

Rice-Israel Exchange Part of Premier University's 'Second Century' Vision

Formalization of initiative coincides with launch of first Jewish studies degree offered in Houston

By MICHAEL C. DUKE

Nanotechnology, computer science, political science, conflict resolution, economic game theory, psychology and Jewish history – all of these are academic fields of study that recently have seen collaborations between Rice University scholars, researchers and students, and their counterparts from Israeli universities. These collaborations have taken place under the auspice of a new initiative at Rice – the Rice-Israel Initiative for Scholarly Exchange and Collaboration – which is part of the acclaimed Houston university's "Second Century" vision.

Opened in 1912, Rice, today, is one of the top-ranked U.S. universities, known globally for its pioneer applied science programs. Quality of campus life at Rice also consistently is ranked among the best in the nation.

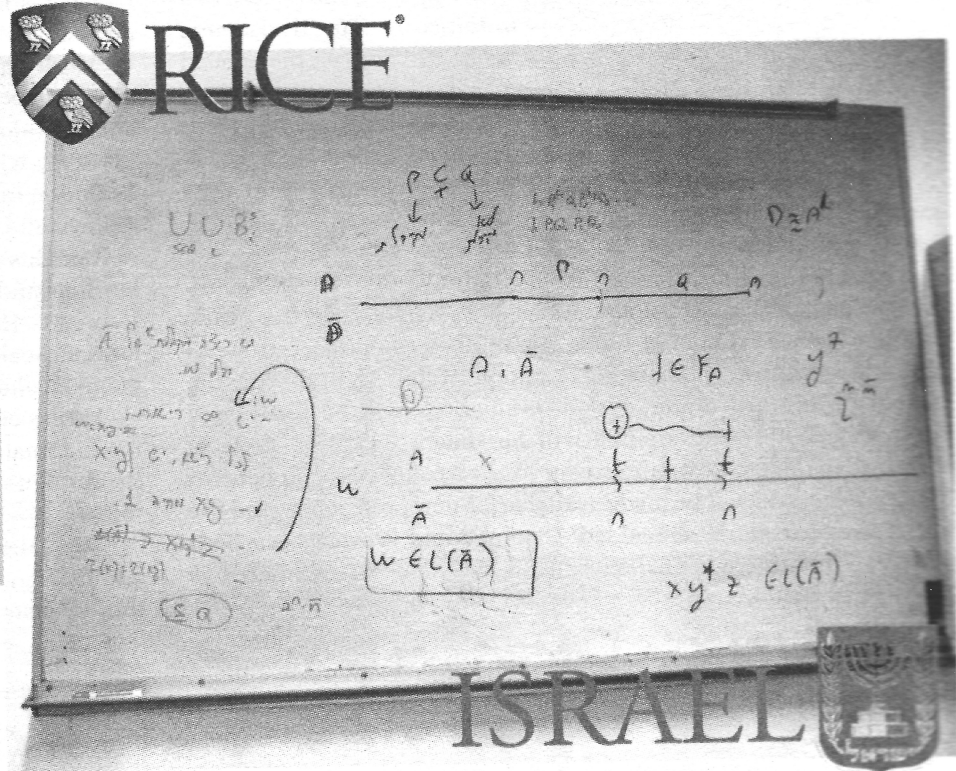
"Rice has a growing interest in having more international engagement," explained Dr. Eugene H. Levy, Rice University provost and professor of physics and astronomy. "We see real opportunity and value in increasing, substantially, the engagement that Rice has with, and in, Israel, in a number of ways."

The Rice-Israel Initiative promotes faculty exchanges and collaborative research projects between Rice and seven leading Israeli institutions of higher learning: Bar-Ilan University, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, Tel Aviv University, University of Haifa and the Weizmann Institute of Science. In addition to faculty exchanges between Rice and its Israeli partners, the initiative promotes post-doctoral and graduate-level research and teaching opportunities, along with undergraduate study abroad programs, summer internships and cultural exchanges.

The initiative is open to all academic fields of study. The exchange is intended to be two-way, with Rice scholars and students going to Israel, and Israeli scholars and students coming to Rice.

"The principle concept [for the Rice-Israel Initiative] is that Israel, over the last 60 years, has built some of the world's very distinguished universities, and has a very impressive tradition of education, scholarship and research in areas that, in some instances, very much overlap with what we do, and other areas that are complementary to what we do," the Rice provost pointed out. "So, we see extraordinary value in increasing the scholarly exchange – students, faculty, researchers and post-docs – with Israel, in the extent that we can. And, the opportunities are open-ended."

The institutionalized Rice-Israel Initiative was built upon a foundation of several previous years of individual collaborations and exchanges between Rice faculty and Israeli scholars. The decision to create a formal Rice-Israel scholarly exchange was born out of visits to Israel made by Provost Levy, and Rice's president, Dr. David



Computations using a combination of Greek symbols, English and Hebrew, provide illustrative evidence of the Rice-Israel Initiative for Scholarly Exchange and Collaboration. Rice's Dr. Moshe Vardi and Hebrew University's Dr. Orna Kupferman recently worked together to address problems related to fault-analysis of computer microprocessors.

Leebron, in summer 2007. President Leebron and Provost Levy both have championed the Rice-Israel Initiative, as well as other scholarly exchanges between Rice and countries in Asia and Latin America. Scholarly exchanges between Rice and Israel, in particular, are "natural" and "easy," owing to the fact that Israel is home to universities and research facilities that are among the world's most technologically advanced, Provost Levy noted.

"There's been a fair amount of exchange between Rice and Israeli universities in the past, but the amount of exchange and collaboration has been small, compared to what it could be," he said. "We'd like to see more purposeful engagement. So, we've created a clearly articulated program of promoting exchange, both scholarly and cultural. Our goal is to provide opportunities for such exchange that are natural and self-sustaining."

Debbie Diamond, director of human resources initiatives in Rice's development office, serves as the point-person for the Rice-Israel Initiative. She explained that "increased internationalization" is a focal point of Rice's "Vision for the Second Century," and is a hallmark of the Rice-Israel Initiative.

"The board of trustees adopted a 10-point strategic vision in December 2006," Diamond explained. "This vision puts Rice on a path to promote increased internationalization, increased diversity and increased education of different cultures and religions, which will help enhance our research endeavors at Rice, and enrich our

student experiences.”

Adding that Rice’s global partners will enjoy similar benefits, Diamond said, “In order to be leaders for the future, we have to be global leaders. We have to understand cultures, religions and languages different than our own, in order to be effective leaders. International exchanges and collaborations with Rice will help make our students effective leaders for the future.”



Provost Dr. Eugene H. Levy

By making the Rice-Israel Initiative open to all academic fields, and not just the applied sciences, for which Rice is internationally-recognized, the Houston university hopes to grow and improve upon its

social sciences, humanities, business and music programs, as well, Diamond pointed out.

The initial goal of the Rice-Israel Initiative is to raise \$2 million, which will support collaborations and exchanges for five years. Having a dedicated pool of funds streamlines the project-proposal and funds-granting processes. Diamond stated that during the initiative’s initial five-year period, evaluations will be made, and additional endowment funding will be sought for those projects that display the greatest promise for long-term success and benefit; funding, also, still will be made available for new projects beyond the initial five-year mark, she added. Diamond and Provost Levy both indicated that the only challenge facing the Rice-Israel Initiative is resource limitations.

In designing the framework for the Rice-Israel Initiative, inventory was taken of exchanges and collaborations already underway between Rice and Israeli scholars. Eighteen such projects were recognized, including an innovative mentorship program, created and led by Dr. Moshe Vardi, an Israeli-born computational engineering professor at Rice. Vardi’s “bottom-up” approach, via mentorships, has served as a blueprint for the Rice-Israel Initiative.

“There’s an overall push today in academia to globalize, build strong connections around the world, not just with China or India,” Vardi began. “Israel is leading the way in many fields, particularly hi-tech. So, having relationships with Israeli institutions is very beneficial to Rice. Building strong relationships between Israeli institutions and Rice is what this [Rice-Israel Initiative] is all about.”

Vardi has built personal relationships between Rice and Israeli universities by serving as mentor to visiting graduate students and post-doctoral researchers. He began his mentorship program in 1994, with Orana Kupferman, then a Ph.D. student from the Technion in Haifa. Today, Dr. Kupferman is a professor of computer science and engineering at Hebrew University. Kupferman returned to Rice this past fall semester to work with Vardi. She was joined by her husband, Dr. Raz Kupferman, a mathematics professor, also at Hebrew U. He spent the semester working in Rice’s Smalley Institute for Nanoscale Science and Technology, alongside Rice chemical and biomolecular engineering professor, Dr. Matteo Pasquali.

Vardi’s current mentorship is with Dr. Yoad Lustig, who is studying automated programming. As a post-doctoral student of Orana Kupferman’s at Hebrew U, Lustig is a “second-generation mentor.”

Over the past 15 years, Vardi has mentored two post-doctoral and four grad students. “If you asked Israelis in the early 1990s if they’ve heard of Rice, not many had. But today, they have,” Vardi said.



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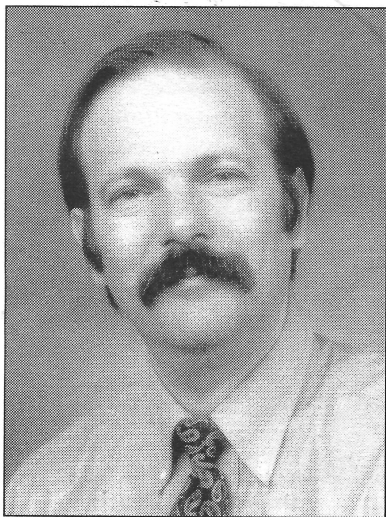
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Dr. Moshe Vardi

it far easier to secure funding for my mentorships and exchanges," Vardi remarked.

In addition to Raz Kupferman, the Smalley lab has benefitted from other Rice-Israel exchanges. Technion chemical engineering professors, Dr. Ishi Talmon and Dr. Yachin Cohen, have been working with Rice's Pasquali to develop carbon nanotube fibers for use in more efficient power transmission lines. Similarly, Rice graduate student, Nicholas Parra-Vasquez, who studies under Pasquali in the Smalley lab, recently traveled to Israel and worked on nanoparticle imaging and analysis at the Technion.

This past March, three Technion scholars, Dr. Dershon Elber (computer science), Ph.D. candidate Shirly Miniowitz-Shemtov (medicine) and undergraduate student Boaz Albaranes (electrical engineering), traveled to Houston and met with Rice's new Israel advocacy student group, Owls for Israel. The Rice-Israel Initiative

observed. "The more Israelis we have visiting Rice, the more ambassadors Rice has in Israel and around the world."

Besides hard science, Vardi's mentorships offer cultural exchanges, including allowing visiting Israeli scholars, and their families, to hone their English language skills. Vardi is scheduled to take a six-month sabbatical to Israel next year, and hopes to bring two or three Rice students with him. "Having an official Rice-Israel Initiative allows us to systematize the process, which makes

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coordinated the meeting with the Houston chapter of the American Society for Technion – Israel Institute of Technology.

Rice psychology professor, Dr. Jim Dannemiller, has a decades-old collaboration with Ben-Gurion University's Dr. Judy Auerbach. Dannemiller, who studies the development of visual attention in infants, lectured on the Ben-Gurion campus in 2006. Dannemiller's more recent work on genetics has led to further collaborations with Auerbach, who specializes in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Other fruits of the Rice-Israel Initiative include the visiting professorship of Dr. Ranan Kuperman, professor of political science at the University of Haifa. Kuperman is the inaugural Joan and Stanford Alexander Visiting Israeli Professor, and is teaching undergraduate courses at Rice this year on the Arab-Israeli conflict and international political science. He is working with Rice political science professors, Dr. Rick Wilson and Dr. Richard Stoll.

A recent exchange of special note is Dr. Oded Hod. A second-generation Holocaust survivor, Hod spent two years at Rice, 2006-2008, studying computational quantum chemistry with Rice chemistry professor, Dr. Gustavo Scuseria. Hod's research at Rice, accelerated by the advanced computer technology in Scuseria's lab, helped the Israeli post-doc to secure a faculty position at Tel Aviv University, where he now works.

Venturing outside the lab during his stay at Rice, Hod teamed up with an interfaith, international group of students, both graduate and undergraduate, to establish an annual Holocaust Awareness and Remembrance program on the Rice campus. Hod worked with Rice's Boniuk Center for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance, the Houston-based Israeli Consulate to the Southwest and Holocaust Museum Houston to create engaging, multimedia programming that teaches the important lessons of the Holocaust to future generations.

The formalization of the Rice-Israel Initiative coincides with the

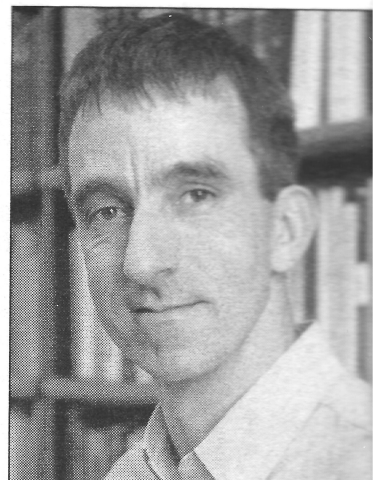
approval of a new Jewish studies minor at Rice. The program, scheduled to launch in fall 2009, will offer the first degree in Jewish studies at a Houston university. Rice's Jewish studies minor will be a free-standing, interdisciplinary program in the humanities department. Its areas of focus will include history, politics, Hebrew, art, religion and Israel.

The Jewish studies minor was spearheaded by Rice professor of biblical studies, Dr. Matthias Henze, and Rice professor of Judaic studies, Dr. Gregory Kaplan. The minor has received strong support from the Rice administration, faculty and students. According to Henze, the new Jewish studies minor and the new Rice-Israel Initiative will benefit from each other.

"I see great opportunities," Henze explained. "My interest in the Rice-Israel Initiative, through coordination with the Jewish studies program, is active outreach to the greater Jewish community."

Local and guest professors teaching in the Jewish studies minor and scholars visiting Rice as part of the Rice-Israel Initiative, will be available to give lectures and programs off campus through partnerships with greater Houston's Jewish communal organizations, schools and synagogues, Henze indicated.

"There will be many ways, and many opportunities, for Rice and the Jewish community to interact in new ways," he said. "The new Jewish studies minor is the first major step toward building a more robust Jewish studies program at Rice. The minor is a small piece of a much larger mosaic."



Dr. Matthias Henze

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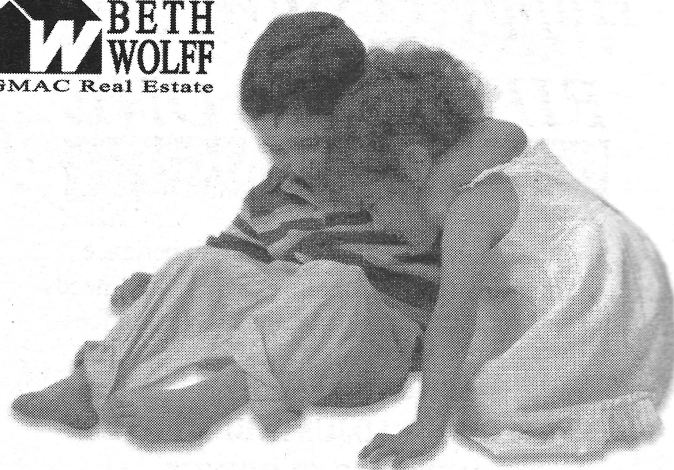
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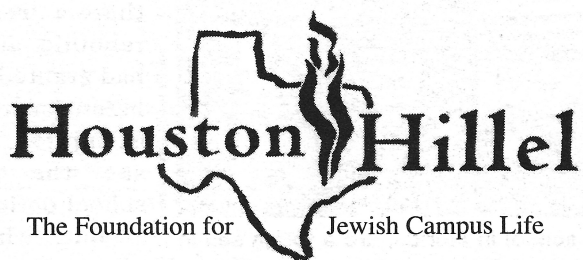
As Rice's fledgling Jewish studies program grows in the future, and new courses are added, new faculty members will need to be hired. The university also could see the creation of a new endowed post-doctoral fellowship program in Jewish studies, which will help put Rice on the map for scholars, both seasoned and rising, in the Jewish studies field, Henze noted.

By hosting visiting Israeli scholars and students, and sending Rice scholars and students to Israel, through the Rice-Israel Initiative, Rice's Jewish studies program, and the Rice campus, itself, will benefit from the academic and cultural experiences that such opportunities provide, Henze concluded.

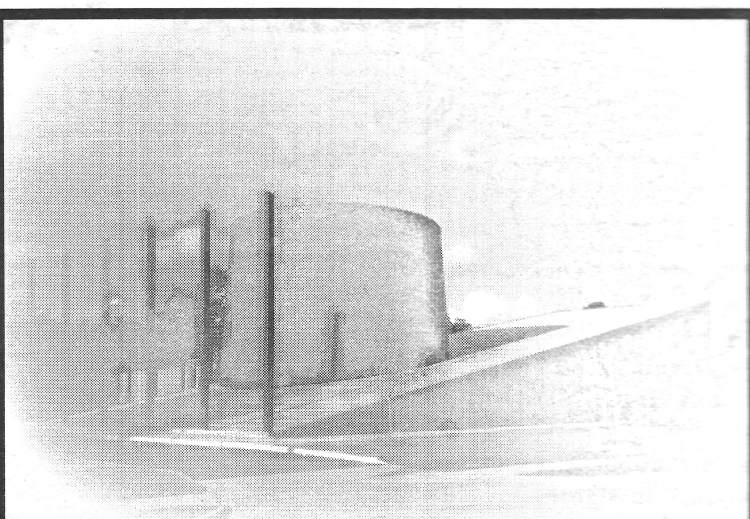
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For information about the Rice-Israel Initiative for Scholarly Exchange and Collaboration, call Debbie Diamond in the Rice development office at 713-348-4619 or email ddiamond@rice.edu. ☆

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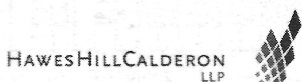
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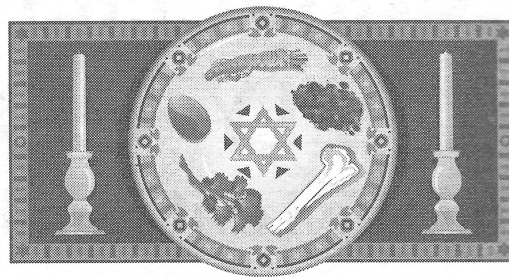
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