

Message from President David Leebron to the Rice Community

May 17, 2019

With commencement behind us and the academic year having come to a close, the campus is quieter as some of our students and faculty disperse, many to destinations in other countries. Our faculty and students travel internationally at this time for a variety of reasons: returning home, visiting extended families in their countries of origin, working closely with colleagues at institutions thousands of miles away and conducting research abroad. The campus remains active over the summer with graduate students and researchers, many of whom have come from around the globe. In the meantime, we also begin preparing for a new class of undergraduates, 11% of whom are foreign nationals and many others are immigrants with statuses that include DACA students, naturalized citizens and permanent residents.

This time of year makes very visible how international our community is, and how our relationships, individual and university, span the globe. Nearly one fourth of our student body is international. Nearly one-third of our faculty received their first higher education degree outside the United States. Our community of visiting scholars is even more international. Our research excellence depends on finding the best talent from all over the world, putting international scholars in a position to reach their full potential at Rice, and on building meaningful international collaborations. Participation from a broad diversity of intellectual and societal backgrounds increases our intellectual vigor and strengthens the fabric of our community.

These international activities and participants in our community are integral to our success. Yet we know these members of the Rice community are facing barriers and unfortunately may also on occasion experience unfair and upsetting hostility and suspicion. That is why I want to take a moment, even as the summer begins, to reiterate our values and commitments regarding both the international aspects of our community and the global nature of our relationships and aspirations.

Our international students, faculty, staff and visiting scholars are welcome and valued on our campus from wherever they come. The contentious issues and indeed hostility that periodically emerges among governments does not alter that basic commitment. While we must of course abide by all laws, we will continue to support and welcome the international members of our community, doing all we can to help assure their success and their ability to participate fully in our community.

Particularly with recent events, there has been an escalation of statements regarding China, and some in and out of the government have made the grave error of translating that into broad suspicion and antagonisms toward members of the research university community who come from China. Higher education institutions, and most especially leading research universities, have served as global bridges even through times of increased governmental tensions. There are legitimate concerns about governmental actions and policies in areas such as intellectual property. But I want to state unequivocally that we will continue to welcome to our campus talented individuals from all countries. We will also continue to engage with our institutional counterparts around the globe to build cultural understanding and address the global challenges we face in critical areas such as health, energy and the environment.

Blanket generalizations regarding any group are dangerous, and risk leading to racial profiling and other forms of discrimination. Indeed, such discrimination has been felt more broadly by those of Asian descent, whether immigrants or not. On our campus, discrimination on the basis of

citizenship, national origin or race is a clear violation of our policies. When members of our community with international backgrounds face obstacles to their freedom of movement or work, we will seek to support them. And while recognizing there are important issues that must be addressed in international relations, we will advocate forcefully for the openness of our country and institutions of higher education for both learning and research.

I ask our entire community to do all we can to make sure that the international participants in our endeavor, whether on our campus or elsewhere, are made to feel welcome and appreciated as the vital and valued members of our community that they are.

David W. Leebron