Dear all,

Letter to the Rice CS Community 2018

I wanted to wish you, your families, and loved ones a Happy New Year, and to give you a brief recap of some of the department's accomplishments in 2018 and a quick look at important events that will take place in 2019.

We currently have about 80 PhD students, 130 MCS students, and 550 majors; that is, we have a department with over 750 students—about 10% of the Rice student population. I believe this makes us, by far, the largest department on campus.

• Among our top accomplishments for 2018 was welcoming four new Assistant Professors: Nathan Dautenhahn, Tasos Kyrillidis, Kostas Mamouras, and Todd Treangen. These outstanding young faculty have already enriched our department by expanding the research areas and course offerings, by providing new opportunities for student mentoring, and, more generally, by injecting much energy into the department. Together with Professors Ang Chen and Risa Myers, who joined us in 2017, we have added six new faculty members in the last two years. Students: Please take their new courses and talk to them about their research; they are all eager to recruit students.

• Speaking of new faculty, we will be interviewing faculty candidates in Spring 2019 for two more open positions at the ranks of Assistant and Associate Professor with start date of July 2019. I ask everyone to participate in the process by attending the candidates' lectures, learning about them, and talking to them. I very much hope that in my next summary, a year from today, I will be able to report on a successful 2019 faculty search.

• Recognitions to our faculty members included, but were not limited to, naming Moshe Vardi as University Professor effective tomorrow (January 1, 2019). This is the highest academic rank that a university bestows upon a faculty member, and is reserved for very few faculty members (Moshe is only the eighth faculty member in the history of Rice to be named University Professor). Professor Lydia Kavraki was inducted into the Academy of Athens, the world's oldest academy.

Assistant Professor Anshu Shrivastava was named among Science News' Top 10 Young Scientists to Watch. Drs. Mack Joyner and Risa Myers were appointed Assistant Teaching Professors effective tomorrow (January 1, 2019).

• CS faculty members won six new NSF grants in 2018, totaling about $5.5M. This is a great accomplishment, especially given the tough funding situation.

• Our proposed Online Master's of Computer Science (OMCS) program was approved and will launch in Fall 2019. Two dedicated instructors have already joined the program: Drs. John Greiner and Mike Fagan. We are now searching for three more instructors to join the program. Ms. Robin Lee also joined our administrative staff and she will serve as the OMCS Administrator. The approval of this program would not have happened without the great work and efforts by Prof. Scott Rixner who will also serve as the Faculty Director of the program. I thank him on behalf of the department.

• In terms of alumni and outreach activities, Ms. Carlyn Chatfield and I held events for our alumni in Austin, Sunnyvale, San Francisco, and New York. These events built on the successful ones we held in Austin and Seattle in 2017. Professors Swarat Chaudhuri, Keith Cooper, Anshu Shrivastava, and Dan Wallach joined us for the California events, where Swarat and Anshu gave outstanding short talks about their work. Events are already planned for 2019 in Austin, Seattle, Sunnyvale, San Francisco and New York.

A record 126 people (faculty, staff, and students) from Rice attended this year's Grace Hopper Celebration Conference (GHC), out of whom 90 were from our department. I am very proud of the effort and energy invested by our department to increase diversity. We are making very good progress in this regard, but much work remains to be done and we are committed to it. The evening before the GHC activities kicked off, our department hosted a CS Career Spotlight and Mixer in Duncan Hall. 16 employers, and 45 engineers and recruiters joined us for the event, and 425 students attended! The idea of holding the event was first proposed by Carlyn and our own alum, Jesse Rothstein, CTO and co-founder of ExtraHop Networks. A

Alum Clement Pang (BSCS 2007) gave Rice University a generous gift to create a permanently endowed fund and requested that it be designate as the Devika Subramanian Graduate Fellowship Fund, in recognition of Devika's great impact on Clement and his success. The generosity and involvement of Jesse and Clement, as well as the unprecedented attendance at the Career Spotlight and Mixer, are examples of the importance of our outreach activities and the

significance of building a strong network of our community members.

Our alumni continue to do great and be recognized, and that includes (this is by no means an exhaustive list)

• Rebecca Parsons (PhD 1992; co-advisors: Corky Cartwright and Matthias Felleisen) won the 2018 Technical Leadership Abie Award given by Anitab.org.

• Alum Kuldeep Meel (PhD 2018; advisor: Moshe Vardi) received the 2018 Ralph Budd Award for the best doctoral thesis in the School of Engineering. Kuldeep is now the Sung Kah Kay Assistant Professor of Computer Science at the National University of Singapore.

• Mohit Aron (PhD 2000; advisor: Willy Zwaenepoel) received the Outstanding Engineering Alumni Award for his outstanding professional achievement and service to society.

• Aaron Hertzmann (BA 1996) was named in the 2018 Class of ACM Fellows. Named to the same class as well was Sandhya Dwarkadas who received her PhD from ECE in 1993, but collaborated extensively and wrote several papers while here with CS faculty members (I counted at least 25 publications co-authored with CS Professors Alan Cox and Willy Zwaenepoel).

• Our external department review is scheduled for January 29-31, 2019. A distinguished committee of professors and industry innovators will visit the department to review it and provide feedback on what we are doing well and where we can improve. This event is not open to the public, though the committee will be meeting with representatives from the student body. This review has implications on our entire community.

• In May 2018, we had our first ever pre-graduation celebration for all CS graduates, and it was a success. We have scheduled a pre-graduation celebration for all our December 2018 and May 2019 graduates in the BA, BS, MS, MCS, and PhD programs. The event will take place in the evening on Thursday, May 9th, 2019, at the Cohen House (the faculty club). Graduates: Please mark your calendars; we would love to see you one last time before you leave Rice and go on to do great things and be busy with life. Each graduate is also welcome to have two accompanying guests.

2018 was a great year for our department, and here's to even more success in 2019. I am very thankful to everyone in our department and to our leaders, Provost Marie Lynn Miranda and Dean Reggie DesRoches, for their strong support of our department. Very special thanks go to our dedicated, professional administrative staff: Karen Lavelle, Carlyn Chatfield, Melissa Cisneros, Annepha Hurlock, Robin Lee, Cintia Listenbee, Deedra McFadden, Sherry Nassar, Beth Rivera, and Lena Sifuentes. These are the people who work hard, mostly behind the scenes, to ensure everything runs smoothly in the largest department on campus. Personally, my life as a Chair is easy due in large part to their dedication and hard work. I thank them on behalf of the entire Rice CS community.

Wishing you good health, happiness, and success in 2019 and always, Luay