Dear Colleagues,

In keeping with Rice University’s mission of “learning and discovery that produces leaders across the spectrum of human endeavor,” it gives me great pleasure to announce a remarkable $50 million gift from John and Ann Doerr to create the Doerr Institute for New Leaders at Rice. By donating the largest single gift in the university’s history and dedicating it to leadership education, the Doerrs have made a truly exemplary commitment to elevate the leadership capabilities of every Rice student, while putting Rice on the forefront of developing new leaders who have the skills, training and confidence to make a true difference in the world.

The Doerr Institute, a signature realization of the Initiative for Students, will embrace the idea that elite university education must combine excellent classroom instruction with experience-based student development programs to produce leaders in any arena. It will offer each student, regardless of their major or discipline, a combination of proven techniques, innovative approaches and resources to formulate their own custom-made leadership development plans. Working with student development programs across campus and, eventually, across the country, the Doerr Institute will collect data with the intent of becoming the most trusted source for identifying effective practices in developing students into leaders.

After an extensive international search, we have chosen an executive director of the new institute who will set the vision for the next several years. We are thrilled to welcome retired Brigadier General Tom Kolditz, who will begin July 1. Tom, who holds a Ph.D. in social psychology, brings with him more than 25 years of experience in leadership roles, including professor in the practice of leadership and management and director of the Leadership Development Program at the Yale School of Management; professor and head of the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership at West Point; and a leadership and human resources policy analyst in the Pentagon.

Tom’s primary objective during his first year will be to listen, learn, experiment and explore a range of ideas in consultation with faculty, staff and students. Emphasizing a highly collaborative systems approach, he will seek to align and enhance current educational offerings, while expanding the unique opportunities presented by the Doerr Institute to the greatest number of students. Supported by a faculty advisory group, Tom will engage with all branches of the university -- from admissions to residential colleges -- to build an innovative and successful program.

As indicated above, the opportunities inherent in this new undertaking are central to the Initiative for Students, Rice’s three-year volunteer engagement and fundraising endeavor launched last fall, as well as to the Rice Education of the Future initiative, a student-led effort that underscores students’ high demand for more leadership, entrepreneurship and experiential learning opportunities. The Doerr Institute not only provides substantial momentum toward these efforts, but also serves as a powerful invitation for our campus and broader community of alumni and friends to support our students in their ambition to lead lives of impact.

This gift from Ann and John Doerr is truly groundbreaking. I hope you will join me in thanking them, both for this substantial investment and for their philanthropic leadership in the creation of the Rice Center for Engineering Leadership and their many gifts to Rice. It seems entirely fitting that their historic gift embraces our distinctive commitment to education and that it comes from two alumni who epitomize both leadership and dedication to Rice.

With warm regards,

President David Leebron