



As chair of the Department of Mathematics, I join with my colleagues in welcoming you to the NSCI Owl Together which because of ongoing concerns with COVID-19 replaces the traditional homecoming and parents' weekend. Of course, nothing can replace being physically on campus and enjoying the pleasure of simply strolling around and taking in the beautiful campus. However, I hope I can pass along some developments in the department even in the midst of the global pandemic.

Most of our undergraduate course offerings are now fully online, although a few in person "hybrid" sections do still meet. The challenges in dealing with this change in content delivery cannot be overstated, but overall faculty and students have done an amazing job in adapting to the new reality, which looks likely to continue at least until the next academic year.

Even in the midst of the global pandemic, we continue to have regular seminars and colloquia via zoom, thereby at least trying to maintain exposure of faculty and Ph.D students to cutting edge research.

The pandemic has also not stopped our efforts to support and advertise undergraduate research. This weekend undergraduates from Rice and around the country (and indeed further afield) will take part via zoom in The Gulf Coast Undergraduate Research Symposium which will showcase research by undergraduates in a variety of disciplines, including Mathematics where we have 20 students participating in 17 scheduled presentations.

This year, the department has added two new tenured faculty members: Full Professor Chris Leininger and Associate Professor Chelsea Walton, emphasizing the department and school's commitment to recruit top faculty to the department. Out of thirteen tenured and tenure-track faculty we now have 3 women faculty. In addition Betul Orcan has been appointed to an Assistant Teaching Professor position in the department, and she was part of a group of Rice faculty leading a multi-institutional team which received a \$1.4 million grant from the National Science Foundation for a collaborative project studying persistence and retention of STEM teachers across the nation.

Professor Mike Wolf, who has been at Rice University since 1988, was recently appointed to the Milton B. Porter Chair of Mathematics, a well-deserved honor for Mike's research excellence and longstanding commitment to many aspects of the mission of the university.

The Department of Mathematics has always had a long tradition of research excellence, and this was again exemplified by the recent news that former Edgar Odell Lovett Professor of Mathematics, Roger Penrose received the Nobel Prize in Physics.

Finally, in these challenging times, it would be remiss of me not to mention the impact of recent, and past, tragedies and deaths resulting from systemic racism and discrimination in our country. Like many departments we are in the process of taking stock of what we can do eliminate the discrimination and racism that permeates society. As a department we are committed to fostering an atmosphere of respect, collegiality, diversity, inclusion, equity and sensitivity.

In conclusion, thank you for your interest and support of Mathematics at Rice!

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