November 25, 2013

Dear Rice Community,

In each academic year, I like to send a note to Rice faculty, staff and students to talk about the values we share as a community. My goal is to introduce new members of our community to the best in our Rice culture, and to reinforce the importance of those values for those of us who are already familiar with them. Those values guide our decisions and behaviors and help define our sense of community. They come through in the way we treat each other and the welcome we extend to our visitors.

In recent years, I have used a helpful mnemonic in recalling the values that are essential to our success as a healthy community. The mnemonic device is, simply, our name, RICE: R for responsibility, I for integrity, C for community and E for excellence.

Responsibility is something fundamental to a mission-driven academic community. We need to take responsibility for making Rice better, and also for our own happiness and success. And we need to take responsibility for our actions and words, and understand how they may impact our friends and colleagues. We especially need to take responsibility for our mistakes. That way we can learn from them and even translate failure into success.

Integrity is one of the strongest threads in Rice’s cultural fabric. In the classroom, office, lab, field of play, in our residential colleges and in our community engagement, we are guided by our commitment to honesty and doing what’s right. This value is embodied in the notion of Rice’s honor and our Honor Code. We accept nothing less than complete academic and research integrity.

Community reflects our collective aspirations and our obligations to each other. Our success as a community depends first and foremost on our respect for each other, and how we reflect that respect in our everyday interactions. That is especially important as we learn from and build friendships with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The Rice community cares about each member. We hope that individual acts add up to the culture of caring that we espouse. Our shorthand way of expressing this to others in need of some assistance: HCIH-- How can I help? As part of our values, we extend hospitality and help to every member of our community.

Finally, excellence. For Rice, that means that as individuals and as a university we are never satisfied with a good result, because we can always find ways to do even better. When I arrived at Rice for the first time more than nine years ago, I was struck by the beauty of the campus and the quality of the education, research and community service it produced. But I was surrounded by people – trustees, alumni, faculty members, students, staff – who believed that Rice could be better. I am proud to be part of a community that constantly strives to become better.

Let us continue to do what we can as individuals and as a community to strengthen Rice's commitment to these values in the following ways:

* Show respect for everyone on campus, regardless of position or office. Think about how our words might be hurtful to someone else. Avoid careless actions that might endanger or make more work for others.
* Take care not to discriminate against any individual because of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national or ethnic origin, ancestry, age, disability or veteran status.

* As part of Rice’s commitment to diversity, help recruit and retain people from diverse backgrounds.

* Make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, and be ready to assist them.

* Avoid personal biases, preferences and preconceived stereotypes. Be inclusive and reach out to others who make up our diverse population.

* Always respect the privacy and dignity of others.

* Remain alert to, and help eliminate, bad behaviors in the classroom, residential colleges, graduate student residences and every other campus venue so that we all can participate and perform to our fullest potential.

Related to this last point, the serious problem of sexual assault on college campuses deserves special mention. It is the responsibility of all of us to prevent all forms of sexual harassment and assault. Familiarize yourself with our sexual assault policy and resources, so that we respond properly to victims of sexual assault and provide them with the assistance and resources that they need. You can learn more about our policy and resources at http://wellbeing.rice.edu/sexualassault/.

One more guiding principle that is central to most institutions of higher education is academic freedom. We invite robust debate on the issues of the day, and we welcome people with many points of view. That means that we sometimes may disagree strongly with one another. But our goal should be to gain a better understanding of those issues and the differences that can divide us, and to express those differences with civility and respect for other points of view.

As we set forth on Rice’s second century, let us commit ourselves every day to the Rice spirit of responsibility, integrity, community and excellence that has created a wonderful environment of discovery and knowledge. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be part of this extraordinary university and to serve with you in pursuit of our highest aspirations.

Sincerely,

David W. Leebron
President

Rice's affirmative action policy and the Board of Trustees' resolutions supporting cultural inclusiveness are available at http://www.professor.rice.edu/professor/policies.asp. If you feel you have been treated in a manner contrary to these policies, contact Russell Barnes, director of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity programs, at rcb@rice.edu.