David W. Leebron

David W. Leebron has served as Rice University’s seventh president since 2004, a period of growth and transformation for the institution. Over the past seven years, the university has increased its undergraduate student population, enhanced the vibrancy of the campus with $800 million in new construction, extended its research endeavors and international presence, deepened its relationship with its home city of Houston and earned greater visibility locally, nationally and internationally.

Early in his presidency, Leebron engaged in extensive consultations that produced the Vision for the Second Century, a 10-point strategic plan for Rice’s growth and advancement as one of the premier research universities in the world. Now, as the university approaches its centennial anniversary in 2012, much has been accomplished under this plan that positions Rice well for its second hundred years.

Perhaps the biggest change has occurred in undergraduate enrollment, which has increased 30 percent since 2004. Applications more than doubled to 13,795 for the fall 2011 class, with 9,000 applications from outside of Texas. International applicants increased fivefold, and more than 11 percent of incoming freshmen are from abroad. The undergraduate and graduate student body includes representatives of 89 countries.
Much like Rice’s first president, Edgar Odell Lovett, Leebron brought a powerful international vision to the post and has actively reached out to Asia and Latin America. International experience is an important part of Leebron’s mission to provide students with a holistic education and, to facilitate this, new study-abroad programs in Argentina and India have been added, along with study and research opportunities in China, Brazil and Turkey. In 2010, Rice was ranked 47th in the world by Times Higher Education magazine.

At the same time, Leebron has strengthened the university’s local presence with multiple programs and centers that connect students and faculty with Houston residents and the Greater Houston community. Most recently, the Kinder Institute for Urban Research was launched at Rice. Home to the Houston Area Survey, the most continuous in-depth survey of any urban area in the U.S., the institute will build on that to study the phenomenon of urbanization in cities around the world to improve understanding of the modern global city.

Under Leebron’s leadership, the Rice campus has undergone significant changes, including the addition of two new residential colleges; the BioScience Research Collaborative, a 10-story building where scientists and educators from Rice and other Texas Medical Center institutions conduct research together; a new state-of-the-art recreation and wellness center; an additional food servery for students; a central campus pavilion that serves as a meeting and
study place for students and campus visitors; an updated sports arena; a new physics building; and the Public Art Program, a presidential initiative that has added beautiful new art across campus to enhance Rice’s distinctive architecture.

Leebron has welcomed the Dalai Lama, former President Bill Clinton, former Indian President Abdul Kalam, Houston Mayor and Rice alumna Annise Parker, a delegation of Chinese educational leaders on only the third U.S. trip of its kind, and hundreds of other global political and academic leaders.

A premier international research university, Rice is home to the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy and highly ranked schools of music, architecture, natural sciences, social sciences, engineering, humanities, business and continuing studies. Its wooded 285-acre campus is located next to the world’s largest medical center, an acclaimed museum district and the other entertainment and culturally rich assets of Houston, one of a few cities with a full menu of ballet, theater, opera, symphony and sports opportunities.

Prior to taking the helm at Rice, Leebron was dean of Columbia Law School. 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 1979, he served as a law clerk for Judge Shirley Hufstedler on the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in Los Angeles. He began teaching at the UCLA
School of Law in 1980 and at the NYU School of Law in 1983, where he also served as director of the International Legal Studies program.

In 1989, Leebron joined the faculty of Columbia Law School, and in 1996 he was appointed dean and the Lucy G. Moses Professor of Law. Leebron also served as a visiting fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law in Hamburg, Germany, and as the Jean Monnet Visiting Professor of Law at Bielefeld University. Currently part of the political science faculty at Rice, Leebron has authored a textbook on international human rights and published articles on issues of international trade, human rights and corporate finance.

Leebron is a member of the New York State Bar Association, Carter-Baker Commission on Federal Election Reform, Jacobs University Bremen Board of Governors, Harvard Law School Visiting Committee, the Executive Committee of the Greater Houston Partnership and several boards of directors, including the KIPP Foundation, Conference USA and IMAX Corp. He also serves on the centennial committee for Tongji University in Shanghai, China. In 2006, Leebron was presented with France’s Commandeur de l’Ordre national du Mérite, and in 2008, he received an honorary doctorate from Nankai University. In 2010, Leebron and his wife, University Representative Y. Ping Sun, were selected by the Greater Houston Partnership as the city’s International Executives of the
Year for their efforts to help make Houston a center of international business.

Leebron and Sun have two children, Daniel and Merissa.