Sailing club keeps the wind in their sails
Little-known student team seeks faculty advisor with competitive streak

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Though they consistently finished at the back of the pack in regattas this year, Rice’s club sailing team is remarkably enthusiastic. At least they’re out there competing, which wasn’t the case last year, and they feel the winds of change blowing their direction.

Two or three years ago the club lost their leaders to graduation and spent time struggling to recruit new members and become active again. Now, with junior president Garrett Tate and sophomore Jim Doty leading the team, the future looks much brighter.

Key to this year’s improvement, Tate said, was the addition of new teammates. In his first year on the team, Doty, who came to Rice with competitive sailing experience, pitched in, teaching the basics to inexperienced sailors.

"None of this year’s members provided more of a boost than Jim," Tate said. "He brought valuable experience to the team, and his several more years of eligibility will be necessary to keep building the club in the years to come."

This year the club wants to recruit more members, increase the team’s visibility on campus, build on improvements they’ve made, and find a coach for expert guidance.

"We will need a coach to help us with the techniques that will take us to the next level," Doty said of the team that has been coach-less for the past several seasons. "We have come so far—from not being in the pack, to being at the end of the pack. The improvement that will put us in the middle of the pack is not as difficult as the challenges we already have overcome."

With the team’s limited funding, equipment and experience, just being competitive has been a challenge. The team has only two working boats in its fleet of 420s — two-person dinghies with two sails — but it hopes to raise funds to purchase more before next year’s
season begins.

"The deck is really stacked against them, and they are building this thing from the ground up," said Marie Wise, the team’s former adviser. "But they have a really fabulous attitude."

Tate calls Wise the largest contributor to the team’s success this year.

"We were on the brink of falling apart," he said. "Marie appeared and worked closely with the club leadership to give us a new sense of direction and put us on good footing once again."

Although club sailing doesn’t have much visibility on campus, the team hopes to increase membership again next season by banking on sailing’s combined mental and physical challenges to appeal to Rice students looking to get involved with a club sport.

"Physically, you have to practice for hours to get your movements and timing precise, and sailing in high winds can be a test of strength," Tate said. "Mentally, the tactics of a sailing race can make it like a game of chess on steroids."

Doty sees the Rice spirit and sailing as the perfect combination.

"Sailing is a sport that is structured along the same lines as Rice," he said. "It requires personal commitment and relies to some extent on an honor code."