

Creating an Undergraduate Journal at Rice: Rice Historical Review

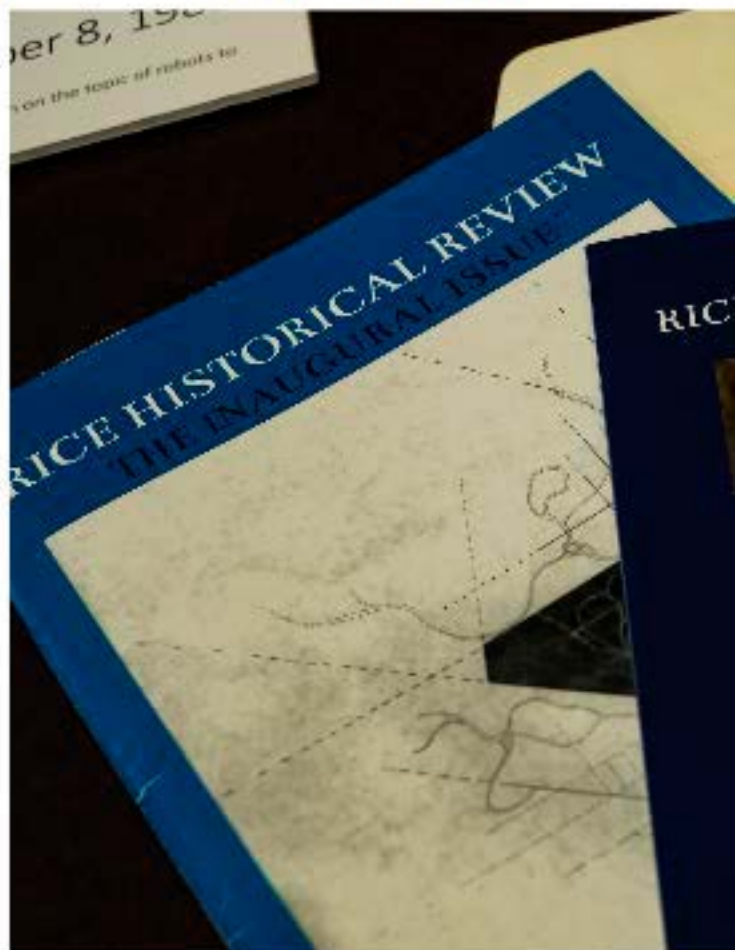
In spring 2015, Mary Charlotte Carroll '16 floated an idea to her friend and fellow history major Rachel Landsman '16: what if they started an undergraduate history journal at Rice? They had received a number of calls for papers from undergraduate history journals at other universities and wondered why Rice didn't have a similar journal. Both were excited by the opportunity to showcase the work of their peers, demonstrate the excellence of the humanities at Rice (particularly the history department) and take on a compelling challenge. As Landsman recalled, "What drew us to the idea of Rice's own journal was an interest in the editorial process: creating a vision for an entire issue, selecting papers for publication and working with our peers to make it happen ..."

While Carroll and Landsman shared a strong vision and commitment, they were a bit daunted by the challenge of creating a new journal, especially since they wanted to release the first issue before they graduated in spring 2016. As Carroll noted, "Without any real blueprint after which to pattern ourselves, we would need to find funding sources, design the journal's layout, decide on a name, create a website, solicit submissions, vote on pieces to publish, edit those pieces and shepherd the journal through the printing process. Daunting." Others on campus were eager to help them navigate such challenges. After contact with Carroll and Landsman, Lisa Balabanlilar (then chair of undergraduate studies) and Alida Metcalf (then chair of the history department) approached me about assisting with the journal. I had served as the managing editor of *Postmodern Culture* and had even written a book chapter that examined the benefits of involving students in publishing, so I enthusiastically

agreed. In addition, this collaboration seemed like a great opportunity to advance the library's goal of supporting new approaches to scholarly publishing. With the support of the history department, I decided to offer a course to help students learn about core concepts such as peer review and publishing ethics, give them a structure for developing the journal and make them accountable.

Beginning in fall 2015, I taught (and continue to teach) a two-hour, credit/no credit history course focused on academic publishing. So that students understand best practices in publishing and get connected to the rich publishing community at Rice, the class hosts guests such as journal editors and marketing experts. Students learn by doing — they create and circulate a call for submissions; review submissions; communicate with authors and peer reviewers; copy edit articles; design, lay out and promote the journal. Seven students participated in the founding editorial board, taking on roles such as editor-in-chief, managing editor and director of publishing. During the first year, students faced the additional challenges of defining the journal's scope, securing funding, creating a design template and picking out a name. The editorial board decided that the Rice Historical Review (RHR) would be open access, which means

that it is freely available and that its content can be reused, provided that it is properly cited. They published the first issue in April 2016, releasing it at a launch party attended by



history faculty, authors, donors and other supporters.

In reflecting on how they were able to create and publish a journal in just two semesters, Carroll and Landsman credit the contributions of the student editorial board and the support of faculty and staff at Rice. Student board members both applied existing skills and developed new ones, taking responsibility for peer review, copy editing, design, outreach and project management. Members

of the history department not only provided encouragement and advice, but also reviewed submissions.

As Landsman said, "Working with professors on the journal was such great fun — my professors weren't just teachers, but also became mentors and collaborators." By consulting with editorial staff from journals such as *Studies in English Literature*, *Journal of Southern*

board, the 2017–2018 board has no one from that initial group. But its members — now numbering nine — remain committed to the journal's founding vision even as they shape its continued evolution. This year, the journal received 35 submissions for only 6 spots, the most submissions to date. Beginning in spring 2017, the journal created podcasts in

which students and faculty discuss historical questions, crafting episodes on the "German SPD and Migrant Crisis" and "Themes in Mughal Imperial Identity," with more in the works (episodes at <https://soundcloud.com/user-176468700>). Next year the RHR plans to open up submissions to students from across the world. The RHR is also expanding its partnership with the history department and helped to promote a lecture on women's history.

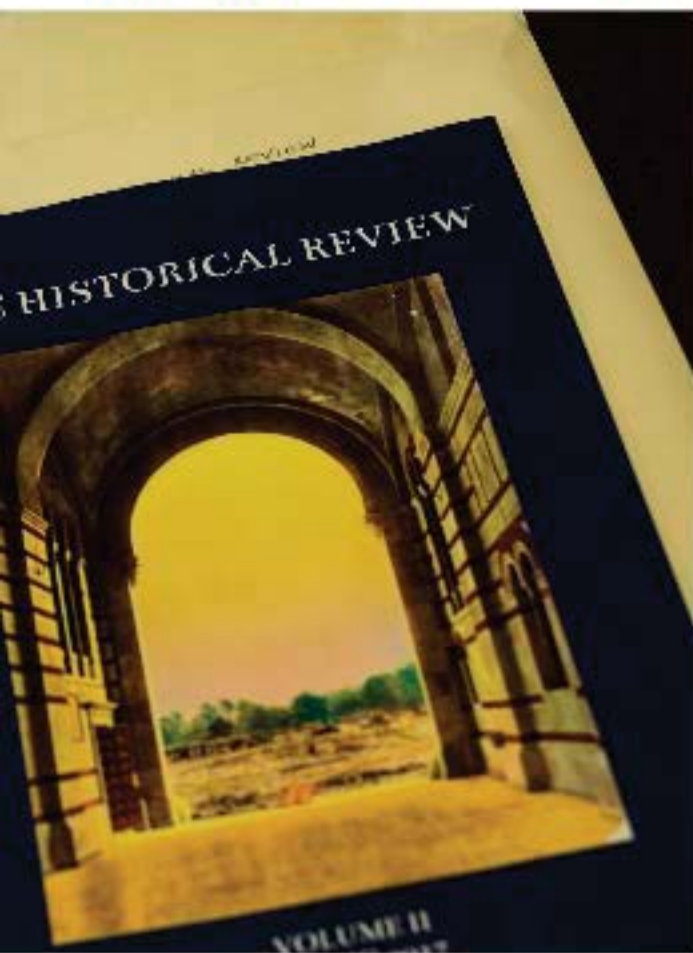
In April 2018, the RHR plans to publish its third issue, with a limited number of print copies. The journal also is available online at <http://www.ricehistoricalreview.org/>. Fondren Library archives print issues of the journal in the Woodson Research Center and digital versions in the Rice Digital Scholarship Archive (RDSA) (<https://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/92659>). Through the RDSA, Fondren also provides articles with digital object identifiers, which are stable web addresses that facilitate citation.

Through their work on the journal, students not only get the satisfaction of producing a publication that showcases the best historical writing by Rice undergraduates, but they also learn

about the publishing process, how to evaluate and improve academic essays, how to collaborate and how to manage complex projects. As current editor-in-chief Daniel Russell commented, "Working on the RHR has given me a greater appreciation for the process of academic publishing." Landsman noted, "Working with my peers to make something from nothing was such a thrill. We learned from each other, and everyone brought something different to the table." Carroll added, "As the editorial board worked together to get it off the ground, I developed both leadership and organizational skills, and when we began our first foray into the peer review process, I gained invaluable editing skills, which I continue to rely on as a law student and current member of the editorial board of the *Yale Law and Policy Review*. The RHR helped me learn how to seriously engage with academic scholarship and contributed to my decision to pursue graduate school after leaving Rice."

Carroll and Landsman said that founding the RHR ranks as a special part of their Rice experiences. As Landsman noted, by looking at an issue of the journal, "You can see the diversity of both the topics and the students, you can see how undergraduates are taking initiative and taking charge of their own learning by choosing projects about which they are passionate and you can see the incredible support the faculty provides (on the front end, by helping student authors develop their papers, and on the back end, by helping journal editors with the review process). I think now, if someone asks me why I loved being a history major at Rice, I can hand them a copy of the journal as an answer."

Lisa Spiro
Executive Director, Digital Scholarship Services



History and Cultural Anthropology, the student editorial board learned how to run a high quality journal. The Center for Civic Leadership, the Dr. Bill Wilson Student Initiative Grant and the history department funded the journal.

One of the goals of the founding editorial board was to create an enduring legacy for the university. While the 2016–2017 student editorial board included several members who were also part of the founding