Dear Rice Community:

I write to share news about the new structure planned for the 101st Commencement this May, which we hope will make for a dynamic and exciting set of commencement events.

Just over a year ago, I asked Vice Provost for Academic Affairs (and then also Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies) Paula Sanders and Dean of Undergraduates John Hutchinson to jointly chair a committee to propose new schedules and ceremonies to make Rice's Commencement ceremonies of our second century more personal, meaningful and enjoyable given the changes in our institution over several decades. The committee included representation from graduate students, undergraduate students, faculty, college masters, commencement marshals, and alumni.

This committee has now presented several significant recommendations which we will implement and which I am pleased to share with you now.

The campus-wide plenary Commencement ceremony will remain on Saturday morning, and will include our invited Commencement speaker along with a full academic procession, the official conferral of all degrees, and the traditional exit of the graduates through the Sallyport. Degrees at each level will be conferred upon presentation by the respective deans and college masters, but the names of individual recipients will not be called at this collective ceremony nor will they march across the stage. We expect that this ceremony will begin at approximately 9:00 AM and conclude by 10:30.

To complement the existing doctoral hooding ceremony, which will remain on Friday afternoon, we are adding a new masters degree ceremony on Friday morning and a bachelors degree ceremony on Friday evening. I will be present at all of these ceremonies. At each of these three events, every student will be presented individually by name and will proceed across the platform as his or her name is read.

The undergraduate ceremony on Friday evening will be staged in the academic quad (weather permitting), and will include speeches by a member of the graduating class and by a faculty member. Undergraduate student award winners will be recognized at this event, which will replace Convocation.

The doctoral hooding ceremony will remain in Stude Hall and be conducted in the traditional manner. We have not yet reached a final decision on the venue for the new masters ceremony, but will be able to provide that information soon.

The committee and I believe that, by separating these events and holding each to a reasonable length, each event will be more exciting and energetic, while also preserving the strong sense of unity of our community in the Saturday morning Commencement. The plan also allows us to move ceremonies indoors in case of inclement weather in a way that is much more conducive to the attendance of families and friends.

Deans Hutchinson and Matsuda will, in later communications, provide more specific details about the schedule and program for these events.

In the meantime, we wish you a wonderful spring semester, especially for those who are anticipating their graduation in May.

With warm regards,

David