Dear Wiess and Hanszen Students:

As you have probably noticed, Rice’s decisions regarding the coronavirus situation have evolved as the virus has spread throughout the U.S., including in Houston. Across the nation – and in large urban centers, in particular -- the numbers of persons who are seriously ill with COVID-19 are putting tremendous strain on hospitals and the hardworking medical personnel who are caring for them.

Houston has not yet reached this point, but projections indicate that it may well happen in the days to come. As the city’s leading research university, and as neighbor and partner to the hospitals in the Texas Medical Center (TMC), Rice has an obligation to do whatever it can to help Houston stem the tide of COVID-19’s advance. This includes providing assistance to the medical center as those institutions strive to help those who have fallen ill.

As you probably saw a few moments ago, President Leebron informed the Rice community that the Texas Medical Center has asked Rice to provide housing for TMC health care workers, and we have agreed. Rice can best accomplish this by relocating all current residents of Hanszen College and Wiess College (which includes 46 students and the Residential Associates).

As a resident of one of these colleges, you are required to move to a college on north campus on Saturday, April 11. Later this week, you will be receive details on the location of your newly assigned room. While your college and room assignment is changing, you will continue to have a room and bathroom to yourself, and your new room will be appropriately distanced from that of neighboring students. On Monday (tomorrow), boxes will be delivered to your college commons for packing your belongings. You will receive a notification and further instructions from my office regarding retrieving packing materials once the boxes have been delivered. You will need to have all items in your room packed and labeled by 8 a.m. on Saturday morning. That morning, movers will arrive and will take your items to your new room. You will receive more specific instructions closer to the date of your move.

I understand and regret the inconvenience this will mean for you. This is already a very stressful time. You have my assurance that Rice will work diligently this week and thereafter to minimize the stress of this move and to continue to provide for the health and wellbeing of each of you and our community as a whole.

I also want to make clear that we are partnering with the TMC in the interest of public health. At a minimum, it will provide a safe, proximate and needed place of respite for health care professionals who, at great risk and sacrifice, are working around the clock to save as many lives as possible. Our goal is to support these deserving citizens, and to help the city’s most important hospitals be as effective as possible for the inevitable peak of the disease which is expected to occur within the next few weeks. This is the kind of preparation that other cities did not have time to make, and we are fortunate to have time to prepare.
Some of you may be concerned that by bringing health care workers onto our campus, we are exposing our students and staff to coronavirus. Please know that we are taking an extensive set of precautions to ensure this is not the case, including prohibiting those who stay in either college from moving into other parts of our campus (beyond these assigned colleges and their designated parking area).

I want to end by thanking you. You have already dealt with so much that was unexpected and unpleasant this semester, and now we are asking you do to more. It is difficult, but I hope you will see that it is the right decision. In times of national emergency, it is incumbent on all of us to do what we can to help others. I very much appreciate the part of you are playing in helping Rice be a good neighbor to everyone.

Bridget Gorman, Dean of Undergraduates