

Houston Philosophical Society

638th Meeting

Cohen House

September 21, 2010

Under the leadership of President Herb Ward, the Society gathered for a reception and dinner meeting. Following dinner, visitors and guests were introduced.

President Ward introduced the speaker, David Leebron, President of Rice University.

INTRODUCTION OF DAVID W.

LEEBRON, PRESIDENT, RICE

UNIVERSITY

At this 638th meeting of the Houston Philosophical Society it is my honor and pleasure to introduce our speaker this evening — David W. Leebron, who was appointed the 7th President of Rice University on July 1, 2004. David Leebron had a Rice connection well before he arrived in Houston to take up his new challenge as president of Rice. He is fond of relating that George Rupp, the 5th President of Rice University, who was then President of Columbia University, appointed him Dean of the Columbia Law School. Following his distinguished leadership of Columbia's School of Law Rupp then was instrumental, with others, in nominating David for the presidency of Rice University. Shortly after arriving in Houston, he launched a communitywide discussion known as the Rice University Call to Conversation, which led to the formation of a 10-point strategic plan --the Vision for the Second Century. Elements of the plan now being implemented include enhancing the University's research mission, internationalization with an increased focus on Asia and Latin America, a 30percent growth in the undergraduate student body, a more dynamic campus, and a long overdue expanded engagement with the city of Houston.

A native of Philadelphia and a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, Leebron has been a practicing lawyer, legal scholar, professor, Law School Dean and is now president of Rice University, which was recently ranked 47th worldwide among institutions of higher education and research.

President Leebron is married to the charming and talented Y. Ping Sun. They have two children, Daniel and Merissa.

My near 45-year tenure at Rice University has spanned the leadership of five of the institutions seven presidents and I can safely say that in my time at Rice we have never had a leader with a clearer vision and greater ambitions for our future.

President Leebron will speak to us this evening about "The Higher Education Landscape Today".

David W. Leebron

President, Rice University

Dr. Leebron's talk centered on the landscape of higher education with emphasis on the role of Rice in the future and now. Sixty percent of the 4400 universities and colleges are private and 40 percent are public. Fewer than five percent qualify as research universities. Rice is one of the elite two percent and is ranked 17 in the United States and 17 in the world by US News & World Report.

For-profit education has become a force in higher education with enrollment at almost half of the students in colleges and universities with as many as three times more students than students in the AAU.

A perfect storm is in our midst in higher education with three main contributors: finances, technology, and crisis of confidence. A sense of unsustainable crisis has produced a professional and public outcry for reform.

The financial contribution centers on the inflation of college tuition for fifty years which outpaces inflation yearly. The issue of unaffordable tuition is real, and many schools try to use more of endowment funds to fund the increasing cost with variable success. Rice has a unique situation and only 20 percent of revenue comes from tuition. The expansion of the Rice student enrollment from 2900 to 3800 has helped Rice soften the blow of increasing costs. Hard choices have to be made with lower expectations of return on investments.

Technology is the second element of concern, and distance learning or online education is growing at an incredible rate. At least one study reports 4.6 million online students with over 80 percent undergraduates. Resistance by traditional institutions is real and is regarded as a threat to traditional education and relations to students.

Accountability and quality are perhaps the most serious contributors to the crisis. The general public, particularly parents, have a loss of confidence in higher education fueled by serious inflation in tuition year-after-year to the point of not being affordable by students and parents. Graduation are reduced at some schools to as low as 30 percent.

The public asks what are students learning, how to know what they are learning, and how to measure learning. Universities are squeezed by financial and higher standards demands for students. University budgets have increased exponentially over 50 years. Rice's budget is 7.5 times larger now than 50 years ago.

Universities are moving toward faculty accountability as well the students. These efforts come at a considerable cost. Students are studying fewer hours each week. The number of students in college has increased enormously, and many now have special needs with disabilities, psychological problems, and drug dependency.

There is international competition for faculty and students.

Rice is addressing these concerns with a strategic plan, The Vision for the 2nd Century. There are 10 points including building the research and grant levels, developing a productive relationship with the City of Houston, expanding the student body, and building a dynamic campus and facilities as well as collaborative relationships with other Houston institutions.

Attention for the next five years will be medicine across the disciplines, and integrated energy initiative, and deeper substance to our international programs.