University Leaders Plan for the Future

Deborah Quinn Hensel

The commitment to secondary education is one of the highest priorities in the greater Houston area, where leaders and educators recognize the value and importance of providing a skilled and knowledgeable pool of future workers and leaders to the local economy. Twenty-eight major institutions of higher education are located in the 10-county region, including Rice University, the University of Houston System, Texas Southern University, Houston Baptist University and the University of St. Thomas. Recently, Opportunity Houston asked the presidents of those five universities to share their visions for the institutions they lead.

Dr. David W. Leebron

Dr. David W. Leebron left the deanship of the Columbia University School of Law to become the seventh president of Rice University in July 2004. He is currently leading Rice through a period of growth and renewal based on the 10-point Vision for the Second Century that he launched during his first three years in office.

A native of Philadelphia, he is a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, where he was elected president of the Law Review in his second year. After graduating in 1973, he served as a law clerk for Judge Shirley Hufstedler on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in Los Angeles. He began teaching in 1980 at the UCLA School of Law and in 1983 at the NYU School of Law, where he also served as director of the International Legal Studies Program. In 1989 Leebron joined the faculty of the Columbia University School of Law, and in 1996 he was appointed dean and Lucy G. Moses Professor of Law. Leebron also served as a visiting fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and Comparative Law in Hamburg, Germany, and as the Jean Monnet Visiting Professor of Law at Bielefeld University.

Rice is a leading research university with a distinctive commitment to undergraduate education. Its primary goals are path-breaking research, unsurpassed teaching and research contributions that lead to the improvement of our world. To fulfill this mission, Rice cultivates a diverse community of learning and discovery that produces leaders across the spectrum of human endeavor. After I took office in 2004, we spent more than a year engaged in the “Call to Conversation.” During this process, I talked to thousands of people about their aspirations for Rice. Those conversations led to the development of the Vision for the Second Century, a 10-point plan to focus our efforts on making Rice one of the best private research universities in the world. As we approach our centennial anniversary in 2012, we see ourselves not as a great small university but as a small great university.
The Vision for the Second Century objectives include increasing our commitment to achievements in research, expanding the undergraduate student body by 30 percent, becoming more fully engaged with the city of Houston and expanding our international outreach, particularly in Asia and Latin America. To accommodate these ambitions, we are in the midst of a construction campaign that, among other things, will add a collaborative research center housing researchers from Rice and other institutions of the Texas Medical Center, two new residential colleges, a new recreation center and new buildings for social sciences and physics. We are building on strengths such as nanotechnology and the Baker Institute, while launching new and expanded efforts in areas such as art history and energy education.

Rice is a small private research university in Houston with big national and international reach. We attract the best students from all over the world, and many choose to remain in Houston after they complete their education. The high quality of education offered by Rice produces engineers, biologists, architects, musicians, social scientists, finance professionals, business leaders and others who are well prepared to take on the problems of the world when they join the workforce. Many go on to graduate and professional school. But even before these graduates are on the market, area employers can benefit through collaborations with Rice students and faculty.

For example, Rice’s Center for Civic Engagement enables our students to conduct research on matters of importance to Houston, such as a study of the impact of red-light cameras at intersections. These research projects are conducted under the guidance of Rice faculty and in collaboration with community partners, so they are mutually beneficial. Our students and graduates are known for their brilliance, their creativity and a “can-do” attitude that suits the dynamic employment environment of Houston.

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Dr. Renu Khator
University of Houston

Dr. Renu Khator assumed the dual appointment of president of the University of Houston and chancellor of the UH System in January 2008. In her capacity as chancellor, Khator oversees a system with an annual operating budget that exceeds $1 billion, serves more than 57,000 students and has an annual economic impact of $3 billion on the greater Houston area. All told, the system components are engaged in more than 800 community, corporate and research partnerships. As president of the University of Houston, she is the chief executive officer of the largest and oldest of the four UH System universities. The University of Houston offers more than 300 undergraduate and graduate programs and awards 7,000 degrees each year.

Khator, who was born in Uttar Pradesh, India, earned a bachelor’s degree at the University of Kanpur. She received her master’s degree and her Ph.D. in political science from Purdue University. A noted scholar in the field of global environmental policy, she has published five books and several articles on various aspects of this subject. Previously, she was provost and senior vice president at the University of South Florida, capping a 22-year career at that institution.
In January 2007, she and her husband, Suresh Khator, who is a faculty member in the UH Cullen College of Engineering, were awarded the prestigious Hind Rattan (Jewel of India), given to nonresident Indians for making outstanding contributions in their field.

The University of Houston was created to provide first-rate and affordable higher education for the working men and women of this city. We continue to embrace that fundamental vision, but we have expanded it to include educating a widely diverse population of students as well as discovering and disseminating knowledge through research, artistic and scholarly endeavors. Our challenge is to become the nation's premier public university in an urban setting.

In the spring, we concluded the first phase of a “100 Days” initiative, in which campus and community members offered more than 11,000 suggestions about the university's direction for the future. That information has been analyzed, and we are hearing that we should encourage athletics, continue to recruit topflight faculty, attract and support the best students and achieve top-tier status. Some issues are “little rocks”—operational problems like campus parking and customer service—that I am having my vice presidents address. I am focusing on the “big rocks” and have been meeting with various leadership groups to determine what pathways we will take to reach our goals. One thing is absolutely clear: our success requires heightened support from the public, business and political sectors.

The University of Houston System has produced 200,000 graduates so far. Recently, we've been averaging about 13,000 a year. And approximately three-quarters of those graduates have stayed in the Houston area. That makes us the single most significant contributor of “intellectual capital” in the region. This includes more than 16,000 professional degrees—in fields such as law and optometry—as well as 7,500 doctorates. Along with the sheer quantity, the range of what we're producing is really remarkable, from educators, architects and accountants to engineers, social workers and hotel managers. We keep Houston working.

Dr. John M. Rudley
Texas Southern University

The Texas Southern University Board of Regents appointed John M. Rudley as the eleventh president of Texas Southern University in February 2008. He previously served as the vice chancellor for administration and finance for the University of Houston System and vice president for administration and finance for the University of Houston. From June 2007 to January 2008, he served in the interim dual position of UH System chancellor and UH president.

Rudley has held numerous leadership positions in higher education, including vice president for business and finance at the Tennessee Board of Regents. He also served as a senior technical advisor with the U.S. Department of Education from 1991 to 1992. He formerly served as the vice president for fiscal affairs at Texas Southern University.

He acquired his public accounting experience from Cooper & Lybrand in Los Angeles and in Seattle. He is a licensed certified accountant in Tennessee. Rudley earned his bachelor of business administration degree from the University of Toledo and his master's in education in administration and supervision and his Ed.D. in administration from Tennessee State University.

Texas Southern University was designated by the Texas Legislature in 1973 as a “special purpose institution of higher education for urban programming.” That designation provides a foundation for Texas Southern's programmatic goals. Ascribing to the global implications of its urban mission, the university focuses on high-quality teaching, research and public service as a means of preparing students for leadership roles in the urban communities of our state, nation and world. Texas Southern University offers a variety of academic programs to students of diverse backgrounds and various levels of scholastic achievement. These students matriculate in undergraduate and
graduate programs leading to degrees in the arts and behavioral sciences, public affairs, education, business, communications, health sciences, law, pharmacy and science and technology.

As one of the nation’s largest historically black colleges and universities located in the nation’s fourth-largest city, Texas Southern has the opportunity to become a major national resource for studying and solving urban issues and for educating the professional workforce to succeed in the global economy.

My priorities as president all focus on restoring to Texas Southern the high expectations upon which this institution was founded. We will recruit quality students—students who recognize the value of an education and are willing to invest the time, energy and work required to graduate. We are making changes in the university’s organizational structure that will hold people accountable for decision making. We expect that each area of operation will take care of its business to the highest of standards. We expect colleges and departments to treat each other and their students and faculties with care and concern and respect. We expect a nurturing, encouraging, challenging and uplifting educational environment at this university. We have high expectations and will settle for nothing less.

Texas Southern is a major provider of educated professionals in our community and, indeed, across the country. This past May we awarded 1,200 degrees to new graduates. In all we graduated more than 2,000 students this year alone. More than 40,000 of our graduates are teaching in our schools, working in and leading our companies, serving in our legislature and creating new businesses for our city and state. Our alumni lead major corporations and run major industrial departments and divisions.

Texas Southern has educated 40 percent of all the principals in HISD. Our graduates make up one-fourth of all African American pharmacists in the country. Our aviation sciences program has one of only two flight simulators outside of the government and is producing professionals for air traffic control and other positions in the aviation industry. Our law graduates are serving in the legislature, in the judiciary and in top law firms around the country. Our science alumni are working at NASA, running divisions of international pharmaceutical companies, and working at universities and in research labs, training the next generation of scientists.

Our Jesse H. Jones Business School has been ranked in the top 25 percent by the Princeton Review, and our Thurgood Marshall School of Law is the most diverse law school in the country, according to U.S. News & World Report. We have national research centers with NASA in nano-technology and with Homeland Security for petrochemical transportation safety. Texas Southern has the only undergraduate health degree in the state and offers high-tech degrees in nuclear health/radiation physics and airway science.

At HBU, we want to be the university that retains its distinctive Christian identity and at the same time pushes forward in terms of our academic excellence and also the expanse of our programs. Right now we’re at about 2,300 students, but we grew by 10 percent last year, and I expect us to grow by as much as 20 percent this year. Our goal is to have 10,000 students, and I think we’ll be there in 10 to 12 years.

To be attractive to the community, one of the most important things we can do is grow. We plan to grow in terms of our academic initiatives, our master’s and doctoral programs, and our business outreach. A substantial amount of construction is under way to accommodate that growth.

We just finished construction of the Morris Cultural Arts Center, which is one of the finest venues for the arts, music and drama in this part of the city, with a 1,200-seat theater. We’re also building a university academic center, which will house the department of art. Of course, Houston is one of the greatest cities in the world for the arts, so we want to emphasize the fabulous studio art department that we have. We also are starting an honors college, which will be housed in our new academic center, along with the communications department.

Right now, we’re also building a new 375-bed residence college. We have a large number of commuter students, but we also

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**Dr. Robert B. Sloan Jr.**

**Houston Baptist University**

Dr. Robert B. Sloan Jr. began his tenure as Houston Baptist University's president on September 1, 2006, serving as the university’s third president since its founding in 1960.

Sloan most recently served as chancellor of Baylor University, following his service as Baylor’s president from 1995 to 2005. Previously, from 1993 to 1995, he was the founding dean of George W. Truett Theologi-ical Seminary. Sloan joined the Department of Religion faculty at Baylor University in 1983. He also served on the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and adjunctively at Hardin-Simmons University. He has served as pastor and interim pastor at more than 20 churches throughout Texas and Oklahoma during his career.

Sloan graduated cum laude with a bachelor of arts degree from Baylor University in 1970. He earned the master of divinity degree magna cum laude from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1973. He conducted post-baccalaureate research at the University of Bristol, England, from 1973 to 1974 and earned the Doktor der Theologie insignia cum laude from the University of Basel, Switzerland, in 1978. A native Texan, he was born in Coleman and raised in Abilene.
hope to add to the number of residential students. As soon as these buildings are completed, we’ll need to start two more—an academic building to serve fine arts and music theater, as well as some general classrooms.

Over the next five to 10 years, we also plan to build a major facility for science and nursing to serve our tremendous premed program and school of nursing. Both of these areas of study have great reputations, but we need to upgrade our facilities there. We also plan to build a new library, new parking garages, a new data center, and some on-campus retail shops. Of course, one of the challenges we face is funding those expansions, and we will soon enter into a substantial capital campaign for that purpose.

We’ve applied to go back into Division I of the NCAA, we’ve been accepted, and we’re now on probationary status. That’s great for our students, but it’s also great for the city in that it adds to the area’s repertoire of NCAA institutions.

We’ll also be starting a college of continuing education for professionals and will be expanding our MLA program into a doctoral program. One of the greatest opportunities we have is to make sure that our diverse population has access to four-year and advanced educational opportunities in graduate and professional schools.

One of the reasons we have such ambitious plans for growth is that we want to be very strong in providing a diverse workforce for the Houston area. It is very important for a major city not to experience “brain drain.” We have a wealth of talented young people here, and with such a diverse population, it’s important to keep them here. We’re also going to add more graduate and professional schools, and I think that’s a way to give our young people an opportunity to stay right here in Houston.

Dr. Robert Ivany
University of St. Thomas

On July 1, 2004, Dr. Robert Ivany became the eighth president of the University of St. Thomas, a comprehensive Catholic university in the heart of Houston. Prior to his retirement in 2016, Dr. Ivany served with the rank of major general. Ivany presided over one of the nation’s most respected institutions for education and strategic leadership: the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

He also served in a number of unique positions, including that of staff aide to the president of the United States from 1984 to 1986 and an assistant professor of history and football coach at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. As the commanding general of the Military District of Washington, he directed a diverse organization of 5,500 civilian and military employees based in seven installations in three states and the District of Columbia.

After completing his U.S. Army service in October 2003, Ivany joined the faculty of the Graduate School of Business, Columbia University, as an adjunct professor in executive education. He worked with senior executives in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States in leader development, strategic planning, and cultural change and has spoken on those topics for numerous civic.
and corporate groups. In addition to earning a bachelor of science degree from the U.S. Military Academy, he received a Ph.D. in history from the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

Our vision is to become a great Catholic university. My predecessor, Archbishop J. Michael Miller, CSB, led a two-year effort that culminated in a strategic vision for the campus. This is what attracted me to St. Thomas. When an institution, a community, says, “We want to achieve something that is compelling,” other people are drawn to it. I had never been in Houston before and I didn’t know much about St. Thomas, but when they articulated that vision to me, it had a very powerful effect.

Our mission is to educate leaders of faith and character. We would like all of our graduates, regardless of their major or minor, to leave here as true leaders, imbued with a spiritual faith and fortified by a strength of character so the decisions they make in their lives will be the most beneficial to them and to society.

The real beauty of a St. Thomas education is that it prepares individuals to use those leadership roles in all different facets of life. The best way for a university to do that is to have a broad liberal arts education. When you come to St. Thomas, we will provide you with the opportunity to take courses in many different disciplines so that you truly become an educated person and a thinking person. And by giving you that broad education, we help you discover what your true passions are. Your undergraduate years are the time to get this kind of broad education that will require you to look at all the disciplines.

We’re very proud of our Catholic identity, which offers a worldview but is also a welcoming, embracing view. If you believe in our core values of goodness, discipline, knowledge and a sense of community, we welcome you to St. Thomas. I think that’s a very powerful attraction, because we have a foundation of theology and philosophy that provides a framework for young people to answer the truly exciting and challenging questions in life.

We’re also very proud of our professional schools—the Cameron School of Business, the School of Theology, the Center for Thomistic Studies, and the School of Education—and the liberal arts courses that we offer, so we try to do our best to offer this framework to answer the big questions, and at the same time give you the skills and capabilities to be very productive.

We’ve also been very fortunate that this past December we received a wonderful grant to endow the Burnett Family Distinguished Chair in Leadership, which will be located within the Cameron School of Business. This person will promote the study of leadership throughout the University, including leadership programs for undergraduates and integrating leadership throughout the other disciplines of the University.

The University of St. Thomas is in the process of starting our next comprehensive capital campaign. We are hosting a series of dinner meetings with the leading citizens of Houston, asking them how St. Thomas can contribute to Houston. In this way, we don’t just react to the world around us, but we try to anticipate the needs of the city. Our guests have been very generous in their advice. One important theme that keeps coming up in these meetings is that perhaps our greatest contribution, our greatest gift, is the ability to produce a graduate who can think critically, communicate effectively, lead ethically and succeed professionally—regardless if they go into the oil business or into health care. 


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