

June 19, 2018

A Letter from Priscilla Huston, Membership Committee Co-Chair

I want to introduce an idea I think is very important not only to individuals and to ARRUF but also to the **University**. Not only the faculty but their friends and family and other employees, etc. "contribute time and energy to Rice over many years" and we all benefit from the opportunities that result.

Given the situation, this may seem in some ways like a new idea but in fact, it is a very old idea since the early days I worked with the university to try to introduce what I then called "Common Data Elements" that needed to be consistent across all parts of the University and be maintained accurately and following whatever relevant rules and laws existed over time. It appears that what we once worked toward has been reduced, distributed, eliminated and in some cases become fairly "helter skelter." It has led to problems including inaccuracy, large commitments of time across many areas of campus, and many examples of departments, organizations, individuals, and ideas being given up or handled piecemeal because the information was not available in a reasonable and reliable way. It has made it difficult of members of the community to stay connect with each other and the University.

Some decisions that lead to this situation are tied to legal (secure information, etc) and other rules and involve administrative procedures to handle appropriately that are difficult, time consuming and expensive. These situations apply to all people connected with the university in some way from faculty, staff, students, to donors, friends, family etc. In the past it appeared that Human Resources had become the place responsible of maintaining this type of information, but this does not appear to have evolved. A lot was lost when we stopped maintaining a printed directory and reduced the information available on the online directory to only information the university has a right to distribute without getting permission.

In the past, we had a process of asking each employee (I am not sure about the student info) what he/she wanted to share about his/her personal information such as home address, spouses, non-Rice phone numbers, etc. It took a lot of work but also made it possible for the Rice Community members that wanted to share this to do so. It made it possible to reach out to spouses of employees who agreed to be listed. Now it seems that each group has to handle this individually (sometimes at the departmental levels, at other times in various higher level ways from the Provost's Office to Budget offices to Human Resources, etc. The Rice Women's Club (formerly the Faculty Women's Club) has had a very hard time since these changes reaching out to potential members even with a great deal of support from Human Resources. I even wonder in the case of ARRUF whether the Provost's office is adequately staffed to maintain this versus an organization at Rice that does this not only for the faculty but all employees or more. Personally, I also feel sad because I believe in Rice University as a reasonably small and close community that is capable of working together in ways that might not be possible in a much larger institution. As a spouse as well as a staff retiree, I am conscious that many Rice spouses who contributed majorly in the past now feel ignored and not connected. This reduces opportunities for them to contribute time, talent and conceivably money in ways they might have otherwise.

As our Membership Committee notes describe, not only does this become critical for retirees, it affects spouses, widows, and widowers in ways that isolates them from the community and Rice. Like ARRUF, all these individuals become hard to find and nearly impossible to find each other. As time passes, they are less comfortable knowing how to support and be supported by the university. I used to believe that Rice University handled this quite well but our experience recently with ARRUF really emphasizes that we have lost our way to some extent even with the Faculty members. I believe this is critical to Rice University and hope we can inspire more general work which will support ongoing efforts during and after employment that benefit not only the employees but also the University.

I am not sure how much of this belongs in the report of the Membership Committee, but I wanted to try to get some thoughts out because I believe it is important to the future of Rice University thoughtfully to manage this information.

Priscilla Huston