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STORYTELLING: Yehuda Sharim is giving refugees and immigrants an opportunity to tell their stories about starting over in Houston.

A Voice for Refugees

When Yehuda Sharim came to Rice University three years ago, he realized that Houston was the home to the largest refugee community in the country. Being a thoughtful person, he asked himself what was the responsibility of an intellectual to these people who often live invisible and traumatic lives?

His answer was to give them a face and a voice so that others could see the struggles they've endured while resettling in a new city. He did this by creating a film about their lives. Simply titled "we are in it," the documentary chronicles the lives of five refugees who came from Burma, Togo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq and Mexico.

"I wanted to humanize their experiences," said Sharim, who is a Post Doctoral Fellow in Jewish Studies and a fellow in the Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

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Rice Undergraduates Serve Judicial Internships

This spring, 12 Rice undergraduates served semesterlong internships with judges in Houston. Six federal court judges and six Texas appellate court judges hosted interns for this program.

Over spring break, the interns took a break from their duties in chambers and traveled to London. There, the students observed court proceedings, took a private tour of Parliament, had lunch with a High Court judge in Middle Temple Hall, toured the U.K. Supreme Court, and met with the Law Commission and other legal professionals to enjoy a comparative international experience.

In Houston, the internship program gave the students a broad and practical introduction to what lawyers do in court and how judges and the law clerks

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“I wanted to empower these communities by creating some kind of awareness about them,” Sharim said, “and to address the most urgent issue of our generation, namely, the refugee crisis that is affecting countries all over the world.”

Sharim spent two and half years filming and interviewing more than 50 people all over the greater Houston area. He interviewed people, often for hours, in their apartments, in parking lots or wherever they felt comfortable. He taped more than 200 hours of video and then edited it down to a little over two hours, focusing on five refugees.

Nancy Adossi, one of the five featured

incredibly necessary because it dispels the preconceived notion that all refugee and immigrants are alike,” Ramirez said. “This is not about politics; it’s about humanity. People need to be aware that immigrants and refugees are part of Houston and the United States.”

Sharim created the documentary, in part, because he too has experienced the refugee life. His parents emigrated from Iran to Israel, where he grew up. Although his situation was not nearly as difficult as that of the refugees he has encountered in Houston, he said he sympathizes with their struggles.

In some ways, Sharim continues to be

information and survey data.

Last year, the United States admitted 68,000 refugees. Harris County receives more refugees than any other county in the US, though the exact number of refugee who remain living in the city is uncertain. In recent years, the largest groups of new arrivals have come from Bhutan, Burma, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Cuba.

In creating the movie, Sharim received financial contributions from Rice’s Program in Jewish Studies, the Chao Center for Asian Studies, the Kinder Institute and the Center for Civic Leadership, and he received help from faculty, staff and students.

Rice junior Vincent Nguyen volunteered as a research intern for the documentary. “This project holds a special place in my heart because of how closely my family can identify with the refugee experience,” said Nguyen. His family members were “boat people” who escaped Vietnam after the war.

The documentary is scheduled for completion this summer and will be screened at Rice in the fall. “we are in it” has been submitted to several film festivals around the world, including those in Toronto, New York, Chicago, Venice and Mexico.

José Aranda, department chairman of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American studies, said that Sharim, has opened his eyes to the refugee problem in Houston. “The dislocation of people because of war, economic upheaval or natural disasters is now a common occurrence,” Aranda said.

“Yehuda has given faculty, staff and students at Rice a unique opportunity to engage in one of the most vexing social issues of our times, something that is both global and local in character.”

► For information about the film, please see <http://weareinitfilm.com>.

I wanted to empower these communities by creating some kind of awareness about them and to address the most urgent issue of our generation, namely, the refugee crisis that is affecting countries all over the world.

— **Yehuda Sharim**

in the documentary, came from the tiny country of Togo in West Africa. She traveled with her mother and brother to join her father, who was already living in Houston. Although undocumented, the 26-year-old is working on her doctorate at the University of Houston in health science.

“This film gave me the opportunity to be heard. This is especially important when you are a refugee and you want someone to know that you are hurting, but you don’t have an outlet to express that grief,” Adossi said. “Before I met Yehuda, I had never told my story to anyone.” Adossi praises Sharim for his approach in getting people to open up. “I like his interviewing style. He tries to get to know you so that you are comfortable in telling your story.”

Another person in the film is Carolina Ramirez, who is from Mexico, undocumented and a national coordinator for United We Dream, an immigrant youth organization that advocates for fair treatment of immigrants. “This film is

a migrant, traveling the world and earning degrees from various universities, including a B.A. in English literature from Hebrew University of Jerusalem; an M.A. in performance from Goldsmiths, University of London; an M.A. in performance studies from New York University; and a Ph.D. in culture and performance from the University of California at Los Angeles.

When he arrived in Houston in 2013, Sharim said he didn’t know much about the refugee community, so he started contacting resettlement organizations and enlisted the help of Rice alum and Russian immigrant Yan Digilov ’11, who works with the Firestarter Group, a nonprofit organization that helps philanthropists manage their charitable giving. The two began working together to document the lives of refugees and created “Houston in Motion: Empowering Houston Migrant and Refugee Communities,” which is a multi-faceted project that combines video footage, oral histories, educational events, research

Internships *Continued from Page 1*

and other staff who work with them, think about the questions they are asked to resolve. The interns performed legal research, prepared draft opinions, observed trials and oral argument, and more.

The internships were designed to provide students an opportunity to gain insight into whether a legal career is right for them and provided an opportunity to continue developing the critical thinking, careful reading and good writing skills that will help them prepare for law school, other graduate study or the workplace. Participation in the internship also encouraged students to continue to develop their understanding of one of the most important parts of our government.

In Houston, the students also had the opportunity to meet with legal professionals outside the judiciary. Visits with assistant U.S. attorneys, federal public defenders and U.S. Marshals Service and others gave the students additional information about legal careers and the positions that support the operation of our courthouses.

The interns came from a variety of majors, including political science, chemical engineering, civil and environmental engineering, sociology, history and sport management.

The program was organized at the federal courts by U.S. District Judge Lee Rosenthal, at the state courts by appellate justice Evelyn Keyes, and by Rice's Office of the Dean of Undergraduates and Student Judicial Programs. Spring 2016 was the second year the internships were offered, and they will be offered again in spring 2017. ■

LISA ZOLLNER

Director

Student Judicial Programs



High School Students Prepare for College

About 60 students from local middle and high schools were at Rice June 6–10 for the sixth annual Texas Diversity Council Summer Youth Program. Most of the students came from lower-income households, and the program was designed to provide lessons and activities that will equip these students for a successful transition into college and completion of their degree. The program included writing workshops, SAT/ACT preparation classes, presentations on financial aid and the admissions process, leadership activities, career development sessions and a tour of Rice's Oshman Engineering Design Kitchen (OEDK). Multicultural Community Relations in the Office of Public Affairs hosted the event.

A COLLEGE-MINDED SUMMER: Students in the Texas Diversity Council Summer Youth Program observe a demonstration at Rice's OEDK.



Reaching Out With Research

Rice science and engineering graduate students and postdocs shared their research projects and educational experiences with students from Houston-area middle and high schools. Eighteen Rice researchers were invited to visit nine science classrooms in Houston Independent School District schools and one from Pasadena.

The program, Grad Student STEM Share, was coordinated by the Rice Office of STEM Engagement (R-STEM) and funded by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies through a grant from Grad Starter.

The public school teachers hoped the program would continue and expand. “I am appreciative that researchers came to our school,” said one teacher. “Not only did they inform the students about their

research, but they also motivated the students to become interested in the science field. I was glad that they spoke to the students on what it is like managing their time for their studies and their families. The students were highly impressed and talked about the presentation all day!”

In response to asking, “What was the most valuable thing about Grad Student STEM Share?” another teacher answered, “Everything, especially grad students Ph.D. program details and their demos, as they showed my students how scientific concepts are applied in the world outside the classroom.”

While the program was beneficial for the young students, it also positively impacted the Rice researchers. Olawale Lawal, a graduate student in materials science and nanoengineering, said that, “It’s a platform for grad students to expose the younger generation to opportunities they may not be aware of. This is absolutely necessary.”

In addition to enabling a rewarding



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— **Olawale Lawal**

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RESEARCH GETS PERSONAL: Rice postdocs and graduate students present their research and provide demonstrations to science students in area schools.
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outreach opportunity, Grad Student STEM Share broadened the awareness and communication skills of the researchers. Kevin Li, a bioengineering graduate student, said the program, allowed him to convey his research to a larger audience.

Mario Bencomo, a graduate student in computational and applied mathematics, said he felt the impact for him was, “Presenting my research in an appealing and accessible manner to middle and high school students. It puts one’s work into a different perspective.”

Overall the graduate students saw Grad Student STEM Share as a valuable outreach program that they will continue to support and anticipate will grow in the coming years. ■

CARRIE OBENLAND OWENS

STEM Education Postdoctoral Fellow
Rice Office of STEM Engagement

Rice Donates Children's Books From Around the World

Patients at Texas Children's Hospitals are now able to read books from around the world thanks to a generous donation from Rice's Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS).

The books were collected in 2012 as part of Rice's Centennial Celebration. The goal was to collect 100 children's books from all over the world to commemorate 100 years of Rice, as well as to celebrate the rich international diversity of the university. The entire campus was invited to participate, and as a result, 106 books were donated from 42 countries and in 27 languages, ranging from Mandarin to Finnish to Quechua.

After the centennial, the collection was housed in OISS for visitors to browse, and a selection of the books also was on display in Fondren Library during the International Education Week celebration.

A few years ago, OISS asked Rice students for suggestions on what to do with the collection. One student suggested that the books be donated to Texas Children's Hospital. OISS agreed that it would be

special for young patients to find a book in their own language while they are being treated in a foreign country. The Pi Beta Phi Patient/Family Library at Texas Children's Hospital felt the same way, and the library staff members were truly excited to receive the donation.

"We are indeed grateful for the generosity and interest of all who participated in collecting, labeling and donating these books," a spokesperson for the Pi Beta Phi Library said. "It is truly a blessing to be able to touch so many lives through the wonder of books, while at the same time helping fulfill the mission of Texas Children's Hospital — to provide the finest in patient care, education and research."

The books were delivered to the library April 3. It was perfect timing because International Children's Book Day, takes place every year on April 2 to commemorate the birthday of Hans Christian Andersen, the Danish author of classic fairytales like "The Ugly Duckling," "The Princess and the Pea" and "The Little Mermaid." ■

ANDY MERETOJA

International Program Administrator
Office of International Students and Scholars

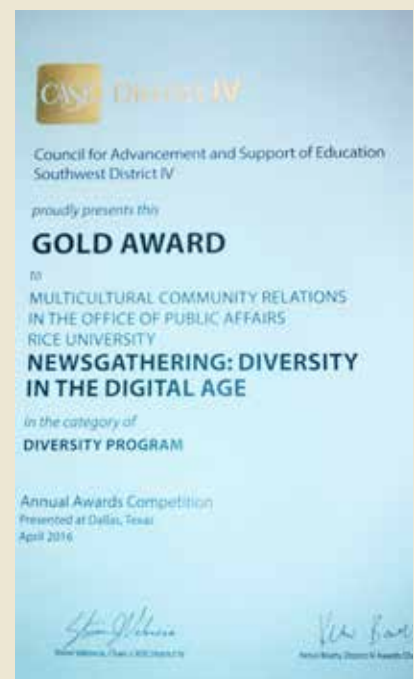


STORIES FROM AFAR: Members of Rice's OISS office and the Pi Beta Phi Library at Texas Children's Hospital proudly display the international books collected to celebrate the university's centennial.

Public Affairs Wins Gold and Silver Awards

Multicultural Community Relations (MCR) in the Office of Public Affairs won a Silver Award in the national Circle of Excellence competition sponsored by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) in the diversity programs category for its conference, *Newsgathering: Diversity in the Digital Age*. The same conference also was honored with a Gold Medal in the 2016 Accolades CASE regional competition.

The conference, held at Rice last fall, was organized by David Medina, director of MCR; Jan West, assistant director of MCR; and Ty Williams, former events specialist for MCR. Seven journalism groups also helped organize the daylong conference: Houston Association of Black Journalists; Society of Professional Journalists; Houston Association of Hispanic Media Professionals; Asian American Journalists Association, Texas Chapter; Houston Press Club; the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, Houston Chapter; and El Gato Media Network. ■



Improving Park Quality for Houstonians

Is the quality of city parks an environmental justice issue? According to an interdisciplinary group of Rice University students, the answer is, yes. The students recently published an article that highlighted just that — the importance of integrating community voices into public-park planning.

Their research was conducted as part of the Houston Action Research Team (HART) program, housed in the Center for Civic Leadership, which brings together Rice students with city offices and community organizations to address issues and challenges facing Houston and its residents.

Since 2014, the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD) has collaborated with the Center for Civic Leadership (CCL)



MAKING PARKS BETTER BY COLLABORATION: Members of the 2015 HART team and CCL present PURE to help analyze the quality of Houston's parks.

to assess and improve the quality of public parks. The HART program has been guided by Alan Steinberg, associate director of Houston programs and partnerships; Libby Vann, director of programs and partnerships; and faculty adviser Robert Stein, the Lena Gohlman Fox Professor of Political Science at Rice.

“The Center for Civic Leadership designs programs to be collaborative and mutually beneficial for Rice students and community partners,” said Caroline Quenemoen, executive director of the CCL. “HART brings together students from different majors and years to work on a single project. Students with diverse academic skills research questions of critical concern to Houstonians and in turn offer recommendations and solutions that will shape quality of life for all residents.”

The collaboration with HPARD and Rice students began with a park usage survey. HPARD conducted the web-based survey and CCL analyzed the results, which revealed that survey respondents were predominantly high income, non-Hispanic whites living on the west side

of Houston, within or immediately outside the 610 Loop.

In 2015, a HART team designed and conducted a targeted survey of park users who were initially underrepresented — predominantly African-American and Hispanic residents of east, northeast and southeast areas of the city. The team consisted of students Sarah Hodges-Copple '16, seniors Emily Jacobson and Lucy Matveeva, and Tanvi Sharma '13.

Results from this second survey showed that users primarily wanted enhanced maintenance and security as well as new and improved parks facilities and amenities, including playgrounds and bathrooms. Additionally, the spring 2015 survey found that user preferences varied across parks, but that as park quality increased, users were more concerned with increasing or improving connections between parks and neighborhoods.

Data analysis led by graduate sociology student Kevin Smiley revealed the importance of integrating community voices into park planning. This finding combined with data from the spring 2015 survey was subsequently used as part of a peer-reviewed journal article titled “More Inclusive Parks Planning: Park Quality and Preferences for Park Access and Amenities,” which appeared in the February 2016 issue of *Environmental Justice*.

In 2015, a HART team developed an evaluation tool, the Parks and Urban Recreation Evaluation (PURE) that HPARD staff could use to assess park quality.

PURE consists of two components: a score sheet for use onsite at the park and a data-intensive component, which takes accessibility, crime and safety, and other factors into account. When completed, the two components are combined to generate a holistic measure of park quality. The HART team consisted of seniors Ben Jones and Rachel Galton and recent graduates Liz Stanfel '16 and Danielle Whyte '16.

In spring 2016, a HART team created and fielded the Park Quality User Assessment (PQUA) to identify user opinion value of planned park renovations. The team consisted of juniors Dylan Dickens, Emily Foxman, Alex Hayes and Rachel Ngo and graduate Danielle Whyte.

This summer, a new HART project will be conducted during the 2016–17 academic year, which will address the relationship between parks and flood control in Houston. ■

ALAN STEINBERG

Associate Director of Houston Programs and Partnerships
Center for Civic Leadership

STEM Discussion Extends to Middle Schoolers

How does one become an engineer? Four Rice engineering students answered that question when they spoke to students from Marshall Middle School as part of an HISD program in which area college students visited classrooms and talked about what it means to major in a STEM field.

The Rice students, Ciara Simmons-Pino '16, Samuel Soyebo '17, Mickyle Stanbury '17 and Dessy Akinfenwa '19, are all members of Rice's National Society of Black Engineers chapter. Simmons-Pino graduated this May with a B.S. in civil engineering. Soyebo and Stanbury are both seniors, majoring in mechanical engineering, and Akinfenwa is a sophomore in chemical engineering. Each spoke in a different classroom about their paths to college, their area of study and how they chose their major. They also took questions from the students.

"I was thinking about when I was that age, the things that shaped me," said Simmons-Pino, about the event. "I thought about how I came to be on this path, and if I can do that in some small way for someone else, I really wanted to be able to say, 'You can do this.'"

The kids definitely have a lot of questions, and who better to answer questions about the college experience than college students?

— Samuel Soyebo

"They were really interested in homework," said Simmons-Pino. "Did we have it, did we have to do it, what happened if we didn't do it. I told them that when you're in college, you want to do homework, because you're studying something you love. That really resonated with them."

"The kids definitely have a lot of questions, and who better to answer questions about the college experience than college students?" said Soyebo. "Forums like this allow the kids to begin thinking about college and the next steps they need to take in order to set themselves on a trajectory to college." ■

HOLLY BERETTO
Marketing Specialist
George R. Brown School of Engineering



ENGINEERING EXCITEMENT : (Top) Members of Rice's National Society of Black Engineers display the owl sign. (Bottom) Marshall Middle School Students with Ciara Simmons-Pino.

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AT LARGE

David D. Medina, Director, Multicultural Community Relations, Office of Public Affairs



INSIDE THIS ISSUE: Ciara Simmons-Pino '16, a member of Rice's National Society of Black Engineers, discusses her college experience with Marshall Middle School students. See story on Page 7.

