

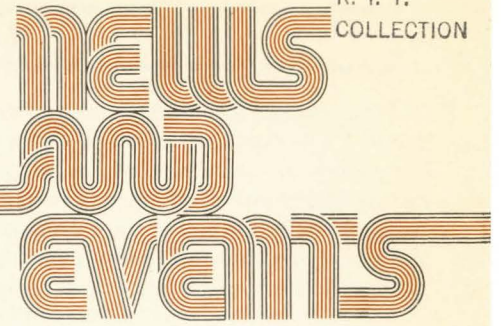


Rochester Institute of Technology

Published by
Communications

Institute
Publications

R. I. T.
COLLECTION



Special Edition

April 14, 1978

Case Study open forum Monday to air Quality of Student Life

The Task Force on the 80s has identified two key issues to be discussed at the Case Study April 16-19. The first of these is the Quality of Student Life. This issue will be examined Monday, April 17 and there will be an OPEN FORUM from 3 to 4:45 p.m. in Webb Auditorium.

The purpose of the OPEN FORUM is to review the day's discussion and then seek input and questions from the entire RIT community. The issue summaries in this newsletter will acquaint you with the sub-issues and related questions.

The OPEN FORUM is a unique opportunity to become involved in the planning issues that RIT must wrestle with to prepare for the 80s. It is also a time when the Middle States Review Panel will have an opportunity to see RIT in action. The Task Force on the 80s hopes as many as possible will attend the OPEN FORUM.

Further questions may be directed to the Office of Planning Projects, x2031.

QUALITY OF STUDENT LIFE ISSUE TEAM

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Quality of student life at Rochester Institute of Technology: Responsiveness in the 80's

Overview

While it is generally felt that a career focus will continue to attract students to RIT, concerns about student retention and satisfaction as well as alumni affection and loyalty in the competitive decade of the 80's and beyond call attention to the quality of campus life issue. Elements in the quality of student life which extend beyond the important influence of the normal academic program include: involvements in special academic, athletic or campus activity afforded to students by RIT; caring relationships with peers and campus "mentors;" availability of needed services; access to facilities for recreation and socializing; reliable information sources, especially those concerning expectation, processes and procedures; assistance in the maintenance of physical and emotional health and personal safety; courteous and prompt attention and reply to requests; and some attachment to a "community" within RIT or to the "community" of RIT.

Quality of student life is significant because these elements of which it is constituted strongly influence the development of individual self-confidence, and successful personal

style. Self-confidence and successful personal style coupled with professional/technical competence offer a high probability of career success and individual happiness for RIT graduates. Criteria for judging the quality of life at RIT would include: high retention; solid alumni giving and support; positive student attitudes expressed in campus media, seminars, and surveys; good attendance at meetings and other events; absence of intragroup conflict and personal crisis; low incidence of vandalism and academic dishonesty. It is clear that RIT must make a choice concerning the appropriate priority level for the quality of student life as plans are formulated for the decade of the 80's. The counterpoint between budget realities and competing incremental or inflationary funding requests for both academic programs and student life programs is a difficult condition surrounding the emergence of a long range plan for the 80's. This dilemma of aspiration mediated by cost in the quality of student life area and the resulting influence on educational outcomes for RIT students is a central focus for the Issue Study Team.

Sub-issues related to the quality of student life:

The nature of the resident student community: The quality of life in residence living involves the basic issues of: living space, density and crowding, group interactions and involvement, power and control, stimulation and stress, boredom and apathy, and physical isolation from the academic side of campus. Over the past decade, many reports and plans have contributed to both the identification and analysis of the quality of student life at RIT. The charge to this subcommittee has been to: gather and synthesize previous findings, verify their current applicability, and search for valid indices for recommending new and continuing directions to improve the quality of life for campus residents. In efforts to move towards an optimum quality of life at RIT, this committee has searched for meaningful answers to the following questions:

- What are the needs of resident students?
- Does RIT have an adequate data base to define and analyze student needs?
- Is the description of the RIT resident environment as "cold" and "non-caring" valid?
- What are the characteristics of resident student life at RIT?
- What is the quality of orientation received by resident students?
- What effect does crowding have on resident students?
- Does noise in the residence halls have a deleterious effect upon students?
- Are resident students bored and apathetic?
- Does RIT provide ample opportunity for students to become involved in student government and other organizations which will foster a sense of belonging, active participation, leadership and improve potential for establishing rewarding interpersonal relationships?
- Do existing organizations and clubs meet the interests and needs of the RIT diverse student population?
- Do student organizations and clubs provide for adequate peer and faculty interaction?
- How actively are organizations supported by students and faculty?
- What factors in the residents' environment produce non-involvement?
- Are there appropriate role models in the resident environment?
- Can a model to assess quality of student life be used as a basis for making recommendations?

Mentorship for students: Recently the role of student-faculty interaction in a student's overall college experience has gained increased attention (Astin, Chickering, etc.). This subcommittee will examine the concept of mentorship or those interactions where the focus is on the development of the whole student.

Cooperative, caring attention to the development of another does occur in many places at RIT. Faculty, staff, and the students themselves provide that mentorship for students and for one another. However, it is not happening systematically or with regularity, or for all students and it appears to be only occasionally reinforced.

The Case statement on mentorship will attempt to: catalog some examples of where mentorship currently exists; identify additional opportunities where it could flourish; note ways it might be encouraged or improved; cite some impediments to its implementation and explore ways to gain support for the concept.

The following questions provided an outline for the team's exploration into the issue:

- What constitutes good mentorship in an institute of higher learning in the 80's?
- How do you identify good mentorship?
- How do you identify potentially good mentors?
- How can faculty/staff/students be helped to be more comfortable in the mentorship role?
- How can the mentoring process be used to humanize the environment?
- In what ways can the *students* be helped to see the value of and make a commitment to mentorship, and assisted in seeking it out?
- In what ways can the *faculty* be helped to see the value of mentorship to the students and to themselves.
- In what ways can the Institute be helped to see the value of mentorship to students, faculty, and staff, and to make a commitment to it?
- Where does mentoring now occur at your institution and what other possibilities do you envision?
- In what ways can the Institute encourage the faculty and staff to seek mentorship for themselves?
- How can we provide for the special mentoring needs of special groups of students i.e., women, minorities, the deaf?
- What are the possible relationships of mentoring to the academic programs?
- What impediments to the mentoring process exist at your institution?
- What advantages are likely to accrue to an institute of higher learning by addressing the mentorship issue i.e., increased retention, increased alumni support?

Support Services at RIT: A survey of literature produced from intra-Institute studies and discussion groups tends to relay certain overriding concerns. There seems to be a gap between the expectations of students and the way the various support services are actually designed to operate or are perceived to operate. There is a tendency for support services

to be crisis oriented rather than preventative in orientation. Faculty/staff and students don't display enough human concern for one another.

There would appear to be a need for better communication as to what service is provided to a student by any particular support service and a need on the part of support services to review the needs and expectations of students and to anticipate those needs and expectations. The student needs to know where to go for what—and she or he needs to know what is not available as well as what is available so that his or her expectations will be realistic.

The subcommittee has identified several support services which appear to be especially representative of the expressed student concerns: Protective Services; Health Services; Financial Aid; Registration. The subcommittee has investigated these services at RIT in hopes of illustrating the problems through specific examples, and asking the following questions as guides to improving specific situations.

- How can the Institute better communicate to the students exactly what services are provided by any given support service?
- How can support services personnel be sensitized to the human needs of students so that the climate is courteous and personal?
- How might student perceptions of Protective Services personnel be improved?
- How can student demands for Health Services (especially after-hour care) be adequately met without significantly increased cost?
- How can the financial aid process be made less confusing?
- How can the efficiency of both the scheduling and registration process be evaluated on a regular basis in order to limit student frustrations, and keep the processes in line with the enrollment, student demands, and course offerings?
- How should the added strain created by the special needs of National Technical Institute for the Deaf students on the support services be met?
- How can students best communicate to RIT about their concerns or expectations related to support services on the campus?
- Could the Institute "contract out" for some support services as an economy measure, and still provide reasonable support services for students?
- How much support service should the Institute provide in order not to negatively impact the educational climate on the campus?

"News & Events" is published every other Thursday and on special occasions by the Communications office at Rochester Institute of Technology; distribution is free to members of the Institute community. For information call Norm Wright at 475-2750.