



Rhode Island School of Design Announces Creation of New Professorship in Sustainability

A generous gift helps RISD bring art and design to bear on the future of the planet



PROVIDENCE, RI (February 23, 2021) – [Rhode Island School of Design \(RISD\)](#) announces it is creating the [Houghton P. Metcalf Professorship in Sustainability](#), made possible by a generous gift to the school. Established through a donation from the Metcalf family, the new fully funded faculty position will allow RISD to recruit an academic leader to develop institution-wide initiatives in sustainability.

“This remarkable gift empowers RISD to make rapid progress on values that have come to define our community,” says President [Rosanne Somerson](#). “As artists and designers, RISD faculty and students bring tremendous power to the intractable problems of sustainability, climate justice and the local impacts of global challenges. We specialize in new methods that identify problems, conceptualize what is

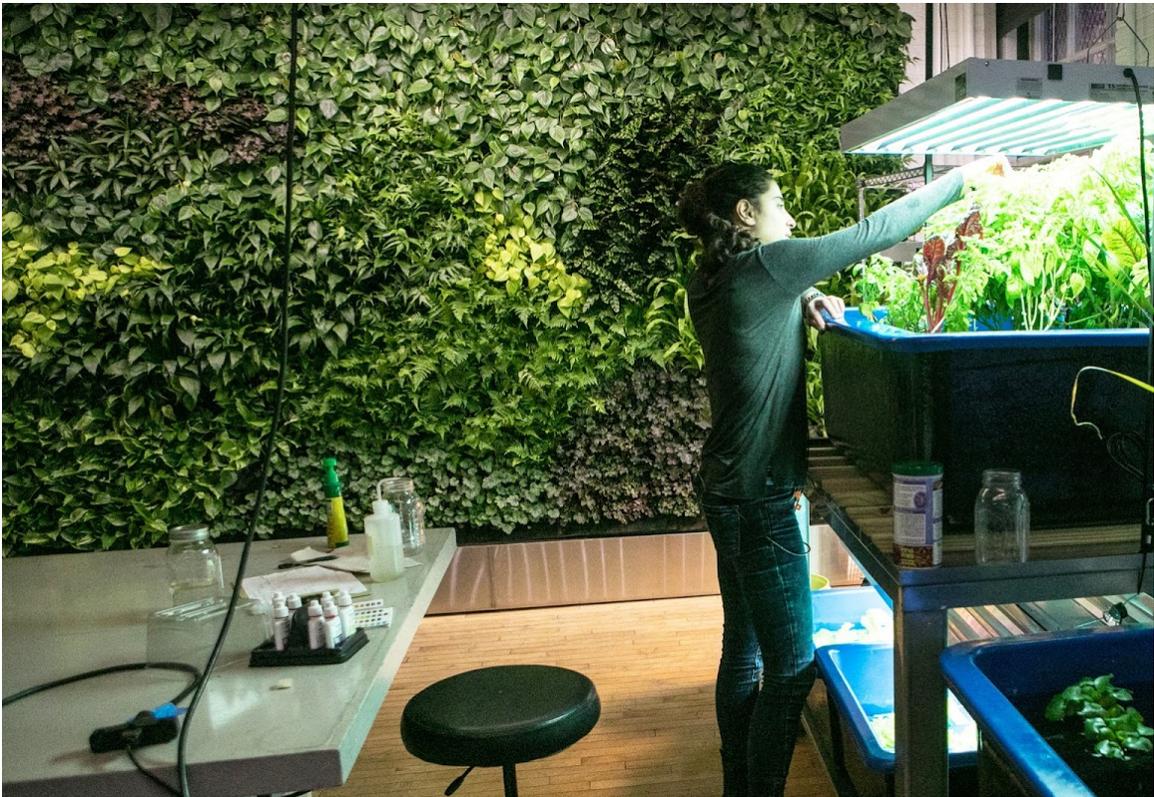
possible—and then bring inventive solutions to life. We are deeply grateful for this support.”



Named in honor of the great-grandson of RISD Founder **Helen Adelia Rowe Metcalf** and father of current trustee **Stephen A. Metcalf, Houghton P. Metcalf** was appointed a RISD Life Trustee in 1958 and honored for his lifelong involvement and contributions to the college with an honorary degree in 1996. Metcalf, who passed away in 2003, was a former RISD trustee, the first chair of the Museum Committee of the Board and a member of the Fine Arts Committee.

“The sustainability initiatives undertaken by faculty and students are a testimony to RISD’s commitment to educate artists and designers for a more inclusive future,” says Stephen Metcalf. “This gift provides the college with resources to prepare students for leadership roles in meeting the challenges presented by sustainability.”

“Climate change and its impact on the planet has presented persistent challenges,” Somerson notes. Despite a steady stream of interventions intended to address and promote sustainability, she says, “Technology and public policy on their own are not meeting the challenge. RISD’s ability to embrace new inputs and collaborate across disciplines, to work in context and to address systems from new perspectives can offer pathways to new thinking about old problems.”



The RISD community has deep ties and a profound commitment to sustainability, at every level. In a 2019 survey of first-year students, 97 percent said they believe climate change is a national priority. And more than 40 percent of RISD faculty members are working directly on sustainability-related projects and courses. Several departments have completely transformed their academic programs to help students address the coming climate crisis; others have introduced new programs to address the intersections between social justice, sustainability and other art and design disciplines.

NEXT: RISD 2020–27, the institution’s strategic plan, identifies sustainability as one of the organizing principles around which RISD will pursue its future. In a 2018 survey, RISD alumni ranked sustainability and climate change as the most important topics they are eager to engage with as part of their relationship with RISD.

“RISD can address challenging social, political and ecological issues facing the world right now through design problem-solving and interdisciplinary collaboration,” says [Johanna Barthmaier-Payne](#), head of RISD’s Landscape Architecture department. “Our mission is to strengthen these values by becoming a leading, world-class institution where science, research, making, expression and social and environmental justice collectively form the guiding principles of our practice,” she says. “This professorship empowers RISD to make rapid progress on our mission.”

In addition to recognizing the significance of a scholar’s work, endowed professorships support their recipients and provide them with a research stipend. This is RISD’s fourth endowed professorship and 14th philanthropically funded professorship, all of which were established within the past five years.

About Rhode Island School of Design

RISD's mission, through its college and museum, is to educate students and the public in the creation and appreciation of works of art and design, to discover and transmit knowledge and to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation. The college's strategic plan NEXT: RISD 2020-2027 sets an ambitious vision for educating students for the future and bringing creative practices to bear on the creation of just societies, a sustainable planet and new ways of making and knowing. RISD's immersive model of art and design education, which emphasizes critical making through studio-based learning and robust study in the liberal arts, prepares students to intervene in the critical challenges of our time. Working with exceptional faculty and in extraordinary specialized facilities, 2,225 students from more than 60 countries engage in 42 full-time bachelor's and master's degree programs. RISD's 30,000 alumni worldwide testify to the impact of this model of education, exemplifying the vital role artists and designers play in today's society. Founded in 1877, RISD (pronounced "RIZ-dee") and the RISD Museum help make Providence, RI among the most culturally active and creative cities in the region. Find more information at risd.edu.

A selection of visuals may be accessed [here](#).

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