Baylor College of Medicine, Rice to merge?
SciGuy blog
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My colleague Todd Ackerman got a good tip late last week about the increasing potential of a merger between Rice University, the state's top private university, and Baylor College of Medicine, one of the country's best medical schools.

Today he has a story, with some minor help from me, on the proposed merger. Such a pairing would enhance Rice's reputation, and many scientists believe an affiliation with a medical school is essential in an age when most federal science funding is devoted to biomedical purposes.

For Baylor the security of a university affiliation may be necessary to keep the medical school afloat financially. Baylor is one of only nine stand-alone medical schools in the United States.

From the story:

The negotiations came to light as talk circulates around the Texas Medical Center about Baylor's ability to balance its budget while building a hospital in an era of tight credit markets and economic malaise.

The possible strains have raised questions about the future of Baylor's president, Dr. Peter Traber. A spokesperson declined comment, but numerous sources in the Medical Center said his leadership is the subject of board discussion.

Rice and Baylor have had talks in the past, but observers said they never reached the serious stage, mostly because of resistance on Rice's part. But Rice professors said this week that President David Leebron is very receptive to the idea.

The story has titanic implications for scientific research in Houston as well as the future of the Texas Medical Center. The situation remains fluid, but several major storylines are emerging:

- What is the fate of the $415 million hospital Baylor has begun building?

- Although Baylor and The Methodist Hospital split now nearly five years ago, do the new developments potentially re-open the door to some agreement between the two institutions?
• Is Baylor financially troubled? There are rumors of this among faculty and those who closely watch the medical school, but the administration has denied being under a financial strain.

• What is the fate of president Peter Traber?

• What are Rice President David Leebron's long-term ambitions for the university? Will all of the faculty go along with his wish to substantially increase Rice's biomedical ambitions?

Posted by Eric Berger at October 29, 2008 11:45 AM