

Merger is worth the risk

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Regarding "Baylor merger is risky for Rice" (Page B17, Sunday), although I agree with the analysis some of my colleagues presented regarding why a Rice-Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) merger would be risky, I disagree with their conclusions.

I am a Rice alumnus and have been on the Rice faculty for almost 45 years. During those years, I have seen Rice change enormously and improve in teaching, research and service. When I came on the faculty in 1965, I was part of a change in Rice from a regional teaching institute to an international research university. There was opposition to this change from the faculty, alumni and community because of the possibility of a de-emphasis of teaching and the negative effects of accepting federal research funding. Rice did change and, from my perspective, for the better. Not only has Rice developed cutting-edge research programs, the curriculum and quality of teaching are much, much better.

Later Rice created a music school that emphasized musical performance. Once again the faculty (including me) pushed back, saying that music theory or music history would be in keeping with Rice tradition, but not performance. The enormous success of the Shepherd School of Music and the contributions it has made to the life of Rice, Houston and the nation show it was the right thing to do.

The creation of the Jones Business School and the Baker Institute for Public Policy also brought opposition, yet they too have been major contributions to the students, faculty and citizens of our city and world.

Personally, I think Rice is at a fork in the road similar to those described above. I share the concerns that my colleagues and others have about the possible merger, but I believe it is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Houston is the fourth-largest city in the U.S., with a world-class medical center. Biology, bioengineering, medicine and health care are going to be top priorities for decades, perhaps forever. We at Rice and BCM can possibly make an impact that will benefit humanity.

There are size problems and cultural problems, but the major concern that I share with many of the Rice faculty is the financial impact that a merger would have on Rice. One of the duties of a board of trustees is the financial health of the institution. If the Rice and BCM boards approve a merger, they have the obligation to make it work, and that means no significant negative impact on Rice or BCM. If that cannot be done, then we should not merge.

In the future, I don't want people to look back at the opportunity that we were unwilling to go for.

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