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A review of the Mid-States Case Study

RIT has a unique awareness of its issues and concerns and should resist temptations toward homogeneity with other institutions of higher education.

This was the expressed general impression of educational leaders who were on campus for parts of four days last week (April 16-19) as part of the Middle States Association Reaccreditation Case Study.

In a wrap-up session Wednesday afternoon in the new academic building (Bldg. 12), Dr. Stanley Ikenberry, senior vice president for university development and relations at Penn State University and Case Study director for

Mid-States, told members of the Institute community who were present:

"You have a considerable asset in your extreme self-consciousness and self-awareness. In spite of what you may think about yourself, you have an extremely high level of communication and dialogue—an extremely high ability to talk in a variety of ways.

"People at RIT have an unusual awareness of what the campus issues are and of the tensions that exist between those issues.

"However, there may be a kind of impatience, and perhaps some strategic implementation may not be taken until the entire plan and priorities for the immediate future are all spelled out.

"There is a tension between RIT's unique-

ness and its desire to be like other (colleges and universities); yet, perhaps your greatest single asset is your sharp uniqueness.

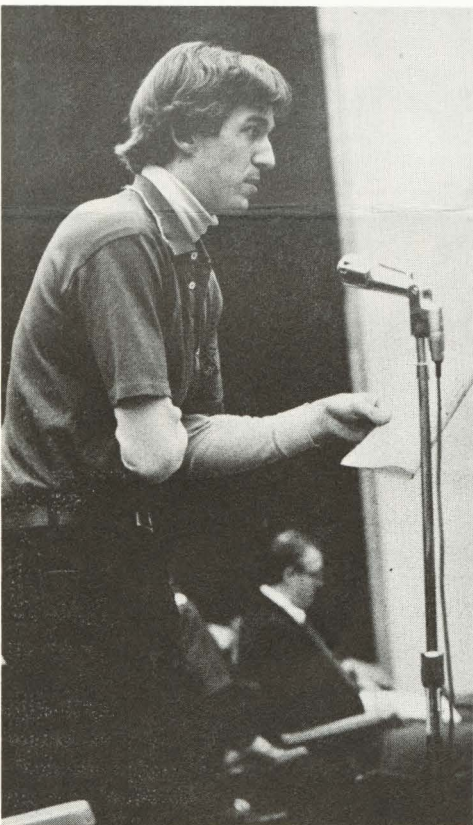
"Resist the temptation toward homogeneity; part of your genius and strength is to find solutions which may not be universally correct (in the field of higher education), but which may be perfectly correct for RIT."

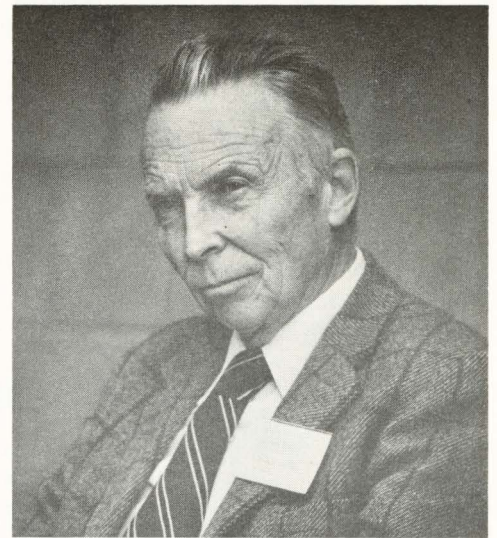
Ikenberry called any concern on the part of some Institute people over an "identity crisis," "a natural, healthy tension."

Asked to respond to Ikenberry's observations, Dr. Paul A. Miller, Institute president, said, "One's feelings become almost unbearable when hope becomes sufficient to make goals realizable."



A Case Study photo album





'Identity crisis' discussed

If RIT has an "identity crisis," that identity crisis is seen primarily as a positive thing.

This consensus came out of the open forum on Academic Programs conducted April 18 in Ingle Auditorium as part of RIT's four-day reaccreditation Case Study.

The identity crisis discussion was launched by Albert Elwell, Office of Planning and Analysis, University of New Hampshire, a member of the Case Study team, who presented the following as his observations of RIT:

—The resources of the Institute are "absolutely incredible"; you have a very competent faculty, staff and student body.

—RIT enjoys sound financial status.

—Quality of programs is the central factor to RIT's long-range planning.

—I think RIT faces an identity crisis; a decision should be made regarding your philosophy of institution.

This kicked off a discussion of the role of general education at RIT as it relates to academic programs and quality of life on the campus.

One participant said that as career interests change while at RIT, students often find themselves trapped in their programs. "It is difficult to integrate an institution such as

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DR. IKENBERRY

'Overarching considerations'

What are the questions being asked around RIT in the wake of the four-day Case Study just completed as a part of the Institute's Middle States Association reaccreditation process?

Speaking on "Overarching Considerations" before Case Study participants Wednesday morning, Dr. Stanley Ikenberry of Penn State University, director of the study, invited these questions as he presented three overarching issues for the group's contemplation and debate:

1. Determination of action priorities
2. Bringing about change
3. The need to know.

Dr. Ikenberry then offered suggested areas of concern for each issue.

Action Priorities

- What are the priorities for action?
- How does one proceed from concept to action in the whole area of general education?
- Who shares responsibility for quality of student life?

- How do priorities for support services for students relate to other priorities?
- Looking ahead to a "no growth" academic environment, how do we provide for vitality and change?
- What needs to be done?
- What needs to be done first?
- Who needs to do it?
- What needs to be done in the area of policy? Program? Skills? Attitudes? Knowledge?
- What operational changes should RIT consider?

Bringing About Change

- How could change over the past years have been accomplished smoother and more effectively?
- What barriers to smooth change exist in the RIT environment?
- How can student access to RIT's rich resources be improved?

The Need to Know

- What is the quality of the available information and data?
 - What is the ripple effect of a particular change? The unintended secondary effects? Tertiary effects?
 - What are the questions that today have gone unasked?
 - How will RIT know when it begins to achieve success in certain areas? Or when there has been no effect? (In such areas as general education; establishing better inter-personal relationships; student services; inter-disciplinary flexibility?)
 - How do we avoid premature closure?
- And there were other questions, raised by group discussion of these issues and brought back to the final plenary session:
- Do faculty, staff and students agree with goals and mission established for RIT?
 - Who communicates with who and why?
 - Why don't people use the information available to them?
 - Why do we distrust the validity of information we have?
 - Will more information enable us to change in a more rational manner? Or will it inhibit change?
 - Can we prepare people for dual careers?
 - What do we do with information once it is collected?
 - Are we really teaching "the living of a life?" Do we feel we are addressing this? Does doing this become training for mediocrity?
 - What is the meaning of mentorships?
 - If pre-registration is such a problem, why are we sitting around?
 - What is the distinction between improvement and change?

These are just a few of the questions RIT will be facing as it moves ahead in forging its response to the 1980s.

'Identity crisis' discussed

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RIT; we need to offer not only five technical studies but more human aspects of education as well."

He pointed to a "lack of two-way communications, with little opportunity for dialogue between students and faculty and faculty and administration. We need to minimize one-way communication and develop a network to link together various colleges, students, faculty and administration."

Dr. John White, a professor in the College of General Studies, had these observations:

"There is some concern that students don't like to take general studies courses. My impression is that teachers in RIT's College of General Studies are second to none. There are many students who would like to take general studies courses, but have selected a specific program of study before coming to RIT and are reluctant to stray from that program."

Several students addressed this issue, one stating that "it's unfortunate to de-emphasize general studies; RIT must adjust its image to include more general education courses." Another said he didn't feel he was "getting my money's worth" in respect to general studies.

On the communications aspect, an Institute employee told the panel, "We've failed to let ourselves get close to each other. We

must put aside our defenses. We start attacking each other at a time we should be embracing one another."

Another student offered, "Simultaneous monologues should be replaced by dialogues... some of us are on FM while others have only AM receivers."

"RIT is like a big, beautiful department store, but you don't have a chance to shop around," added another.

Then came the remarks from those who saw the "identity crisis" and the day's debate as a healthy sign:

"I hope RIT's identity crisis never ends; it's what makes us a vital institution. We should never stop asking these questions. To be otherwise we would stagnate."

"The identity crisis may be one of the assets this institution has that other colleges and universities don't have. We have managed to attract students from a wide variety of sources; by solving the identity crisis, we would be throwing two-thirds of these students out of the Institute."

Summarizing the discussion, Dr. Edward Schatz, vice president for academic affairs at Carnegie-Mellon University and review panel chairman, said:

"I believe the description of RIT should note that it will be 150 years *young* in 1979. You are going through a controlled evolution.

"To those who don't believe you have open communications—I urge you to try harder.

"This institution is firm and solid-moving. You have a very good thing going here, and all of you can make it even better."

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