Baker Institute Civic Scientist Program: 2019–2020 Achievements and Outcomes

The Baker Institute’s Science and Technology Policy Program furthers science education and public policy through three Civic Scientist initiatives: the Civic Scientist Lecture Series, the Civic Scientist STEM Outreach Initiative, and the Civic Scientist Research program. In addition, in 2020, it started the Developing Civic Scientist Leaders program to engage young scientists in public policy.

The Civic Scientist Program is generously supported by a gift from Benjamin and Winifer Cheng as well as funding from Rice University’s Wiess School of Natural Science and Brown School of Engineering.

Lecture Series

In November 2019, Kelvin Droegemeier, Science Advisor to President Trump and Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, visited Rice University. He gave a keynote lecture to more than 200 attendees at the Baker Institute, met with Rice faculty and students, and visited a local high school to talk about being a scientist.

Developing Civic Scientist Leaders

In 2020, the program received a small grant from Rice’s Doerr Institute for New Leaders to pilot a project to engage Rice science and engineering graduate students. Ten students were selected and attended a spring course on public policy that will culminate in a trip to Washington, DC in the fall to talk with policy leaders and staff in the White House, Congress, federal agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. The group also produced a series of science policy essays: bakerinstitute.org/research/commentary-developing-civic-scientist-leaders.

Federal Science Policy Advice Research

In July 2019, the program received a National Science Foundation grant to study the White House President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST). Evans and Matthews are conducting oral history interviews with former PCAST members and creating a digital archive of PCAST materials since 1990. In addition, the program’s 2018 report was widely cited by the media after Droegemeier announced the new PCAST.
Outreach: Fall 2019 and Spring 2020

The Civic Scientist STEM Outreach Initiative brings scientists and engineers from Rice University and other Houston–based institutions, as well as nationally renowned speakers from our Civic Scientist Lecture Series, to talk with middle and high school students in the greater Houston area — with a focus on underserved communities. The initiative reached more than 1000 students in the 2019–2020 academic year despite the limitations to group gatherings imposed by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

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<th>Lectures</th>
<th>Students</th>
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<td>29</td>
<td>1081</td>
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99% of students agreed that the presentation showed that science is an important part of our society.

100% of teachers surveyed would recommend the program.

“This was amazing... This has added more interest to choosing my career. Thank you for coming!”

Student from Energy Institute High School, September 2019 (Civic Scientist: Jorge Loyo)

The Civic Scientist Program is managed by Baker Institute Fellow Kirstin Matthews with Senior Fellow Neal Lane, Scholar Kenny Evans and Research Associate Daniel Moralí

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