Learning the ropes

By Michael Nalepa

I’d have to say that June 1st and 2nd rank among the strangest 48 hours of my life. In less than 2 days I got to jump off a 20 foot pole, take a personality indicator test, carry two people a hundred feet at the same time, hear business lectures in the offices of one of Houston’s most successful consulting firms, and dine at the Four Season’s Hotel.

This wasn’t a scavenger hunt; it was training for The Leadership Rice Summer Mentorship Program.

At the time, I was curious as to why our initiation into this program included a day at a ropes course; talks on group dynamics and networking; and an etiquette lesson. After a few weeks at work, I was no longer curious.

The strange mix of components presented in our training paled in comparison to the different situations that greeted me at my placement at St. Luke’s Episcopal Health Charities.

I learned that there is no such thing as a typical workday, and that the eclectic nature of our training was meant to reflect the world we would encounter in our internships.

And thanks to the training, I came partly prepared. There were a lot of things I didn’t know, but when I had to go to a breakfast meeting at the River Oaks Country Club, I remembered where to put my used sugar packets (on the right, near the edge of the table).

No one asked me to climb a 2-story pole at work, but there were days at my placement when it felt that way.

It was nice not to be surprised.

Helping students think creatively

By Christine Adams

They have so many possibilities before them that the challenge of carving out their own lives, absent a syllabus, must be overwhelming at times. And the safe, well-worn path will be a lay-up for the disciplined Owl — much easier than sitting with the discomfort of possibilities and uncertainty.

Leadership Rice brings students out of the merely dutiful role and encourages one in which students take ownership of their learning, their work, their communities, and their lives. In addition to mentoring and other “beyond the hedges” experiences, this task requires a great deal of reflection.

So, in Leadership Rice, life becomes a case in point. Everyday interactions, actions, and inactions become the teachable moments. At the core of this method is a level of directness and honesty not found in most arenas of life. This process gives stu-

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Leadership Rice program offers range of rewards and experiences

Office of the Secretary of the Navy (Washington, D.C.)
Student: Evie Zambetakis  Mentor: Commander Fred Henney

I can’t begin to describe how amazing my experience in Washington, D.C. was. My mentorship was at the Pentagon with the Department of the Navy in the Office of Legislative Affairs (OLA). I worked with the Public Affairs and Congressional Notifications division of OLA which afforded me the opportunity to participate in many high-level events, such as Chamber of Commerce visits involving high-ranking Naval officers and distinguished members of the political community. I was an OLA escort at the Air Show at Andrews Air Force Base on Armed Services Day; I flew to the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise with a Congressional delegation while it was underway off the coast of Florida and shot a 50-Caliber off the side of the ship; I visited Navy Liaison offices on The Hill frequently, and compiled briefing reports for the Secretary of the Navy’s Hill Calls. ... This description only scratches the surface of the experience.

Houston Airport System
Student: Patrick Quayle  Mentor: Thomas Bartlett

During my summer mentorship, I shadowed Tom Bartlett, Deputy Director of George Bush Intercontinental Airport Houston. One of my projects was to work on the specifications for the Aircraft Rescue Firefighting trucks that will be purchased to service the expansion of runways at IAH. In addition, Mr. Bartlett included me in high-level meetings that discussed the airport’s expansion and other planning for the Houston Airport System. I also worked with the Airport Operations staff who are responsible for ensuring that the aircraft can operate safely on the runways and taxiways at IAH. I was also able to work with the various carriers that operate out of IAH. A day might include working on planning flight routes for a KLM flight that travels from Houston to Amsterdam non-stop, or spending time with the Continental Vice President who runs the Houston Hub. I loved every day.

Joint Center for Political & Economic Studies
Student: Evelyn Chang  Mentor: Wilhemina Leigh

This summer I interned at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington, D.C. For thirty years, the Joint Center has been one of the only think tanks focusing on public policy issues affecting African-Americans and other minorities such as political participation, economic advancement, health, and international affairs. As a research analyst, I worked on a project investigating reproductive health behaviors and outcomes (i.e., STDs, HIV/AIDS, contraception, premarital sex) of African-American adolescents.

Because I was the only Asian-American in a predominantly African-American organization, this summer represented a unique opportunity for me to understand people who were culturally different from me. Through the discussions about the project and conversations with people at the center, I began to see how they viewed the world, which had profound implications for the methodology and presentation of our research. In order not to perpetuate negative stereotypes and to gain more accurate knowledge of the issues, we considered many contextual factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, neighborhood, the concept of masculinity/femininity in African-American communities, geographic regions) instead of limiting our research to the sexual behaviors and outcomes. It is our hope that the research may be used to guide future policy and research, while improving the reproductive health of African-American teens.

Houston Endowment
Student: Gigi Doan  Mentor: Michele Sabino

My mentorship with Houston Endowment Inc., the largest private foundation in Texas, introduced me to the giving side of philanthropy. I had a chance to participate in the grantmaking process that distributed $14 million to non-profit organizations in just two months. I value the chance this mentorship gave me to visit a variety of organizations ranging from a school for children with Down Syndrome to an apartment complex housing the elderly homeless to an organization establishing self-help water and sewer treatment systems in colonias on the Texas-Mexico border.

My perspective of the philanthropic world has changed as a result of my observations of how many people are willing to give to those in need, how much they are willing to give, and what a difference it makes. I now understand the importance of giving a part of oneself, no matter how small, to those who need it the most. As a result, I have signed on to volunteer at The Children’s Assessment Center for the sexually-abused and next summer’s Camp Hope for children with HIV/AIDS.

Learning doesn’t end at the end of mentorship.

ABC News (New York)
Student: Laura Derr  Mentor: Krista Kendall

The time I’ve spent at ABC News in New York City this summer has been an incredible experience. No day is the same. I’ve worked with interesting people in a variety of capacities; I now have the practical experience of sending faxes, writing memos, and speaking with all sorts of people.

Countless lasting rewards of this summer are more intangible. I’ve witnessed the diligent work behind both the broadcast news and news magazine genres, sharpened my political perspective, discovered how to structure a story and sell it visually, and participated in all aspects of production from brainstorming to shooting an actual 20/20 episode. I’ve experienced large corporate culture and learned television news vernacular.

I never know who I’ll run in to in the elevator or cafeteria. One day, I watched Peter Jennings broadcast the nightly news live to millions of Americans, then chatted with a film maker on my bus ride home. New York keeps surprising me.
**Enercorp Ltd. (London, Casablanca)**

_Students: Thomas Miller & Prakesh Venkataraman   Mentor: Andy Karsner_

This summer, I (Thomas Miller, pictured left) worked for an energy development start-up company in Casablanca, Morocco called Enercorp. The experience involved extremes of both self-motivation and mentoring.

Soon after arriving in Casablanca, Prakash Venkataraman (center), another Leadership Rice student, and I were handed the keys to a car and an apartment and were left to take total control of a solar energy development project for the following three weeks. In contrast, one weekend, Andy Karsner (right), our mentor and founder of Enercorp, took Prakash and me on a hiking trip in the mountains near Marrakech during which we talked about business, education, marriage, and the “meaning of life” in general. My diverse but challenging summer helped shape my future direction and gave me valuable skills which will assist me in finding success.

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**Houston Public Library**

_Student: Sara-Ann Logan   Mentor: Carter Roper_

As a student just finishing my freshman year, I didn’t know what to expect from the “summer.” Summer had always been a time to sleep-in and socialize. I had held jobs before, but none could hold a candle to my position this summer with the Houston Public Library Building and Planning Division.

I tried to prepare myself to be placed at the bottom of the hierarchical structure, but I was pleasantly surprised.

Nowhere else could a freshman architecture student intern have gained so much practical design and construction knowledge. Now where else could I have been trusted with the procurement and preparation of library improvements and minor construction projects. No where else could I have made such useful connections.

I had fun learning, through the Library and through Leadership Rice, the value of holding a job for which one is well suited and loves doing.

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**Hill & Knowlton**

_Student: David Chen   Mentor: Sonya Harris_

I learned a lot about public relations from Hill and Knowlton. I learned all about the process of letting the public know about the business and products of a client. I helped in training clients to deal with the media; I assisted in creating press packets for newly-formed companies that journalists would rely on for information.

Because of my background in art, I was often the go-to person for page layout and general “spruce this up” areas. I was given free reign in creating a packaged look to presentations.

They allowed me to conduct a hands-on training program on graphic design. The reactions to the seminar were fantastic. Everyone who attended was enthused with all things related to graphic design — at least, that’s what they told me. ... I just thought, “it must be a success... everyone was still awake at the end.” The company has enough faith in my abilities that they have retained me for future design work.

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**Baylor Teen Clinic**

_Student: Amelia Pousson   Mentor: Dr. Peggy Smith_

As a child of the eighties, I was instructed to practice “condom sense,” to “just say no,” and to “be cool — stay in school.”

I heeded all these catchy slogans, and ended up safe, sound, drug and disease free, at Rice, in the Leadership Rice program.

And abruptly, through the medium of the Baylor Teen Health Clinics, I found myself face to face with all of my peers who hadn’t heard or hadn’t known about all of those catchy slogans, and who were in situations vastly different from my own.

The young men and women aged twelve to twenty-two who came to the clinic were pregnant, parenting, infected with any one of a variety of STDs, neglectful of their fate, in and out of school and everything in between.

The clinic offered them access to health care that would have otherwise been completely unavailable, and made a huge impact in keeping these young men and women healthy.

This experience has made me an invested participant in the future of public health and women’s health.

I will never forget the work that I had the opportunity to do here. Nor will I forget my mentor, Dr. Peggy Smith (director of all six teen clinics) who helped me make sense of it all, and helped to mold my unfocused desire to ‘help’ into solid academic and clinical results. That is concrete proof of a incredibly full and valuable summer.

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If you are interested in mentoring a Rice student in the Summer Mentorship Experience, please contact Leadership Rice at 713/348-4750. Or visit our website: [www.rice.edu/leadership](http://www.rice.edu/leadership/)

The Hershel and Hilda Rich family are founding sponsors of Leadership Rice.
UNIV 309: Creating & Managing Change

By Evelyn Chang

UNIV 309 is a class designed to develop leaders through instruction on teamwork, application of team-work principles to a group project, and an assortment of lectures on leadership in different fields. I had heard the lecture were excellent and looked forward to the class, but I knew little about the team-building component.

On the first day, Mr. George Martinez, founder of Chrysalis Enterprises, announced, “I will teach you to create and to manage a powerful team.” Privately, I wondered, “What does he mean by a powerful team? How can anyone claim that it can be taught?” And when I started attending the assigned team meetings for the group project, I desperately hoped he would teach it soon. I had never been part of such a diverse group of personalities, leadership styles, and opinions. When we had to make group decisions, almost every discussion ended in gridlock.

Throughout the course, Mr. Martinez taught us key phrases to give us a common language so that we could communicate the problems we saw in the team structure. This helped us to work together more effectively. One week, he taught us the word “declaration” and instructed us to verbally “declare” our commitment to the team. “What good would that do?” I thought. “How corny.” Right before the end of our next team meeting, we went around the table, pledging our commitment to each other and to the project. Amazingly enough, through continual assessment of our level of commitment and of our discussions of the team’s progress, the mood of the meetings changed from one of helpless frustration to one of determination and purpose. I know that personally, my motivation to attend the meetings had changed. Instead of forcing myself to go for the sake of a class, I found myself not wanting to let the rest of the team down. Consequently, we pushed ourselves to work hard, researching literature, meeting with experts, polishing details of our proposal, and preparing the presentation. Gradually, we became a cohesive team; we all deeply cared about the vision of project and about the group itself.

Maybe Mr. Martinez was right. Teamwork can be taught. As it turns out, the team-building component was what made the class an incredible experience for me, giving me tools applicable for working in any team context. Our UNIV 309 team is the most powerful team I have ever been a part of, and I hope it will be one of many we will create.

Diversity Training at HISD In the coming year, we plan to implement a program for high school students in the Houston Independent School District called “Students Leading Change.” This semester-long program will allow students from racially-segregated neighborhoods to interact with those of other races and ethnicities. We hope this will lead to better understanding and reduced racial friction.