

**From:** [president@rice.edu](mailto:president@rice.edu) on behalf of [trustees@rice.edu](mailto:trustees@rice.edu)  
**Subject:** Letter regarding Founder's Memorial  
**Date:** Tuesday, January 25, 2022 12:31:58 PM

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To the Rice Community:

The Board of Trustees is engaged in a broad consideration of our university's history and how our aspirations of today, including that Rice be a diverse and inclusive institution, can best be reflected in our campus, our community and our programs. Over the coming months, as we continue to communicate with the community, we anticipate announcing a number of measures that we as a research university will take to contribute to the evolution of a more diverse society that provides opportunity for all.

As part of that series of initiatives, today we announce our unanimous decision about the course of action to be taken with regard to the Founder's Memorial and the Academic Quadrangle.

The [Task Force on Slavery, Segregation and Racial Injustice](#) convened by President Leebron has issued two initial updates on its work: "On Research about Slavery" and "On the Founder's Memorial." The Board of Trustees formed a working group to consider the issues raised by these reports, and in particular recommendations regarding the Founder's Memorial and more broadly the Academic Quadrangle. More recently, the Student Association (SA) adopted a resolution on Nov. 29, 2021 ("SA Resolution") calling for, among other things, redesign of the Academic Quadrangle and relocation of the Founder's Memorial.

The board working group solicited input from the Rice community, including students, faculty, staff and alumni, through an online portal after the release of these reports. The working group read through the 218 responses previously gathered by the Task Force in Spring 2021 and publicly posted in July 2021, and the over 1,200 responses submitted to the online portal this fall. In addition, the working group met with the chairs of the Task Force, with several experts, the executive committee of the Association of Rice University Black Alumni, and several other groups of leaders in the Rice community. It found all of this information and these exchanges extremely helpful. At the Board of Trustee meeting in December, the working group reported on its work, acknowledging the many perspectives and often strongly held and opposing views that have been expressed across the Rice community.

The update "[On the Founder's Memorial](#)" reported on Task Force research and discussions regarding the location of the memorial to William Marsh Rice. In particular, it noted that "The Task Force was unanimous that the Academic Quadrangle needs bold change." Similarly, the SA resolution urged that the Founder's Memorial not remain the "singular focal point of attraction" of the area. The Board of Trustees embraced the recommendations, as explained below. The Founder's Memorial will be placed in a new location within the Academic Quadrangle to achieve these goals.

The board believes that the founding gift of William Marsh Rice is an essential landmark in our history and his philanthropy should be recognized. In addition, it acknowledges the founder's entanglement with slavery, which is in stark contrast to the modern vision and values of our university. The board believes retaining the image of the founder in the Academic Quadrangle best allows the university to convey the story of our university, including our rejection of the racial inequities of its beginnings. It intends for the Academic

Quadrangle to both fully acknowledge the history of our founder and founding, and to mark and celebrate the important evolution and growth of our university over time.

Importantly, we have concluded that the Academic Quadrangle can be reimagined to be more welcoming, to be an active heart of the university, and more completely represent our history, our achievements and our values. Accordingly, and with the desire to have the Rice community move forward together, the Board of Trustees will immediately inaugurate a design process, as called for in the second recommendation of the task force, to select a distinguished architect or landscape designer to reenvision the Academic Quadrangle. The board intends for the new design to have a welcoming space at its center, and sites around the quadrangle for artworks or features that prompt ongoing reflection on and appropriate celebration of our history and aspirations.

One of the spaces reserved in the quadrangle for recognition of our history will be a new location for the Founder's Memorial, and this space will include information about the founder, including his ownership of enslaved people and his broader entanglement with the institution of slavery. A new monument of similar prominence in terms of both location and visibility will commemorate the beginning of the integration of the university a half century after its racially exclusionary opening. Because we believe most of the university's history is still in its future, eventually other monuments representing and celebrating other milestones and aspirations will be added.

We anticipate that the design process will occur in the spring of 2022 with a final design to be recommended to the board at its May meeting. Physical modifications to the Academic Quadrangle will occur as soon as practical thereafter. Once the Academic Quadrangle is broadly redesigned by the architect, we will conduct a competition for a new piece of artwork to commemorate the integration of the university. Over time, as previously noted, additional artworks or memorials will be added.

The third recommendation of the Task Force stated "that the statue of William Marsh Rice known as the Founder's Memorial should no longer be used as an iconic image of the university in its publicity." The administration of the university had already begun this process prior to the release of the Task Force report, and its implementation is now complete. The trustees support the administration's decisions in this regard.

We believe that these actions accomplish four important goals: they 1) acknowledge the central role of William Marsh Rice in establishing our university; 2) recognize that after nearly a century of change, the memorial to the founder ought no longer be the singular, dominating feature of the Academic Quadrangle; 3) create additional opportunities to recognize more fully our history and signature times in our evolution; and 4) reconfigure the Academic Quadrangle to be an engaging and active space for our community.

More important than the changes contemplated for the Academic Quadrangle are the present and future actions we take to assure that our university is a welcoming environment for all.

Much work remains to be done both to assure that our university is the diverse and inclusive institution in all aspects that we aspire to, and that we as a research university contribute to the evolution of our broader society in the same direction. Recognizing how valuable the communication with the broader Rice community has been as part of this process, we will continue that communication through a variety of mechanisms as we move forward together.

We thank all who participated in this process. It has been a process of careful research, of

