. The great universities of the 21st century will inevitably be global universities, and although we are comparatively small, that ought not be seen as an obstacle to our global reach. We should begin by increasing the number of international students in our undergraduate student body; develop research, student exchange, and other relationships with distinguished universities and policy institutes around the world; and foster the international learning (both here at Rice and around the world) of our faculty, students, and staff.

Indeed, Rice is already notable for the world citizens it has produced during its first ninety-four years—teachers and students who have either made an impact worldwide or who today show promise of doing so. Its two “home-grown” Nobel laureates, chemists Robert Curl and the late Richard Smalley, exemplify this role, as do numerous faculty members recognized by fellow scholars in other nations because of their research. Moreover, current and recent Rice undergraduates give evidence, through their activities and accomplishments, of the fact that global citizenship is not limited to those with a distinguished career behind them.

For example, the Rice chapter of Engineers Without Borders (EWB), founded in 2003 by then-undergraduate engineering students Abigail Watrous, Michael Higuera, and Tamar Losleben, all class of 2004, has received much favorable press for the students’ work on behalf of needy communities in several nations, including Mali, Mexico, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. By the end of the 2005-06 school year, the chapter—one of nearly 80 university chapters nationwide—had a membership of more than 70 students. As described in *The Sallyport*,

In the span of three years, EWB at Rice has triumphed. In addition to receiving the 2004 Sustainable Legacy Award from EWB-USA for its work in Mexico, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, the group served as the host for the 2006 EWB-USA International Conference [in April 2006]. More than 350 students and professionals traveled to Houston and Rice for a three-day conference featuring prominent engineering and business professionals, including the former director of the United States Peace Corps and executive director of EWB-USA. . . . “I am very proud of the EWB program at Rice,” affirms Sallie Keller-McNulty, dean of . . . engineering. “We are one of the most active chapters in the country and frequently pointed out as a chapter others should emulate.”⁴

Many Rice students over the years have graduated and gone on to establish a reputation for their accomplishments internationally. A notable example from an earlier

⁴ Tracey Rhoades, “Beyond Borders,” *Sallyport* (Summer, 2006), pp. 21-2.

era is Dr. Nata Duvvury, a native of India who grew up in Houston, receiving a B.A. degree from Rice in 1973. She obtained an M.A. degree in economics from the University of Alberta in Canada and a Ph.D. degree from Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. While in her native country she worked extensively on women's and agricultural issues in India for nearly 18 years. She directed a documentary on a widespread movement to restrict government sale of alcohol in India. This movie, "When Women Unite: The Story of an Uprising," won the 1997 Grand Prize at the Earth Vision Film Festival in Tokyo.

Returning to the United States soon thereafter, Duvvury went to work for the International Center for Research on Women in Washington, D.C., where she has spearheaded a path-breaking five-year study of domestic violence in India, in partnership with 20 academic institutions and NGOs. The research program included a 10,000-household survey and established the prevalence of domestic violence in the country, identified key risk and protective factors, and highlighted the health and economic consequences of violence.

Dr. Duvvury is currently leading work on the links between women's property and inheritance rights, HIV/AIDS, and violence against women, and she directs a small grants program in Sub-Saharan Africa that explores these links and aims to strengthen the property and inheritance rights of women. She also directs two projects in South Asia exploring the link between property rights, domestic violence and food security. She recently completed an in-depth examination of the role of civil society representation in the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Duvvury is a widely published scholar, with articles appearing in many venues. She received the Human Rights Community Award from the United Nations Association of the National Capitol Area in 1999.

A more recent example of students who have accepted the challenge of becoming a world citizen is Liora Danan '03, who graduated from Rice thirty years after Duvvury. Danan has already established a record of international enterprise and ingenuity that suggests what is possible for Rice undergraduates today. Born in Israel, Danan grew up in San Antonio. While at Rice, she majored in political science and policy studies (focusing on international relations), graduating *summa cum laude*. Among her many extra-curricular activities at Rice, she was senior news editor of the *Thresher* from 1999 to 2003. She spent a semester abroad in Israel in 2001, studying at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and interning on the *Jerusalem Post*. Also, early in her Rice career, Danan founded a tutoring group for disadvantaged students in Houston, which expanded to 120 members by the time she left the University.

In the week before the first anniversary of 9/11, at a time when there was sharp tension and some violence between Jewish and Arab students on some American college campuses, Danan wrote an op-ed in the *Thresher* urging the formation of a dialogue group between Jewish and Arab students at Rice. She then took the lead in forming such a group, with a faculty sponsor, which met throughout the rest of the time she was on campus.

After graduation, she applied for a very competitive post and was selected to fill it: resident researcher for the European Rim Policy and Investment Council in Cyprus, and in that capacity she served as liaison with Turkish Cypriot representatives and assisted with a European Union-funded project to prepare Cyprus for membership in the EU. She also helped monitor the Turkish Cypriot elections in 2003 and organized roundtables on Cypriot

reconciliation issues, as well as researching and writing articles for the policy journal *Perihelion* and developing the organization's Web site.

After her work in Cyprus was finished, Danan returned briefly to Israel and then went to Cairo, where she enrolled in the Kalimat Language Institute and completed an advanced-level course in Egyptian Arabic. From there she traveled to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where she worked for AKIpress News Agency, the nation's first independent news agency, editing the online site that now serves as the leading source of accurate electronic information for all Kyrgyz mass media. In that capacity, she provided journalism and writing training for the staff. Simultaneously, she developed curriculum, prepared lesson plans and taught university courses on reporting, writing and editing in the journalism department at American University-Central Asia in Bishkek, the nation's top regional university.

Leaving Kyrgyzstan at the end of 2004, Danan returned to the United States and became a research assistant in the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington, D.C. There she became the leader of a project that considers how the international community can better engage with religious groups in conflict-prone settings. Specifically, she directed field research in Nigeria to study U.S. government involvement in these issues. She also conducted hundreds of interviews in Washington and abroad with senior government officials, NGO leaders, religious leaders, and academic experts.

Her work for CSIS, during the almost two years she has been employed there, has required her to conduct research and to write and speak on stabilization and reconstruction issues, including governance and justice in post-war Afghanistan. She has also written proposals and managed project finances, hired and managed support staff and interns, planned and organized conferences and events, and initiated her project's blog, which reaches 12,000 members of the Post-Conflict Reconstruction (Afghanistan) community worldwide (pcrproject.com). She also obtained a grant through the Henry R. Luce Initiative for Religion and International Affairs. For her work, Danan was recently given the honor of CSIS Leading Young Professional.

What Liora Danan's future holds, less than four years out of Rice, is unclear. She has passed the Foreign Service exam and is considering a diplomatic career. However, she has also applied to a number of top graduate schools in public policy, and may go into academe. Whatever her decision, this Rice alumna, like her predecessor, Nata Duvvury, is a model of an active and accomplished world citizen, whose willingness to travel, to learn, and to lead on behalf of world betterment gives evidence of the kind of person Rice can help produce in the 21st Century.