

# RIT | University Council

## Meeting Minutes: November 18, 2020

The meeting was called to order at 3:03 p.m.

### **Approval of Minutes from October 28, 2020 Meeting**

The minutes were approved by 22-0-3.

### **President's Report**

Number of COVID-19 cases has grown but we are still doing exceptionally well compared to many schools our size and as well as smaller schools. In the last 14 days the number of student cases is 31 and employees at 6. Although higher than earlier in semester the number has stabilized and it looks like we will be able to complete on campus this fall. Thanks to our students who have really worked to keep us safe and to our faculty and staff on execution of the plan. While campus will be pretty heavily depopulated after finals, at least in terms of students, we will have students on campus over the break.

We announced a week ago that men's and women's hockey would not be played this coming season due to the increasing prevalence of the virus, not just in our community, but state and nationwide. Then vice president Sandy Johnson, Athletics Director Lou Spiotti, and myself met with representative members of the men's hockey team, a number of whom are seniors. We are now taking a different stance with men's and women's hockey. I'll explain the turnabout and what it means. First of all, the leagues are moving ahead with schedules that they expect most of the schools will play and have submitted their safety plans to New York State. The students made the case that some of them will go pro after graduation and actually make a living in the sport. Without their senior season and video of it for recruiters to view, they will face problems going as far as they might hope in their chosen sport. In addition, there are no positive cases among the men's or women's hockey team. Another factor is the season schedule. It appears they will be playing right after Thanksgiving and then into January. So, much of their season will occur when the campus is heavily depopulated. Now I will say that our announcement is really changing from "no play" to "maybe we'll play." The maybe still hinges on us clearing what we would like to do with New York State and also with the Monroe County Health Department. But we're optimistic that we will see some hockey games and that's where it stands at the moment.

We are offering pre-departure COVID-19 testing to students leaving for Thanksgiving using the ~3,000 Broad tests we still have available. The tests are not required. We are building our capability for saliva testing which we expect to be using a lot next semester. These tests will actually be processed in our School of Life Sciences labs. We've ordered enough chemicals for about 50,000 tests and we may be ordering more depending on how things continue with the prevalence of the virus. Since we can do the processing locally, we will get the results back very quickly. The saliva test is very good at detecting the existence of virus in an individual early in the course of contracting it. We expect to be doing some combination of saliva and Broad testing along with a rapid test from Abbott Corporation. This test is sort of analogous to an at home pregnancy test and can deliver results in just 15 minutes with no instrumentation.

We are slated to resume classes on January 25 and we're going to require every student, faculty, and staff member to again have a negative COVID test upon arrival for spring semester. With our enhanced testing capability I feel pretty confident in our ability to keep our campus safe. However, we have to be ready to respond to changing directives from state government. Given this uncertainty, we will probably plan out a few different scenarios that could occur so we are ready to respond to what the authorities decide to dictate.

**Close of Fall/Opening of Spring Term Updates** (presentation files available on [RIT Digital Archive](#))

Ellen Granberg, SVP & Provost, Academic Affairs

Sandra Johnson, SVP, Student Affairs

**Academic Affairs**

The fall semester will officially end on December 11th and within academic affairs, most of our administrative offices will then move to remote operation until the beginning of the spring term. I want to share some work that was done to determine student and faculty satisfaction with both instruction and academic technology. We did three pulse surveys over the course of the semester. The first was directed to both faculty and students and focused on instructional quality. This gave us a lot of good feedback about how students and faculty were experiencing the different modalities. A bit later in the semester we did an academic technology survey to see how that piece was going for faculty and students and then just recently we completed a survey focused on COVID impacts on faculty scholarship and teaching. The results will be used in planning for spring semester and include:

- Very consistent feedback about how they felt about different course modalities, the blended modalities were the least preferred by both students and faculty. Both in person and synchronous online were strongly preferred.
- The technology was working, but there were some enhancements that would be helpful for spring. For example, we're going to be working on installing some additional monitors so that faculty members who have their course material up on one screen could have their zoom students up on a second screen which will make it much easier to handle classes where there are students attending via zoom. In addition, some backordered equipment requested for fall has finally arrived and will be installed over the break.
- We heard a lot from faculty around the way COVID had impacted scholarship and instruction, which was not surprising. It's a combination of different kinds of professional demands and also the blending of home and work. One of the things we asked about was something that many universities are doing. It's called a COVID Impact Statement and this is an opportunity to be able to report on specific ways in which the pandemic may have impacted particularly scholarship. We're working on some templates that will make it quick and easy to be able to report this should a faculty member choose to do so.

**Spring Course Modalities and Distribution**

- The main change is the increase in the proportion of sections that are being taught in person and the decrease the number of blended.
- We're at about the same with respect to online sections.
- There is a reduction in the proportion of sections that are flex.
- There is reduced pressure on faculty to make flex classes because students are going to be able to view class modalities when they register for spring.

**Additional Changes for Spring Term**

- We delayed the start of the semester classes to January 24th.
- Spring Break was cancelled, but 3 respite days were added to provide some breaks.
- As Dave has mentioned, pre-arrival COVID testing will be required and it looks like students will be able to complete their quarantine before classes start, which did not happen in the fall. While NYS will have some influence on how universities open in the spring, we're hoping we'll be able to make our own decisions about the course of the spring semester.

**Student Affairs**

I will do a little bit of looking back to our start in August, through fall term and then looking forward to spring. As Dr. Munson said, we have successfully gotten to the close to the finish line. We did that by starting out with a very staggered move-in process and New Student Orientation program that went on for several days, bringing in students in smaller cohorts. Orientation was both in person and virtual to accommodate several hundred students who were in quarantine due to the NYS travel restrictions. We also did it by ensuring that all who arrived had a negative COVID test and then continuing the testing process on campus.

Another factor in our success was the intentional social and engagement opportunities we provided. I'm happy to report that as of last week we had over 1,000 in person events for students on campus. We utilized our new outdoor stage for music performances and had a Black Lives Matter rally there. They did yoga. They had the dueling pianos, outdoor cinema, sporting events, debate viewing and other activities. We took advantage of every opportunity to be outside in the often spectacular fall weather. We also had to outdoor cinemas, sporting events, debate viewing, as well as films and other activities.

Our Health Promotion Team was out and about on campus and our RIT Ready Crew was out there complimenting people on for wearing their masks appropriately, doing their daily health screening and appropriately social distancing. We also continue to do work around stress management and mental health. We also provided opportunities to engage in physical activities prior to our ability to actually have some of our fitness equipment out and available to students. The fitness pods set up on the outdoor track had over 3,700 participants. We have since been able to move the equipment indoors to the Gordon Field House. Monroe County came in to do our inspection and I am very pleased to say that they told us that we had the best setup out of any gym or facilities that they had seen to date! The Aquatic Center has been open and we've had about 2,400 reservations there. So we have provided opportunities for our students to engage in physical fitness.

The other big piece of fall was around how we were supporting wellness and as you can imagine, our Student Health Center (SHC) had been planning for the opening all summer long. They had over 3,500 appointments. They are the ones who took the lead in supporting our students who were in quarantine isolation. They oversaw the whole COVID testing process. They also introduced a new online chat encounter and they had conversations with over 2,400 students via chat. The SHC has contact traced 450+ students to date and has served as a campus consultant on COVID for both faculty, staff and our leadership team. They have really been the cornerstone of helping us through this pandemic.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) has continued to support our students. They had about 3,600 clinical contacts. The utilization is actually a bit lower than we have had in the past, but the number of students who have been seen – the contact hours – are increased. So the clinical contacts are the same, but the numbers of unique students did decrease. We had about 6% utilization and 38% of those students identify as BIPOC. This was a big push for us in the midst of the pandemic, as you know, the conversations across the university and in the country around racial inequality and social justice. They did a number of virtual support groups for a whole host of different groups from our Greek life students to athletes, LGBTQ+, international students, students who were completely remote. This was an opportunity to provide support for groups who were sharing some of the same concerns and issues. They also did over 276 hours of outreach and education for faculty and staff.

Our Case Management Office was also incredibly busy. Eight-seven of the people that they supported were COVID related, but they had total unique contacts of 861. That's a 10% increase. We know that our students have been impacted in multiple ways. So they would utilize case management for things like understanding their insurance access, food or housing insecurity and other types of challenges that could interfere with their success as a student.

We also did some pulse surveys over the last eight weeks, taking a portion of the student body and asking about 10 questions. We really wanted to get a sense of if they felt that RIT was a welcoming community, that there are people that care about them and how they were engaging, and overall our numbers have stayed consistent from the beginning. The only number that has changed has been the number of students, the percentage recording fair, or poor mental health. But that is also consistent with what happens during a regular semester. Students start out feeling good, then things get a little bit more stressful and classes are continuing. There's thoughts about what do I do next semester, going home, and we typically notice that is when we get to some of our peak times at the Counseling Center. Overall, we did pretty well considering that about two thirds of students felt that we had met or exceeded their expectations for the campus social environment in the midst of a pandemic. Students we're very concerned that there wouldn't be things for them to do, they wouldn't be able to participate in their clubs and organizations. They also understood the why behind COVID restrictions and they understood how that negatively impacted their social environment, but they adapted. And I think that is the key piece to take away from this. Our students are incredibly resilient. They did a tremendous job in helping us to get to where we are today. We would not be at the cusp of the finish line if it wasn't for our students, who really understood, bought in, and worked with us along the way to get us here today.

So as we're thinking about the spring. We want to have a clean start, meaning that we will also be requesting students to have a negative COVID test. And we also required the flu vaccine, so that we can avoid those common symptoms that would normally be associated with the flu. We're looking at creative indoor opportunities, our auxiliary service area has already developed a plan and it's working with various student groups from the residential area as well as Student Government to retrofit Ritter and really create that as a go to place on campus. We're going to continue to use the outdoors. We'll just switch to a more winter kind of theme and we are taking those respite days and we're turning them into Wellness Days providing opportunities for students to just have some fun, to relax and blow off steam in the middle of the semester.

Believe it or not, we're going to start orientation planning in the spring as well. So thinking about how we're bringing in the next group of tigers for fall 2021. You also heard a few minutes ago that we are kind of thinking about that clean start in terms of quarantine. We are hoping that NY State stays with if you get a negative COVID test, you can come and then quarantine for three days and then take another test. And as long as that is negative, you can come out of quarantine. We'll monitor that. What we've done right now for students currently in residence is asked what their plans are. We are anticipating about 550 students will stay through the entire Thanksgiving break and then 652 that will stay during finals. And about 500 will stay through the entire time of the winter break. We will work with them to make sure that there is also a clean start and there will be support services for that.

**Q:** You mentioned that the number of students relying on Case Management had increased slightly. Would you be able to say how well they have been able to support these students?

**A:** Case Management works with students until there is a resolution for their issue. Sometimes, this involves a combination of things. For example if the issues are around food insecurity, we work with the student to see if they are eligible for any kind of services in the community, but also use the RIT Food Share and other supports for them.

**Q:** My question is around the unique experiences that our on-campus students have with the decrease in social opportunities and just overall mental health impact of the pandemic despite all the awesome mitigation efforts. Particularly, how it can negatively impact the students' motivation and ability to remain focused and complete their school work on time. What sorts of guidance or encouragement have the faculty received in order to provide ongoing flexibility for the students as they're managing their evolving mental health needs. I'm thinking particularly of the students who are put in isolation or quarantine as that reduces their access to certain resources.

**A: Dr. Johnson:** As you know from being in Counseling Center, your team is instrumental for students in quarantine and isolation and that each of these students is assigned a social contact from Residence Life or off campus to assist them in accessing support services. And faculty have started the semester with a plan in mind to assure that students

in isolation can continue to make course progress. We know that academic stress was a challenge, but I can say anecdotally from different groups of RAs and they report that faculty would be asking more often of the class “how are you doing?” And this really opened the door for students to make contact with faculty.

**Dr. Granberg:** Not only faculty, but also the advising staff have done an absolutely amazing job of staying in touch with students, checking on how they are doing and reaching out to students who are not on campus. It’s really been a great job and inspiring to watch. Some other things going on:

- Some formal communication with faculty and staff to look for ways to lighten students’ load.
- Taken a series of academic actions specifically designed to reduce stress levels including pass/fall grading option all year, adjusted course withdrawal dates and revised academic action which is the process that is used when a student’s GPA falls below 2.0. The new process has more counseling support for students who are struggling. I particularly want to thank the Academic Senate who was very supportive of these policy adjustments.
- We’ve spent lot of time assisting faculty in how to teach in these new modalities. In spring semester we will be increasing support for students in how to learn in this way.

**Q:** Without hockey, will the Polisseni Center be available as study place?

**A:** We will need to keep the ice as some of the hockey games will be played there. But, there is a very comprehensive plan underway to turn Ritter Arena into a much more attractive place to be next semester.

#### **New Business**

- None

Meeting adjourned at 3:47 p.m.

Attendance – see next page.

**Attendance November 18, 2020**

Name	Relationship to UC	Attended	Name	Relationship to UC	Attended
Aguilar, Christian	Member-SG		Krutz, Daniel	Member-AS	x
Buckley, Gerard	Member-Dean	x	Lindsay, Susan	Member-SC	x
Castillo, Jaime	Member-SC	x	Liu, Manlu	Member-AS	
Castleberry, Phil	Non-Voting Member	X	Loffredo, Joe	Non-Voting Member	x
Clarke, Cathy	Member-SC	x	Lutzer, Carl	Member-AS	x
Cohen, Lindsay	Member-SC Alt.		Maggelakis, Sophia alt. Larry Buckley	Member-Dean	x
Cuculick, Jessica	Member-AS	x	McQuiller, Laverne	Member-Dean	x
Cummings, Twyla	Member-Dean	x	Miller, Heidi	Member-AS	x
Custer, Jacob	Member-SG	x	Mortimer, Ian	Non-Voting Member	
Damanda, Elisabetta	Member-AS	x	Mozrall, Jacqueline	Member-Dean	
DeHarder, Shine	Member-SG	x	Munson, David	Non-Voting Member & EC	x
DeMay, Patrick	Member-SC	x	Nasr, Nabil	Member-Dean Alt	
Doolittle, Dick	Member-Dean	x	Nickisher, Heidi	Member-AS	x
Durand, Joline	Member-SG	x	Ortega, Jared	Member-SG	
Edwards, Doreen	Member-Dean	x	Pinkham, Jo Ellen	Non-Voting Member	x
Edwards, Patrick	Member-SG	x	Prescott, Joanna	Member-SC	
Ellis, Jacob	Member-SG	x	Provenzano, Susan	Non-Voting Member	x
Engström, Tim	Member-AS		Raffaella, Ryne	Non-Voting Member	x
Esterman, Marcos	Member-AS	x	Ramkumar, S. Manian	Member-Dean	x
Fagenbaum, Barb	Member-SC		Reeder, Gina	Member-SC	x
Ferrari, Christopher	Member-SG		Rutenber, Daniel	CMember-SG	
Finnerty, Bob	Non-Voting Member	x	Simpson, Emi	Member-SG	x
Granberg, Ellen	Member & EC	x	Sood, Harshita	Member-SC	x
Haake, Anne	Member-Dean	x	Stendardi, Deborah	Non-Voting Member	
Hall, James	Member-Dean Alt		Stiner, Holly	Member-SC	x
Heyman, Emily	Member-SC		Teal, Michelle	Member-SC	x
Hull, Clyde	Member-AS	x	Thomas, Shawn	Member-SC	
Jenkins, Keith	Non-Voting Member	x	Trierweiler, John	Non-Voting Member	
Johnson, Sandra	Non-Voting Member	x	Vallone, Lindsay	Member-SC	
Jokl, Todd	Member-Dean	x	Velamuri, Sri Chartitha	Member-SG	
Juergens, Alyssa	Member-SG		Watters, James	Non-Voting Member	
Kiely, Becky	Member-SC	x	Zion, George	Member-AS	x

Key: EC=Executive Committee; AS=Academic Senate; SC=Staff Council; SG=Student Government

**Interpreters:** Hanna Hoekman and Jeneca Saeva