Rice Mission Statement

“As a leading research university with a distinctive commitment to undergraduate education, Rice University aspires to pathbreaking research, unsurpassed teaching, and contribution to the betterment of our world. It seeks to fulfill this mission by cultivating a diverse community of learning and discovery that produces leaders across the spectrum of human endeavor.”

Points of Connection for School Literacy and Culture Project
Drawn from Rice’s Vision for the Second Century Ten Point Plan

Rice University Vision:
We must visibly and substantially increase our commitment to our research mission and raise our research and scholarship profile. We must especially focus on departments and disciplines in strategically selected areas where we have an opportunity to achieve nationally and internationally recognized levels of distinction and achievement. Success in this endeavor will require significant investments in and improvements to our research support, physical facilities, and information technology infrastructure.
We must invest in a select number of interdisciplinary endeavors that will enable us to leverage our own strengths as well as the strengths of potential collaborators. These interdisciplinary endeavors should include some efforts to which we have already made substantial commitments and new areas that will emerge as we develop our strategic priorities and research vision for the future.

- From its inception, Rice has been dedicated—in the words of Lovett—“as much to investigation as to instruction” and to providing a setting in which faculty would join the “pleasures of teaching” with “the privileges of research.”
- Interdisciplinary centers, programs, and institutes offer Rice an opportunity to leverage our small size by bringing together and integrating strengths across the institution.
- In sum, these criteria encompass leadership, leverage, excellence, impact, and intellectual merit.
- Similarly, we must carefully evaluate the efficiency with which we use and administer our resources.

School Literacy and Culture Project:
The School Literacy and Culture Project (SLC) was created upon a strong research base twenty years ago and the emphasis on research continues today on several levels. Our project asks teachers to read, discuss, and apply current research in the field of early childhood education as part of their participation in Classroom Storytelling Project seminars at Rice University. Literacy leadership team members routinely attend and present at national conferences and remain current in the field through leadership team seminars. Extrapolating current research into classroom activities is a central charge of our project. In addition, SLC conducted original research into the efficacy of the Classroom Storytelling model in 2008. The peer-reviewed study not only substantiated the efficacy of the model, it received national recognition from the Journal of Early Childhood teacher education for excellence in research design.

SLC’s work across Houston’s diverse communities and educational settings affords Rice undergraduate and graduate students opportunities for research and for exploring careers in education. We have had students take volunteer positions at our Summer Institute on Reading, Writing, and Cultural Conversations in order to gain a deeper understanding of developmentally appropriate practice for young children. We have also worked with Rice undergraduates through our internship program at the Summer Creative Writing Workshops.

The School Literacy and Culture Project promotes interdisciplinary study with teachers and students of all ages. Preschool teachers learn how to utilize interdisciplinary themes in planning classroom learning experiences for young children. When investigating “Change” for example, young children might read a book about how children grow, then participate in art activities that challenge them to mix primary colors, science activities to determine whether items will sink or float in different liquids, and block-building in order to figure out how blocks might be rearranged to make the most efficient ramps. Perhaps the best example of interdisciplinary work, though, comes in our Literacy and the Arts project. Through this collaboration with Houston Grand Opera, participating kindergarten through high school students investigate a deep theme such as “legacy” using visual arts, creative writing, dance, photography, oral histories, and technological applications. These art integration projects are shared throughout the campus to create both depth and breadth of learning.
Rice University Vision:
We must aggressively foster collaborative relationships with other institutions to leverage our resources. This is particularly important in light of our comparatively small size. Our geographic location offers excellent opportunities, and we are especially well situated to develop substantial strategic research and teaching relationships with the other members of the Texas Medical Center. We also can expand our teaching and research achievement in the arts in part through effective partnerships with the cultural institutions of the museum district.

- One of our greatest comparative advantages as a small research university is effective collaboration with other institutions to leverage our resources. This applies to our research endeavors, our educational partnerships, our administrative infrastructure, and our service mission to the broader community.
- At the other end of our campus, the institutions of the city's cultural district also present enormous opportunities to leverage our resources, particularly in all areas that touch upon the arts. These institutions can provide resources that are critical to achieving a more effective and visible program in a range of endeavors, and, conversely, we can offer institutions such as the art museums critical expertise and resources they are unable to provide internally. The growing and deepening collaborations with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Menil Collection are the most important recent examples of the opportunities that abound in our immediate neighborhood.
- Much research at Rice is addressed to understanding and identifying solutions to a wide range of social problems, from the integration of immigrants to the design of effective political and social institutions. ... Rice is well positioned to make a contribution to Houston and other cities through collaborative research and educational programs that focus on urban systems, sustainable energy, public policy, K-12 math and science education, and capacity-building for our city's nonprofit and civic sectors.

School Literacy and Culture Project:
Over the past five years, the School Literacy and Culture Project has grown through powerful community collaborations. These collaborations have enriched our practice and opened doors for new projects. A sampling of collaborators includes:

- **Writers in the Schools (WITS)** – This 20+ year partnership providing creative writing workshops to Houston-area preschoolers through high schoolers. We have grown from one campus to today’s six campuses serving over 750 students.
- **HGOco** (Houston Grand Opera’s community engagement project) – impetus for our current Literacy and the Arts project bringing arts integration and creativity to five Houston area Elementary, Middle, and High Schools
- **Ridgemont Early Childhood Center (Fort Bend ISD and William Smith, Sr. Tricounty Head Start, Fort Bend Literacy Council and others)** - This collaborative “dawn to dusk” early childhood facility serves children, families, and teachers in the low-income Ridgemont area of Sugarland. In addition to early childhood education for infants through school agers, the campus provides family literacy workshops; ELL, citizenship, and computer classes for adults; and extensive long-term professional development for teachers. Facilities for medical and dental care have been built into the site and plan to open in 2012.
- **Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH and MFAH - Rienzi)** Past work has included workshops for children and docents at MFAH – Rienzi and an exhibit of student art from Azerbaijan and Houston is scheduled to premiere at MFAH on May 27
- **The Menil Museum** – Site of field trips and readings for our Summer Creative Writing Workshops
- **Collaborative for Children** – Participation in the College Bound Beginning at Birth initiative taking place in the Gulfton area
- **Rice University-based programs** (This is our current emphasis – introductory meetings have also taken place with Shepherd School of Music and REEP)
- **Rice Gallery** – Site of field trips for the Summer Creative Writing Workshops (students) and Writing and the Arts (teacher group followed by student groups). Both teachers and students have participated in creative writing experiences inspired by Gallery installations.
- **Azerbaijani Art Project** – **Humanities professor Geoff Winningham** – This new collaboration couples student photos taken in Azerbaijan with student photos taken in the greater Houston area. This work connects Rice with HGOco, MFAH, and the Houston Independent School District.
Rice University Mission:
We must fully engage with the city of Houston—learning from it and contributing to it—as a successful partnership with our home city is an essential part of our future. We should do so by continuing to integrate Houston into the educational experience of our students, by emphasizing selective areas of research especially important to the city (notably energy and urban studies), by making tangible contributions to improve our city (particularly K–12 education and environmental quality), and by continuing to provide innovative educational and cultural resources to the broader Houston population.

- Although Rice’s engagement with the city is far-reaching and diverse, we must recognize our responsibility as an educational institution to create opportunity and equality by opening our doors to our community. We have made and must continue to make a distinctive contribution to K–12 education in this city, through the training of teachers and by providing opportunities for students from underrepresented populations.
- We must continue to make available our tremendous educational and cultural resources to the many thousands of Houstonians who come to our campus.

School Literacy and Culture Project:
The School Literacy and Culture Project has maintained a reputation as a leader in the field of early childhood education for well over twenty years. Members of our leadership team have been recognized for excellence through such awards as Teacher Educator of the Year from the Houston Area Association for the Education of Young Children (HAAEYC) and Teacher of the Year (HAAEY and a significant number of Houston area school campuses and districts). Our efficacy study One … was achieved national recognition for excellence in research design. Leaders of our project consistently receive invitations to extrapolate findings from early childhood research into practical classroom curricular suggestions at the national, state, local, and campus levels.

Key to this work is the word “innovative” emphasized in the description above. Rather than providing one set of materials, or even one set approach, the School Literacy and Culture Project responds to the diverse needs of our greater Houston area community through campus collaborations and other programming designed to meet particular needs. One example of this occurred this year through the multi-agency collaboration at the Ridgemont Early Childhood Center. Because this site serves children from infancy through elementary school, project leaders at School Literacy and Culture Project developed personalized mentoring to meet the needs of the teachers of infants. Because teachers at this level seldom receive truly “professional” development, our resident teachers working with these youngest children truly embraced this educational opportunity and made huge strides in their interactions with and educational stimulation of these youngest learners.

Justification for a final point of connection comes in our name alone. The School Literacy and Culture Project has always believed that issues of culture permeate the fabric of classrooms, yet seldom are they allowed to be considered and analyzed. Our project gives voice to that impact in more formal ways through our Cultural Conversations project, but we also weave discussions of cultural issues through our Classroom Storytelling project; Summer Institute in Reading, Writing and Cultural Connections; Literacy and the Arts project; teacher training for our Summer Creative Writing Workshops; Campus Collaborations; and January Early Literacy Conference. Our new collaboration with HGO’s Song of Houston series of commissioned operas connects Rice more directly to Houston’s international and cultural communities and substantially increases our direct connections with parents of diverse backgrounds. Projected work with English Language Learners through a demonstration literacy lab at Gabriela Mistral Center for Early Childhood punctuates the importance of this work and allows us to add a deeper understanding and articulation of best practices in working with English Language Learners. In short, it is impossible for us to speak about issues of early literacy without addressing the impact of culture on learning.