Thought Leadership and Innovation

Thought leadership and innovation continue to thrive at the Jones School—on campus and globally through our alumni network. Evident in faculty research, the new Ph.D. program, and alumni achievements, thought leadership is the driving force of our mission, our actions and our connection to the school.

In the current economic turmoil, uncertainty confronts the school on two fronts: enrollment and employment. The school was quick to create a weekend option for the Rice MBA for Professionals. This new option is helping us to continue growing enrollments with the same or higher admission standards during a potential downturn.

Meeting the employment challenge for our students and alumni requires a broader array of innovations from the Rice MBA community. Most gratifying are examples of alumni hiring new graduates and/or fellow alumni – If you know of any job opportunities, please contact us.

Drawing on the Rice MBA community’s core strengths of thought leadership and innovation, Deanna Fuehne, Director of the Career Management Center (CMC), and I recently visited a group of executives in New York City to discuss career patterns and the future employment picture in the wake of the recession. Keith Anderson (’83) (CIO, Soros Fund) hosted the group initiated by Subha Barry (’85) (Head of Global Diversity and Inclusion, Merrill Lynch), and joined by Michael Friezo (’88) (MD Deutsche Bank), Bob Orr (Satori), John Sorte (CEO of Morgan Joseph & Co), and George Tierney (COO of M&A at Barclays). While reinforcing the importance of alumni helping each other, this high powered group offered insights about the changing nature of investment banking and the movement of many top jobs from large investment banks to smaller financial services firms, government regulatory positions, and international opportunities. One implication is that MBA programs will no longer be able to rely on a handful of large employers. Advantage will go to MBAs who can scramble to find entry positions in smaller, growth firms. They also pointed to the influx of government stimulus money to various sectors, particularly alternative energy. Alternative energy entrepreneurs (and their investors) are likely to flourish. Given our strengths in energy and entrepreneurship, this is a good trend for Rice MBAs.

Throughout the discussion, innovation and thought leadership were apparent. Tomorrow’s winners will come from firms and individuals who reposition themselves today. Among Jones Graduate School alumni and faculty we find numerous other exemplars of thought leadership and innovation.
Exemplars of Thought Leadership by Faculty
Faculty research at the Jones School persists in its innovative reach and relevancy. Benefiting our students in the classroom and our reputation for intellectual capital, the cutting-edge research keeps the school inspired and credible.

- The number of elderly Americans is rising rapidly, and providing them with quality care has become a high priority for family members as well as medical professionals. Two recent studies completed by a team of researchers including Vikas Mittal, address: the relationship between physical health and quality of life in nursing home populations; and the challenges of retaining health care workers.

  Both studies make important contributions to the health status of nursing home residents – one addressing the psychological factors that have yet to be incorporated into standard nursing home treatment procedures and the other focused on reasons direct care workers leave or stay at their jobs.

- New research, summarized in a working paper by Jefferson Duarte and Stephan Siegel and Lance Young, both of the University of Washington, suggests that a person’s physical appearance may play a role in whether they are deemed trustworthy by financial lenders. The paper, “Trust and Credit,” found that borrowers on the peer-to-peer lending site Prosper.com who are perceived as trustworthy are more likely to have their loan requests granted. The research revealed that a seemingly untrustworthy person must promise to pay an interest rate almost 2 percent higher than those deemed trustworthy to have the same chance of getting a loan. The researchers also found that people perceived as trustworthy get loans more often, even after accounting for traditional creditworthiness measures, such as credit scores.

- Scott Sonenshein’s recent article in Organization Science, "The Emergence of Ethical Issues during Strategic Change," describes the very different realities of top managers and employees during change implementation. While managers may have the best of intentions when implementing change, employees are prone to interpret managerial actions through their own lens. This lens, called an employee welfare frame, alters the meanings of issues managers view as strategic and transforms them into ones employees consider having ethical implications. As a result, managers can lose control over the change process as what they consider strategic issues of benefit for the organization become recharacterized as ones that create ethical quandaries for employees.

- In Marc Epstein’s new course, Technology Commercialization in Developing Countries, Rice MBA students collaborated with Rice engineering undergrads to create a sustainable commerce model for delivering life-saving technologies in developing countries. And then they put those products into action.

  Over spring break, 20 MBA students traveled to Rwanda where they refined and implemented their business plans, introduced bio-medical products — such as a low-cost incubator and lab-in-a-backpack — and helped Rwandan entrepreneurs launch their own businesses to produce and sell the products. Now back on campus, students are re-addressing their business plans to include unforeseen challenges. They will soon make presentations to faculty and potential investors in these social enterprises.
Exemplars of Alumni Thought Leadership
Our alums prove daily that thought leadership comes in many shapes and sizes. It is measured by actions and words, not only in a public arena but also through their connections to the Jones School.

- In March, Jim Turley ('78), Ernst and Young Chairman and CEO, participated in a roundtable conversation in Washington, DC. As one of the 100 or so brightest minds in finance, he and other prominent figures such as George Soros, Nobel Prize winners Myron Scholes and Robert Engle, ex-Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and ex-Fed chief Paul Volcker discussed not just how to restart the global financial system, but how to reconstruct it.

  Turley brought some of the insights gleaned from his involvement in DC to his speech at the Rice MBA Alumni Dinner on April 3rd at the Junior League of Houston.

- Founder of AllergyKids, Robyn O’Brien ('98) is an advocate for healthy food choices for children and families. She has been featured in the *New York Times* and has appeared on CNN, *Good Morning America*, and the CBS *Early Show* and *Evening News*. Her book, *The Unhealthy Truth, How Our Food is Making us Sick — And What We Can Do About It*, debuts May 5. Her book tour includes Houston and a stop at the Jones School.

  Robyn’s answered the thought leadership call to action by taking on government agencies and the chemicals in our food, while also recognizing the Jones School by crediting the “remarkable role that Professor Doug Schuler played in my story.”

- Rice engineering undergrad and Rice MBA ’06, Sean Self is president of Nimbic Systems, former president of Lone Star Medical Products, Inc., and a 16-year veteran in the field of medical device design, manufacturing, marketing, and business planning. His entrepreneurial savvy and experience have produced life-saving tools to the medical community. After initial tests and a clinical trial at the end of April, his most current device may prevent the intrusion of airborne bacteria into surgery sites.

  Sean still makes time to bring his innovative expertise into the Jones School classrooms — with a Houston Oriented Social Enterprise Case Analysis (HOSECA) last year, a Community Engagement Seminar (CES) this year, and possibly a capstone course next year.

Jones Graduate School's Commitment to Thought Leadership and Innovation
The new Ph.D. in Management is another reflection of the school’s long-term commitment to its mission of developing principled, innovative thought leaders. The program is intended to prepare students as scholars who create new knowledge and develop business students to be tomorrow’s thought leaders. The program will boost our visibility globally when aspiring MBA prospects at top business schools see some of their faculty had their doctoral training at Rice.

Starting in the area of marketing in fall 2009, we are very excited by the strength of the incoming class. Our recruiting success was driven by the research strength and global visibility of our marketing faculty, the diligent PR campaign undertaken by Marketing Communications, as well as personal PR efforts of our marketing faculty. Our new program attracted over 80 applicants for four positions, compared to peer schools’ average of 40-45 applicants.
Thought Leadership and Innovation by the Jones Family
With this lasting contribution from alumni, both near and far, we can make the appeal to reflect on the ways in which each of us have been thought leaders. Who is making the tough decisions? Who is open to change? Who is willing to stay the course and responding to the need? To find answers among our own Jones School family gives us the motivation, support and confidence to persevere.

Warm regards,

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