January 14, 2010

TO: Carl Caldwell, John S. Olson
FROM: Eugene H. Levy
ABOUT: Graduation date of record
COPIES: Duane Windsor, Paula Sanders, Robin Forman, David Tenney

This follows conversations that started late last semester about the graduate date of record for Rice students – undergraduates and graduate students – who complete their degree requirements in the fall semester. This matter has been called to attention by students on a number of occasions, and inquiry into the matter reveals their point to be well taken.

It is the practice of all peer universities that I have checked (more than half a dozen of the usual suspects) to award degrees at the end of the semester or quarter in which the degree requirements are actually completed. Rice, seemingly singularly among peer institutions, delays the award date until the following spring semester. This has deleterious impacts on both students and the university. For the students, it arbitrarily adds a calendar year to their time to degree. In the best cases, this has only a perceptual impact as it gives the impression that students have taken a year longer to earn their degrees. But the perceptual impact is, it has been reported, sometimes material. In the worse cases, this has apparently caused some students to appear to have not satisfied requirements for scholarships or financial aid that they have received. The negative impact on the university is that, in published average-time-degree comparisons, Rice is disadvantaged by this arbitrary practice.

Altogether, the impacts of the current practice are highly negative. By comparison, there is no identified positive impact or benefit.

The current practice is arbitrary. It does not seem to be mandated by any formal act or rule of the university. I am informed that the practice can be changed simply by changing the graduation date of record in the motion to grant degrees that is passed at the January meeting of the general faculty. The Registrar has suggested that the date of record be made to coincide with the last due date for fall grades. According to the fall 2009 academic calendar, that would be December 25, 2009 for this past fall semester.

Accordingly, let me ask that, now and in the future, the motions from the Committee on Examinations and Standing and the Graduate Council, for granting fall degrees specify the above-referenced date as graduation date of record.

If this seems problematic, please let me know.