Student Affairs Committee
of the Academic Senate
Report for the 2012-2013 Academic year

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**Charge #1**

*Review Institute procedures and policies as they relate to RIT's GLBT population.*

A recent GLBT Climate Study task force provided 17 recommendations to the President in writing. However, outcomes were not public at the time of this writing.

“The number of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students seeking a university that is “gay friendly” is increasing, driven by Web sites that rate schools on how supportive they are of gay students.” (NY Times, January 20, 2011)

**Issues**

**Unknown Population Size**

A Kinsey report indicates approximately 10% of the population—up to 15%—has self-identified as part of the GLBT population. It’s possible that RIT has a larger population than many other schools but we never ask (so one can’t address definitively the size of the RIT GLBT population). How can we address issues we might have without knowing what size population we have? It is unclear whether there are legal limitations regarding to whom one can ask questions regarding sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Use of an Alternative Name**

Within an academic community such as RIT many students use names other than their legal names to identify themselves. As long as the use of this different name is not for the purposes of misrepresentation, RIT should acknowledge that a "preferred name" can and should be available for use wherever possible in the course of university business and education.

**Housing**

RIT currently operates with “gender neutral” housing. No current housing options are provided specifically for those in or allied with the GLBT community. A PRIDE floor or area designated to support this community could be considered. (Such housing options are known to be in place at other institutions.)
Benefits (re: faculty and staff)
RIT has no cost correction program in place for faculty / staff members of the GLBT community to address disparities between family benefits for this group versus those in heterosexual marriages. Policies at RIT are often worded in a utilitarian way— RIT does not stipulate recognition of same sex marriage or other civil union.

Limited Gender-Neutral Facilities (showers/lavatories)
There are no gender-neutral shower facilities in the Student Life Center and many older buildings lack gender-neutral restrooms. While the installation of gender-neutral bathrooms is not required under New York State Construction Code, RIT has voluntarily added a number of such facilities around campus. It is unclear, however, whether there is a university policy governing the inclusion of such rooms in any new campus facilities.

Findings
The Coordinator of RIT’s GLBT Center is currently a temporary position— it has been suggested that, as funding permits, making it a permanent position will have an impact on the perception of whether or not RIT is in support of the GLBT community.

While the university offers a specific Safe Zone training, a workshop that provides information to faculty, staff and student Allies regarding transitional issues for Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender (GLBT) students, few faculty elect to participate in this Center for Professional Development course offering.

Recommendations
Preferred Name
It is recommended that RIT take immediate steps to permit students to identify themselves within university administrative systems with an alternative first name in addition to the person’s legal name and that the person’s “preferred name” be used, wherever possible, in university communications and reporting except where the use of legal name is required by university business or legal needs.

Housing
It is recommended that RIT Housing Operations, the Center for Residence Life, and the Center for Women and Gender be charged with exploring the
need, feasibility and benefits of establishing a PRIDE floor or area for interested GLBT and “allied” students.

**Need More Gender-Neutral Facilities**
It is recommended to incorporate more gender-neutral bathroom and shower facilities across campus and to require gender-neutral restrooms be included in all new campus construction. This will not only help the GLBT community but will also provide a more family-friendly atmosphere on campus.

**Training**
Consider developing a training program for faculty that includes components of RIT’s existing SAFE Zone training. Such awareness and training programs could be driven by each college, department chair, and/or Dean.
**Charge #2**

Review what training is available for faculty and staff to help them manage the behavioral challenges of working with the changing characteristics of the student population.

**Issues**

Faculty, staff and instructors increasingly face a myriad of potentially difficult, challenging and even dangerous situations that can significantly interfere with the teaching and learning process as a result of rapidly changing student demographics.

**Learning Disabilities**

More than ever before, students with a wide range of disabilities are enrolling at RIT. “Both technological and pharmaceutical advances have made educational opportunities available to persons with conditions that would have previously have barred them from higher education.” (Wingert & Monitor, 2009) The current number of students registered with RIT’s office of Disability Services is 616.

**A Global Campus**

The number of international students enrolled at RIT on the Henrietta campus has increased 44.7% over the past five years.

**Digital Natives**

Today’s electronically immersed students are extremely connected, and yet increasingly isolated. “While they are in 24/7 contact with a tribe of friends, family and acquaintances via social media, they are more alone in many of the activities they pursue.” This connectedness/isolation contradiction makes them “weak in interpersonal skills, face-to face communication skills, and problem-solving skills” (Levine, 2012).

**Academic Dishonesty**

Recent data from the International Center for Academic Integrity at Clemenson University shows between a quarter to a third of students at the collegiate level admit to cheating on tests. A study conducted by Rutgers University School of Business professor Donald McCabe, who has investigated the topic for 22 years
and surveyed over 250,000 college students, shows two-thirds of students report some type of academic dishonesty (The College Times, 2012).

**Mental Health Issues** are a leading impediment to academic success:
In an American College Health Association report released in 2011, students cited depression and anxiety as among the top impediments to academic performance. The report revealed that 80 percent students surveyed felt overwhelmed at times; 31 percent felt depressed seriously enough that the depression adversely affected their functions; 45 percent felt hopeless at times; and 7 percent had seriously considered suicide. Overall 40 percent of students with diagnosable mental health conditions did not seek help.

**Disruptive Classroom Behavior**
Disruptive student behavior in the classroom, from mild antics to dangerous, potentially lethal aggression, in college and university classrooms has increased significantly over the past two decades (Kitzrow). Professors have struggled with students who arrive late, leave early, chat through class, dominate the class, refuse to participate or are preoccupied with social media. In addition, at least 20% of all college students demonstrate classroom incivility during their college years (Meyers).

**Impact on the Learning Process**
“Challenging classroom situations can seriously interfere with the teaching and learning process, adversely impacting faculty, students, and the overall learning environment. In such situations, faculty feel increased stress and tend to spend more time dealing with disruptive behavior than teaching critical material. Teaching excellence takes a hit. Caught in this unfortunate crossfire, students experience derailed learning due to the tense or chaotic learning environment.” (Wingert & Molitor, 2009).

**Findings**
Five programs are currently offered through the Center for Professional Development (CPD) to address the issues cited above. However, there does not appear to a specific focus on instruction or classroom management issues. Historically, faculty participation in CPD programs is extremely limited and there is no incentive program to encourage faculty to take advantage of such training. In addition to these formal offerings, RIT’s Student Behavioral Consultation
Team (SBCT), the Spectrum Support Program and RIT’s office of Disability Services provides custom tailored training and discussions with academic departments upon request.

Center for Professional Development (Spring 2013):

1. Navigating Student Learning Support Services at RIT
2. Academic Strategies and the Study Process
3. Understanding the Accommodation Process for Students with Disabilities
4. Supporting RIT Students on the Autism Spectrum
5. Professional Development for RIT Advisors

RIT faculty and instructors would benefit from the assistance of teaching and learning development specialists to adapt their pedagogies, classroom activities, and learning materials to more consistently reflect the way students today learn most effectively.

Similarly, instructional faculty would benefit from increased training on classroom management strategies and working effectively with international students, students with learning disabilities, disruptive students, and students with potential mental health conditions.

**Recommendations**

**Targeted Training**

Faculty Career Development Services should be charged by the Provost to work with SBCT, Disability Services, the Spectrum Support Program, International Student Services, and the RIT Counseling Center to design training specifically to meet the needs of instructional staff and offered during the January intersession. Individual departments and colleges are strongly encouraged to design faculty incentive programs and to supplement any university-wide training with discussions customized to their unique student populations. In addition, special attention should be given to adjunct and contract employees who often have limited understanding and access to RIT student support services.
**Charge #3**

*Review RIT’s transfer student experience.*

**Issues**

As RIT’s reputation continues to grow nationally, more students are likely to transfer to RIT from other universities. Transfer students are a population that requires special attention to facilitate their successful transition to RIT.

**Findings**

**Targeted Orientation Program**

RIT’s office of New Student Orientation recognizes that transfer students have more diverse backgrounds and have different needs than freshmen. As a result, New Student Orientation has designed a Transfer Orientation program that is not only flexible but one that is easily customizable to meet the individual needs of each new student. Transfer students entering RIT in the Fall have three program options that vary in intensity, called tracks, from which to select.

**Support discrepancies**

The needs of transfer students are different than those of first-year students and those discrepancies need to be supported. New Student Orientation offers transfer students an Orientation experience very similar to the experience of first-year students. The two programs run simultaneously for the majority of Orientation with a few exceptions. First-year and transfer students have a different Academic Day that each college offers to their students. These experiences will vary by college and are tailored to meet the differing needs of first-year and transfer students.

First-year and transfer students are also offered different options for Interest Sessions. These Interest Sessions are specifically geared towards meeting the needs of first-year students and transfer students respectively. The interest session topics for transfer students were chosen based on an assessment completed regarding the self-reported needs of transfer students. Some topics included in the Transfer Interest Sessions are: Student Employment, Financial Aid & Scholarships, and Co-op & Career Services.

In addition, Transfer students are offered opportunities to connect to their peers and the RIT community through social events. One such
event is the Transfer Luau - a partnership with the Center for Residence Life, Housing Operations, and New Student Orientation hosted at the RIT Inn. There will also be a new event for Orientation 2013 designed to welcome transfer students to the RIT community by tie-dying RIT t-shirts and building relationships with peers.

Social Challenges
Students transferring to RIT face similar challenges in adapting to RIT as those in the International student population.

Lack of follow-up
While there does not appear to have been a focused effort on follow-up during their first year on campus to support transfer students in their transition into the RIT community, beginning Fall 2013, New Student Orientation will be offering a year-long series of programs geared towards transfer students to continue to connect students to the RIT community, to engage with peers, and learn more about RIT resources.

Recommendations
Transfer students should be incentivized to attend the new student orientation for their college.

All college orientations on campus should cover a key set of topics to facilitate the integration of transfer students into their respective colleges.

Student advisors should actively monitor the well being of transfer students on campus.
**Charge #4**

*Review Institute procedures and policies as they relate to RITs growing international student body.*

**Issues**

The continued growth of RIT’s international student population necessitates the need to further examine how this growing international presence positively contributes to the RIT educational experience and overall campus environment. Similarly, as the number of international students expands, questions should be raised as to what distinguishes the RIT global experience for domestic and international students from other universities. While RIT has historically done a good job recruiting international students, as a campus little has been done to leverage this international presence into the fabric of campus life and/or academic programs. Finally, the university would benefit from knowing more about the quality of international students’ experience while attending RIT.

**Findings**

**An Involved International Population**

International students are heavily involved in co-curricular activities across the campus. Many hold leadership positions and each year earn awards and widespread recognition for their endeavors both inside and outside of the classroom. In many areas, international students are also an integral part of academic research teams.

**Engagement**

A high percentage of RIT international students take full advantage of the many and diverse opportunities to become fully engage in their academic programs, in the broader campus activities, and to explore America and American culture - often more proactively than many domestic college students. Two thirds of RIT’s international students are graduate students, and as such, have different expectations and engage differently than do traditional undergraduate American students.

**Knowing Where We Stand**

It is hard to assess the experience of international students at RIT, because there is no institutional report or metric that assesses how successful RIT has been at integrating these students in its community.
Global Education
RIT has only recently begun discussing the need to think strategically about the growth of the international student populations and is starting to build structures within colleges to encourage taking a more comprehensive perspective. Some departments/colleges have thought more about how they wish to benefit from, and provide maximum value for, the international students in their programs. There is not yet a universal buy-in across all departments to ensure that all staff, faculty and domestic students engage with, and take advantage of, the opportunities to learn from our international students. Current literature in the field of International Education calls for this to come through internationalizing the curriculum. The recent hiring of an Associate Provost for Global Education, Dr. Jim Myers, and the committees and departments with whom he works, are starting to lead these important efforts.

Difficulties To Follow Up With International Alumni
RIT would benefit from an improved system to track the whereabouts of its international alumni. Additionally, RIT is missing the opportunity to engage with international students on campus with activities that will help develop a sustained and active relationship after their graduation.

Limited Opportunities For Interaction
From college feedback, and with specific exceptions, it is evident that the number of opportunities to foster informal social interaction between international students, domestic students, and faculty are limited. Colleges that actively seek the integration of international students often offer a series of frequent informal social events. This issue is on the radar of the office of Associate Provost for Global Education and efforts are currently underway to develop international committees within each college.

International Students Housed With Other International Students
Due to RIT's housing policies, and admission procedures, and the possibility that international students arrive to campus later than their domestic counterparts, international students are often housed later than domestic students. Students (many of them international) who are delayed in their initial application for housing can generally only be accommodated at the RIT
Inn. A few weeks into the fall term, students assigned to the Inn may request to move on-campus as housing space becomes available. Unfortunately, increased concentrations of international students in geographic proximity to one another can make it difficult to foster an integrated housing experience with domestic students.

**Housing As A Means To Foster Diversity**

With the exception of International House, housing at RIT does not currently appear to be used as a strategic tool to enhance the interaction among international and domestic students. Such an approach might prove useful.

**Fostering Student Integration With The Rochester (Off Campus) Community**

In addition to the large number of international students actively involved in off-campus cooperative education employment there are a number of academic programs that facilitate the engagement of international students off-campus for class assignments. There is also a very high percentage of international students who participate in off-campus volunteer activities through RIT’s Leadership Center, and many are required as club members to further engage in off-campus community service. In addition, for the past two years a number of international students have participated in a new Alternative Spring Break, working in such places as Louisiana helping to restore homes affected by Hurricane Katrina. Furthermore, international students have comprised fifty percent of the students enrolled in a Social Change certificate program through the RIT Leadership Center that examines Hunger in America, including volunteer work within Rochester.

**Community Integration**

Approximately twenty-five percent of the fall International Student Orientation programs coordinated by RIT’s office of International Student Services are intentionally and necessarily devoted to federal regulations and guidelines pertaining to immigration, travel, employment authorization, health insurance, etc. due to the potential grave consequences that can impact students with respect to their health, well-being, and legal immigration status. The balance of this targeted orientation program is geared to assisting new international
students establish a strong sense of community through a rich variety of on and off-campus programs. Programming continues after the fall orientation, often in a collaborative partnership with the Rochester Global Connections (RGC), that allow international students to meet with community members at off-campus locations throughout the year. For example, RIT assists in coordinating a large off-campus picnic each fall for more than 300 community members and international students from area colleges. In addition to an annual trip to Niagara Falls, RIT’s office of International Student Services also co-sponsors hikes for international students with RGC to Letchworth State Park, Watkins Glen, and Mount Hope Cemetery in addition to sponsoring winter cabin parties and chili suppers with community members teaching Line Dancing and Square Dancing.

**Co-ops**

Co-ops are challenging to obtain for all international students in the United States, especially during weak economic times. RIT however is believed to have one of the highest percentages in the nation of international students engaged in cooperative education. Internal business processes have been streamlined to assist international students in securing employment opportunities. When the economy is booming, it is frequently easier for international students to land jobs as U.S. companies become more willing to pay the future immigration fees that inevitably come with hiring a non-U.S. citizen. This challenge is faced by international students across the country.

RIT’s office of International Student Services has partnered with the Co-op and Career Services office, as well as specific colleges and departments, to offer workshops that prepare international students to overcome some challenges inherent in applying for employment as a non-U.S. citizen. International Student Services also coordinates a free workshop annually featuring a top immigration attorney to prepare students for the recruiting and interview process and to discuss how to successfully obtain employment authorization in the United States.

**Recommendations**

Colleges should plan their new student orientation activities to provide opportunities that foster the spontaneous interaction of domestic and international students (graduate and undergraduate).
Colleges should standardize some part of their orientation activities to ensure that key topics are covered among all new international students.

Academic departments should have a responsibility to incorporate the following into their orientation programs for new international students:

1. an awareness of the common challenges facing international students,
2. an awareness of the common mistakes that international students make,
3. a frank and explicit discussion (preferably accompanied in writing) about these pitfalls, the support services that the department offers and the specific expectations the department has for its students.

As RIT’s population of international students continues to expand, academic curriculums need to evolve to provide increased space for the more global scope of student’s experiences to be brought into the conversations and students (both domestic and international) should be encouraged to explore and share the different perspectives that they bring to how they approach the particular subject matter of the class.

Housing should be considered as a strategic tool to foster interaction among students of different backgrounds. As such, housing can help students share day-to-day experiences with individuals from communities different from their own.

International interest programs on campus should be better advertised and promoted. This promotion should be continuous and sustained during the academic year.

RIT should continue to examine the return on investment for systems that would aid in tracking international alumni, continue current efforts to develop more overseas Alumni chapters, and do more to connect international students to RIT’s office of Alumni Relations while students are here.

Much like their domestic counterparts, international students have some of the strongest affinities with their academic majors and so the approach that Alumni/Development has adopted of connecting through academic colleges may be valuable in keeping international alumni engaged upon graduation.
In order to better capitalize on the international RIT community, attempts should be made to further integrate the domestic and international populations on campus. Exposing students to ideas and cultures outside those with which they are familiar can provide both groups with a better world view and increased opportunity.

Preferred name: It is recommended that RIT take immediate steps to permit students to identify themselves within university administrative systems with an alternative first name in addition to the person's legal name and that the person's "preferred name" be used, wherever possible, in university communications and reporting - except where the use of legal name is required by university business or legal needs. (See Recommendations for Charge #1, RIT's GLBT population.)