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Jul14

[Bob](#)

## “The university as economic savior”: More to the story

### The Chronicle of Higher Education

published a cover story July 14 addressing the issue of higher education replacing industry in some cities as the economic catalyst.

What better place to tell this story than Rochester, N.Y.? Reporter Karin Fischer wisely selected the [University of Rochester](#) as the thread for her story. After all, UR is now the No. 1 employer in the Rochester area, surpassing Eastman Kodak, which held that rank in the Flower City for nearly a century. In great detail, Fischer chronicles how UR’s research is providing fuel for Rochester. She provides wonderful context of town-gown relationships in other areas of the country, like Akron, Ohio; Bethlehem, Pa.; and Kalamazoo, Mich.

But there is more to the Chronicle story that never made it to print. Not to sound like sour grapes, but [RIT](#) received one passing mention. It’s as if Rochester, N.Y., is a one-college town with just UR—hardly enough mass to really turn a metro area of 1.2 million into the “economic savior.” UR is a great university and as a lifelong Rochesterian I am pleased with the great progress they are making.

But Rochester is a “College Town” and the reporter missed this point. How could she not mention that Rochester has 60,000+ students in the area. That’s larger than Ohio State in Columbus. To learn more about Rochester area colleges, visit: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rochester\\_Area\\_Colleges](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rochester_Area_Colleges) What is upsetting is that the Chronicle reporter interviewed RIT President [Al Simone](#) on the subject for more than 30 minutes. She never quoted him in the story. Furthermore, she was given several data points outlining RIT’s economic impact on Rochester.

Some facts about RIT’s economic impact on Rochester:

â€ RIT is by far the largest university in Rochester in terms of enrollment. With 15,200 students, it is among the top 20 largest private universities in the nation.

â€ About 35 percent of RIT graduates find permanent employment in the Rochester area.

â€ About 35,000 of RIT’s 100,000 alumni live in the Rochester area. This is by far the largest alumni base of any college in the area.

â€ RIT has a \$492 million operating budget (fiscal year 2005-06)

â€ RIT spends \$50 million a year in capital expenditures.

â€ RIT has spent about \$265 million in physical improvements during the past decade, making us one of the “larger construction sites” in the area.

â€ RIT is the 8th largest employer in the Rochester area.

â€ It’s estimated that RIT students directly spend \$130 million in Rochester each year.

â€ RIT researchers brought in \$32.5 million in 2005 from federal agencies, New York state, companies and foundations.

Furthermore, the reporter details UR’s relationship with Kodak founder George Eastman. Mr. Eastman also happened to give his first donation to RIT in 1887 and served as board chairman. Kodak employs nearly 4,000 RIT alumni (the most of any company for RIT, and the most of any university for Kodak).

For more on the Kodak/RIT relationship, visit: <http://www.rit.edu/~umagwww/winter2003/kodak.html>

In the reporter’s defense, I understand she had time and space constraints. But Rochester has truly transformed into a college town thanks in large part to the University of Rochester, RIT, Nazareth, St. John Fisher, Roberts Wesleyan, Monroe Community College, SUNY Brockport, SUNY Geneseo, Hobart and William Smith, Keuka, and Empire State among others.

It’s an eclectic group of colleges and universities. They are keeping this area prosperous in countless ways. Rochester is blessed.

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#### 1. [John Follaco](#)

Jul14

Well said, Bob. Rochester is no longer the corporate giant that it once was—with Kodak, Xerox and Bausch & Lomb not employing as many Rochesterians as they once did. But we’ve become quite the college town—spearheaded by both the UofR AND RIT. Unfortunately, the Chronicle failed to capture what is truly an impressive story about the Rochester community and its many colleges. I do have one complaint with your post, however. Next time you run down the list of area colleges, as a Fisher grad, can you do me a favor and list Fisher ahead of rival Nazareth? :-) Thanks. I’d appreciate it.

#### 2. [Pete](#)

Jul17

Maybe it’s a proximity issue. The public doesn’t feel that there’s as strong a connection between RIT and Rochester as there is between the city and U of R. I mean, we may have the enrollment, the budget, and the alumni, but maybe we lack the common touch.

#### 3. [Paul](#)

Jul21

Nice summary Bob. I had become more acquainted with RIT because my son attended his first year of college there. But alas, he decided to change majors and move to a liberal arts school. To say the least I was quite impressed at what I saw while he was there and still go for social events etc. I believe and hope that through some of the entrepreneurial incubation projects that Rochester will come to appreciate what is going on at RIT. From military application to some of the nanotechnology developed for medical devices, a perfect synergy fit with what is going on at U of R/Strong, is truly amazing. Perhaps changes in the medical field are more thrilling so they get the print. Only if people would look at the changes in the physical plant to finally getting a division I team in Rochester, they would see something was going on at RIT. Many of these changes are due directly to the vision of Dr Simone and Rochester should and will be in his debt for a long time. Lets hope this momentum continues with the next President. I think the politicians from this State are well aware of what RIT offers, as evidenced by the steady stream of visits and the money they are bringing with them. Being a County employee I know only too well what it means for RIT to drive initiatives that will create business. Maybe the next time an article is presented on saving Rochester RIT will stand shoulder to shoulder with the U or R. Thanks for having a forum like this.

 Name (required) E-mail (required) Website

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