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**A MENTOR TO MANY:** Karen Capo wants her students to develop a love for good literature and become lifelong learners.

**Inside:**



**INSIDE: CAMP MEETS CLASSROOM:** Houston teachers took an active approach in learning mathematics at a summer camp at Rice University. See story on Page 6.

## An Unconventional Approach to Teaching Children the Joys of Reading

Karen Capo grew up an avid reader, and with each book that she read, her imagination expanded so that she envisioned a world that offered endless possibilities.

The world she envisions today is a place in which all children can read and write and are motivated to want to learn more. “We want to develop children who are curious, passionate learners who are opened to the joy of discovery,” said Capo.

Capo is director of School Literacy and Culture (SLC), which is part of the Glasscock School of Continuing Studies at Rice University. SLC provides professional development for early childhood teachers through programs that emphasize reading, writing, culture, child development and research.

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## Network Will Seek Solutions to City Challenges

Rice University and the city of Houston are joining forces with 20 cities and 25 universities from across the country in an effort to solve urban problems.

The partnership, MetroLab Network, will use technology and analysis to research, develop and deploy solutions to the problems facing urban infrastructure, city services and civic engagement. The network will focus on common challenges facing cities and develop shared, scalable solutions that can be deployed across the network.

The MetroLab Network will be organized and operated by a management team, initially led by Carnegie Mellon University.

“One of Rice University’s ongoing priorities is engagement with the city of Houston, and the MetroLab

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Over the last 24 years, SLC has built nine early literacy programs, including Writing and the Arts, the Summer Institute for Teachers, and parent and teacher workshops. But according to Capo, the best-known programs are the Classroom Storytelling Project, the Rice Oral and Written Lab (OWL) and the Early Literacy Leadership Academy (ELLA).

The Classroom Storytelling Project is a yearlong course that develops teachers to be instructional leaders in early literacy. In this program, teachers encourage students to share their personal stories, which the teachers write down. The students then act out the stories in the classroom. “When the students see the story brought to life through drama, they gain more

learners.

“We want students to develop a love for good literature, build their self-esteem and become lifelong learners and risk takers,” said Lori Espinoza, a teacher in the OWL Lab. “At the beginning of the school year, students are reserved and reluctant to talk, but by the spring, they are assertive and want to talk about what they are doing.”

The lab has two teachers, but parents are also invited into the lab to help their children. Every six weeks, parents learn about a project they can create at home that will help advance the student’s reading skills. For example, they can create play scenarios using signs that children see everyday such as McDonald’s and Toys

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**— Lori Espinoza, OWL Lab teacher**

information about what is happening,” Capo said. “The vocabulary and comprehension become real and powerful.”

The program, Capo explained, is designed to give children a voice. The children, whose ages range from 2 to 7, discover that they have something meaningful to say when asked to share their stories. This in turn, she said, motivates students to learn more. “We know that if children are learning something that they are interested in, they are more engaged.”

Following this philosophy is the Rice OWL Lab that is housed at the Gabriela Mistral Center for Early Childhood in the Gulfton area. The center is part of the Houston Independent School District and works only with prekindergarten students. Within the center, the OWL Lab is an ancillary classroom serving 400 students. During their visits to the lab, students learn about storytelling, dramatize stories, hear quality children’s literature, and learn to sing songs and chant rhymes — all as a way to develop their English language skills. Almost 90 percent of the students are second-language

“R” Us. “We see the excitement on the parents’ and children’s faces when they bring their family projects back to school,” said Debbie Paz, associate director for early literacy and bilingual programs.

Brenda Ortiz has participated in the OWL Lab parent engagement sessions with two of her children. “If the program didn’t exist, I would not have known how to read to my children,” she said. Her older son now is in the first grade and has become an avid reader of computer and dinosaur books.

The OWL Lab was so successful that SLC decided to expand that concept into a program that would reach more teachers, and thus they established the Early Literacy Leadership Academy (ELLA). Sponsored by a gift from Phillips 66, ELLA is a three-year intensive program that develops teacher leaders in early childhood literacy. The program includes seminars at Rice, visits to exemplary early childhood classrooms such as the Rice OWL Lab, mentoring, summer and winter institutes and an opportunity to teach in SLC’s Creative Writing

Camp.

In all her programs, Capo said, SLC intentionally brings together teachers and administrators who represent the diversity of Houston. They come from public, private and charter schools to learn best practices in early childhood literacy.

Literacy has long been a passion of Capo’s. “My parents put a high value on education,” she said. As a child, she read books from public libraries and books that came in the mail for her parents. Her reading led to an interest in education and eventually to pursuing a degree in psychology with a minor in human development and family studies at the University of Houston. Four years later, in 1988, she



received a master’s from UH Clear Lake in early childhood education with a teacher of young children certification. Thereafter, Capo worked in various schools as a kindergarten and first-grade teacher and as a curriculum director and coordinator. She came to Rice in 1991 to join SLC and became a mentor to many teachers.

“She is a phenomenal leader,” said Espinoza. “She always gives constructive feedback and always asks thoughtful questions. Because of her, I want to take more risks. I want to try harder to master my materials and engage my students.”

And that is what Capo envisions: a world where all teachers go beyond conventional methods to create students who are readers and critical thinkers. “Unconventional wisdom,” Capo said, “is at the very heart of what we bring to teachers of the greater Houston area.”

**DAVID D. MEDINA**

Director  
Multicultural Community Relations  
Public Affairs

Network is an ideal way to build on our existing efforts,” said Rice President David Leebron.

“The time is right for a great research partnership that will help Houston — and other cities as well,” said Bill Fulton, director of Rice’s Kinder Institute for Urban Research, which will be the network’s main point of contact for the Rice and city of Houston partnership. Experts at the Kinder Institute will play a role in putting the available data into context and generating ideas about which urban problems that data can help address.

“Rice University is one of this nation’s finest institutions of higher learning,” said Houston Mayor Annise Parker, who is a 1978 graduate of Rice. “Some of the best research minds around are available right at our front door. This partnership will allow us to tap into that wealth of knowledge to gain answers that will help us make informed future decisions in key areas.”

During the 2015–16 academic year, each city-university partnership will focus on three research projects to be completed by the end of the year. The city of Houston-Rice University projects will be:

• **IMPACT OF HOUSING CHANGE ON NEIGHBORHOODS AND FAMILIES**

Significant anecdotal evidence indicates that in Houston, as in other large cities, families of modest means are being displaced by gentrification in neighborhoods close to the downtown area and being pushed to locations farther away from jobs and transit. Using city and county permit data on construction, demolition and substandard housing, Rice researchers will document the characteristics of housing and housing change, in particular

“Rice University is one of this nation’s finest institutions of higher learning. Some of the best research minds around are available right at our front door. This partnership will allow us to tap into that wealth of knowledge to gain answers that will help us make informed future decisions in key areas.”

— **Houston Mayor Annise Parker ’78**

Houston neighborhoods, and compare them with current and changing neighborhood demographics. This research will be used to inform future housing and infrastructure policy in the city.

• **IMPACT OF STREETLIGHTS AND NEIGHBORHOODS**

Using geographic information systems data about the location of streetlights and billing data about streetlight usage, Rice researchers will map streetlights in Houston and also map and analyze patterns reflecting when streetlights are in use or out of service. The streetlight data will be examined against data associated with neighborhood characteristics, crime, traffic accidents and other factors. This research will be used to inform the city’s decisions about where to locate new streetlights and how to prioritize streetlight repair.

• **BIKE-SHARE ANALYSIS**

Using data provided by B-cycle, which operates Houston’s bike-share system, Rice researchers will conduct an analysis of bike-share usage and accessibility of bike-share station locations. Houston trends will be compared with trends in Austin, Fort Worth and Denver using data provided by B-cycle. This research will be used to assist the city of Houston and B-cycle in decisions about future locations of bike-share stations as well as improved management and operation of the bike-share system.

For more information on the MetroLab Network, visit [www.metrolabnetwork.org](http://www.metrolabnetwork.org).

**AMY MCCAIG**

Senior Media Relations Specialist  
Public Affairs





## Journalism Conference Inspires and Educates

Multicultural Community Relations in Public Affairs joined forces with seven journalism groups to organize NewsGathering: Diversity in the Digital Age, a conference that took place at Rice University Oct. 2–3, with as many as 250 people attending.

Some of the best journalists in town volunteered their time to offer advice and knowledge to young, aspiring journalism students, as well as to professional journalists seeking to hone their skills.

of Giant.” Award-winning film director Hector Galan introduced the movie and participated in a question-and-answer session moderated by Minerva Perez, former Channel 13 anchor and now freelance journalist and author.

On Saturday, the conference offered 10 professional workshops, several student workshops, a career development clinic, and 38 panelists and presenters, who represented a variety of news organizations. The workshops included “Using Social Media to Build Your Brand,” “Storytelling on Deadline,” “Bilingual Reporting,” “Immigration” and “The Relationship

Dallas Morning news reporter Dianne Solis, Houston Chronicle senior editor Maria Carrillo, Houston Chronicle reporter Monica Rhor, Houston Chronicle managing editor of Hispanic products Aurora Losada, Houston Chronicle/La Voz senior reporter Olivia Tallet, Telemundo anchor Martin Berlanga, Univision news director Martha Kattan, Channel 2 senior Web editor and producer Nakia Cooper, national entertainment reporter with Houston Style Magazine Rebecca Briscoe and media blogger Mike McGuff.

The luncheon keynote speaker was Houston Chronicle metro columnist Lisa



**THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE:** Presidents from six journalism groups talked about the goals of their organizations.

“The conference definitely transformed my idea about journalism and inspired me to continue with this career,” said Alejandro Ezquerro, a student at Houston Baptist University who attended the conference.

Conference participants were: 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.

The opening reception was held at the Rice Media Center, where participants enjoyed food and drinks and mariachi music, followed by the screening of the award-winning documentary, “Children



Between Journalism and Public Relations.”

“The conference was filled with a variety of important topics that were professionally discussed,” said Bianca R. Montes, local government reporter with the Victoria Advocate. “I walked away with a lot of great ideas on how to implement them on my beat and in my newsroom.”

Among the array of speakers were Channel 13 anchor Art Rascon, Houston Chronicle sports columnist Jerome Solomon, Channel 13 reporter Miya Shay,

Falkenberg, who was introduced by KPRC anchor Bill Balleza. Falkenberg talked and answered questions for nearly an hour about stories she wrote that eventually led to her winning the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for commentary.

Many people left the conference with a sense of renewal and hope. “As an educator, it was very inspiring to hear so many stories and learn from the experts,” said Sara Gonzales, journalism adviser at Cypress Lakes High School in Cy-Fair ISD.

“I have come back with a wealth of knowledge for my students. They are so excited about everything I have told them thus far.”

**DAVID D. MEDINA**

Director

Multicultural Community Relations  
Public Affairs

## Kinder Institute Seeks Answers to Urban Problems

More than half the world's population lives in urban areas. Within 35 years, an estimated 66 percent of people will call urban areas home.

At the Kinder Institute, we're charged with advancing understanding of the most critical issues affecting Houston and other urban centers. We focus on topics such as urban planning, transportation, public health, financial disparity and education. The movement toward cities has made our work more important.

A critical part of our mission is outreach. We want to have an impact on Houston and other cities. If our work isn't disseminated to the public — so that policymakers and citizens can act on it — our efforts are for naught.

To do that, we have two primary ways of communicating with the public: our website and our events.

This spring, I joined the Kinder Institute to run our revamped Urban Edge blog, accessible at [urbanedge.blogs.rice.edu](http://urbanedge.blogs.rice.edu). In the summer, we redesigned the site. Since its debut July 13 through the end of October, the website garnered over 40,000 page views. To keep visitors engaged, our blog features interviews with policymakers and researchers, analysis of current events, guest commentaries, videos, interactive graphics and a new podcast series. New content is published at least once a day.

Importantly, we also feature work that is done outside the Kinder Institute. We strive to highlight and elevate interesting work on cities, regardless of the source. Our audience includes journalists, academics, policymakers and everyday citizens who have an interest in all things urban.

As part of our blog policy, we allow any news media outlet to republish our articles. So far, they've appeared in the Texas Tribune, the Houston Chronicle's Outlook section and the popular Gray Matters

section of the Houston Chronicle's website. In some cases, our stories have been the best read on the day they run in [HoustonChronicle.com](http://HoustonChronicle.com).

This year, Whit Bones, our events and web specialist, also led a redesign of the main Kinder Institute website, [kinder.rice.edu](http://kinder.rice.edu). From its redesign debut at the start of May through the end of October, the website garnered nearly 50,000 page views.

We also have a steady stream of events featuring leading urban thinkers. In 2015, we've welcomed about 2,800 guests to 30 events such as public lectures, academic conferences and other meetings. Separately, through the Kinder Institute's speaker's bureau, our experts — namely founding director Stephen Klineberg — have spoken to more than 100 organizations about the demographic and public opinion shifts occurring in the Houston region.

Our event highlights this year included a public lecture by Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett, who discussed how his community shed its title of "America's Fattest City" by focusing on pedestrian and transit improvements. The Kinder Institute hosted a major conference for school district and university personnel from across the nation who are partnering on cutting-edge education research. And in September, we co-hosted a forum where mayoral candidates debated the city's health priorities.

Working with the public is a major part of the Kinder Institute's mission, and we're excited to expand our reach in Houston — and beyond. To learn more about our upcoming events, email [wbones@rice.edu](mailto:wbones@rice.edu). For information on the blog, contact me, Ryan Holeywell, at [rholeywell@rice.edu](mailto:rholeywell@rice.edu).

**RYAN HOLEYWELL**

Senior Editor

Kinder Institute for Urban Research



**ALL THINGS URBAN:** The Kinder Institute is on a mission to have a positive impact on Houston and other cities.

## Rice Bridges International Helps Students Acclimate

Incoming international students must adjust to a series of situations that can often be stressful. They must cope with a different language, learn to maneuver a new university system, make friends and survive in a strange city. But more than 60 foreign students at Rice University got a head start this fall on making the adjustment, thanks to Rice Bridges International.

The group builds bridges for international students from Rice and UH by offering them city tours and social gatherings that foster friendship and an understanding of the Houston culture. The tours, which have been offered for the past 12 years, end with a party. This year, Bridges organized nearly 100 volunteers from the Houston area to lead the tour buses and serve food at the party.

As the buses of students pulled up at a country club after the tour, volunteers formed a high-five gauntlet. They cheered as the students came through and got in line for food. After lunch and swimming, the students gathered for a short program that included an interactive rendition of “Deep in the Heart of Texas.” They had been prepped during

the bus ride to clap at the right time and sing the refrain. Lots of prizes were offered, and one lucky student walked away with a laptop. Before going home, they gathered for a group picture that ended in a surprise water balloon fight.

Rice Bridges International is a faith-based student organization that seeks to welcome and offer resources to international students, graduate and undergraduate. The resources can be broken down into three essences: service, social and spiritual. From picking students up at the airport to helping them buy a car, Bridges is there to serve.

As for social gatherings, Bridges offers a welcome party and events throughout the year for all students, international or not, to connect. The events range from dinners in Chinatown to camping trips. Volunteers outside of Rice also help by hosting students for meals or inviting them to celebrate holidays together.

In the spiritual sphere, Bridges provides opportunities for dialogue about worldviews and spirituality among people of diverse backgrounds.

**JAMES BARTLETT**

Rice Bridges International

## No. 1 Camp for Teachers

The Rice University School Mathematics Project (RUSMP) had its busiest summer ever with offerings for both teachers and students.

In June, local mathematics teachers participated in RUSMP’s 29th Summer Campus Program. The camp was so popular that two more camps were offered the following month for elementary school teachers.

The camp in June was a rigorous three-week program that brought together 80 K–12 teachers from the Greater Houston area to The Rice School/La Escuela Rice to explore mathematics topics and enhance their pedagogical skills. This year’s focus was number and algebraic concepts across the grade levels. Teachers took part in an active approach to learning mathematics by participating in concept-based learning activities with emphasis on motivation, applications, problem-solving and technology.

An elementary teacher wrote that the program “allowed me to gain a deeper knowledge of my content and teaching strategies of mathematics. I will be able to take effective and successful ideas back to my campus that will benefit all the students in mathematics.”

The two new classes in July were also for elementary teachers. The first class focused on the base-10 system and basic operations with whole numbers. The second class concentrated on operations with whole numbers, integers, fractions and decimals. One of the participants wrote that this professional development will “mark my teaching forever in a great, positive way.” Another teacher shared that this program helped her “unpack a lot of mathematical understanding. I needed help mentally organizing different units and TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills), and now I feel more confident in my ability to use TEKS-based games and instruction.”

RUSMP also collaborated with Rice’s Richard Tapia Center for



### SUMMER CAMP WITH AN EXTRA SENSE OF CLASS:

Teachers from around Houston came to Rice to hone their teaching skills and explore mathematics topics.

Excellence and Equity and HISD to create the Tapia Math-Science Scholars (TMSS) program that was held July 6–Aug. 1. Forty HISD high school juniors and seniors stayed at Rice as they experienced college life and university-level mathematics. Students attended intensive mathematics classes presented

by RUSMP’s Anne Papanikolaou and Richard Parr, and talks by Rice University faculty and industrial leaders.

The students also worked on their own mathematical research projects and presented their results at a research symposium in the Grand Hall of the Rice Memorial Center. Juliet Stipeche, associate director of the Tapia Center, shared that the goal of the program is to “empower these students. We want to allow them to understand the resources available in these institutions.”

**SETH BERGGREN**

Rice Junior

**ALICE FISHER**

Director of Technology Applications and Integration

RUSMP



## Urban Planner Encourages People to Design Their Dream City

Fashioning buildings from plastic Easter eggs, trees from hair curlers and other discarded materials, five teams at Rice University created a model of their ideal city.

The five teams were part of a workshop led by James Rojas, an urban planner who has developed a method that engages community members in the planning and designing of their dream urban space. The purpose of this exercise is to encourage the public to become more active in deciding the future of their cities.

Rojas, who is from Los Angeles, was in Houston this summer to direct a series of workshops throughout the city and at Rice. At Rice, people from all professions took part in the activity, including city council member Robert Gallegos, city of Houston staff, practicing architects, nonprofit leaders, and staff and professors from Rice and the University of Houston.

“Houston is a loving city,” said Paul Charles, executive director of the Neighborhood Recovery CDC, as he helped explain his team’s design, which included abundant affordable housing, urban farms, bicycle paths, job centers and a lush environment with room for wildlife. Other teams’ designs included maglev trains, autonomous buses, rooftop gardens, village commons and preserved historic neighborhoods.

Rojas says very little during each session, preferring that participants speak to their own visions. At the end, however, he makes the same brief statement, “You are all city planners.” If you take the statement not as a platitude but as an actual position, as a starting point for a theory of the built environment,



**THE PERFECT PLACE:** Community leaders gathered at Rice for a workshop in how to design a dream urban space.

you can understand why Rojas crisscrosses the country, tirelessly engaging as many people as he can.

The Rice campus event and workshops in Houston were co-sponsored by the Rice School of Architecture, Kinder Institute, Rice Design Alliance and Rice’s Multicultural

**Rojas says very little during each session, preferring that participants speak to their own visions.**

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Community Relations in Public Affairs. Rojas carried out a public workshop at the Leonel Castillo Community Center in partnership with city council member Ed Gonzalez and Neighborhood Centers Inc. Students at three public schools — Wharton Dual Language Academy, Travis Elementary and Stephens Elementary — worked with Rojas as well. In total, about 250 people participated in the workshops.

Rojas often begins the workshops by asking participants to represent their favorite childhood memory. At the Castillo Center, adults and children created models showing scenes of climbing trees, walking along ditches, exploring an abandoned house with friends, digging for treasure at a Galveston beach, and other moments of intimate contact with built and natural environments.

Rojas writes that this step of recalling memories “peels away difference” while also creating a safe space for the expression of how gender, age and culture shape the experience of cities. This process informs the subsequent visions for an ideal city of the future.

When challenged to design a new park that will be adjacent to Stephens Elementary, one young girl talked about the Hispanic Christmas tradition of La Noche Buena and produced a design that covered every inch of space with flowers. Ellen Shwaller, community health and design coordinator at Harris County, took notes of this figurative vision as well as several more literal designs centered on soccer fields.

After his visit to Houston, Rojas was awarded California’s Planning Advocate Award of Excellence for 2015 in recognition of his innovative workshop methodology.

**RAJ MANKAD**

Editor

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# AT LARGE



**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:** Rice international students jump for joy as they learn to adjust to a new and strange city. See story on Page 6.

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

