March 6, 2020

Rice New Leaders,

Greetings from your Doerr Institute! We have record numbers of Rice students distributed across our 17 various programs, and our mid-term metrics show strong, positive growth among participants across the spectrum of our activities.

Due to the coronavirus, 2020 has brought us new challenges. Rice University leadership has done a great job of keeping us all informed, and we are all taking additional precautions in terms of hand sanitation, blocking coughs and sneezes, staying home at the first sign of illness, and other common-sense measures. At the Doerr Institute, we go further, and carefully analyze all of our interactions with students to ensure that nothing we do puts students at additional or unnecessary risk.

Students interact in our programs much as they do in other classroom activities at Rice—that includes our Synthesis group coaching sessions, our Catalyst multi-session workshops, our CoachRICE coach certification courses, and our community leader Excursions. These group activities will continue to meet, along with your academic courses at Rice, subject to guidance from university leadership.

Activation, our one-on-one professional leadership coaching process, is different than the group deliveries. There are 340 students, equivalent to one third of an annual class cohort, currently being coached by professional coaches from the greater Houston business community. Interactions with coaches will create almost 2,000 face-to-face, on campus conversations this semester. More than 40 professional coaches will come to campus to work. We know from repeated assessment that most students prefer face-to-face coaching. We also know that at Rice, when we directly compare the empirical results of face-to-face coaching with virtual coaching (e.g. Google Hangout, Skype, Zoom, FaceTime) we find no significant benefit to face-to-face coaching over virtual—in fact, in some semesters, virtual coaching has yielded slightly greater benefits than face-to-face. We recently finished a research project involving 50 West Point cadets who were coached 100% virtually by our team of professional coaches, and the measured impacts were impressive.

Given Activation program characteristics and the unpredictability in the spread of the coronavirus, it makes sense to us at the Doerr Institute to request that our coaches and student clients interact virtually, rather than face-to-face, for the rest of the semester. Most of you have had three sessions already. It’s unlikely that completing your remaining sessions virtually or even telephonically will degrade your ability to achieve your goals through coaching. You and your coach can choose whatever video telephonic platform you prefer to support your sessions.

We will assess our ability to return to face-to-face coaching at the beginning of our summer programs. Meanwhile, we will continue to ensure that you have access to evidence-based, outcome-validated leader development activities for the remainder of your time at Rice.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Kolditz
Executive Director

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