

Dateline: RIT – The Podcast (May 24, 2007) (Episode 18)

ANNCR: Welcome to Dateline: RIT with Mike Saffran.

HOST: Dateline: RIT (May 24, 2007)

In his technology-themed column in City Newspaper online on May 18th, RIT information technology professor Stephen Jacobs described a State University of New York-led initiative incorporating the three-dimensional, online world “Second Life” into college classrooms. Tell us, how’s it being used?

ACTUALITY [STEPHEN JACOBS]: Just like the real world, you can’t build anything permanent unless you’ve got land. So people who use Second Life “build”—purchase—land from Second Life, which is, essentially, their own server; and then they can build classroom spaces, or they can build various simulations for people to interact with, set up virtual businesses and do experiments with virtual branding. There are all different kinds of things you can do from replicating your physical campus into a virtual world, all the way out to doing much more experimental abstract work or teaching students how to build 3-D in the environment or having an experiment with different personalities and their representation in a virtual world, so on and so forth.

HOST: And how effective would you say Second Life has been in the classroom?

ACTUALITY [JACOBS]: I think we’re still in the experimentation stage. If all you want to do is conference with your students—things that we can also do through chat rooms or voice discussions or even video discussions—Second Life kind of adds a lot more overhead onto that process than you really need. It’s probably a lot better just to use those existing tools. If you really want to experiment with what a virtual world can offer, then you’re probably better off using Second Life.

HOST: That’s RIT information technology professor Stephen Jacobs. RIT economics professor Amit Batabyal wrote an op-ed that appeared in the May 21st Rochester Democrat and Chronicle advocating for increased reliance on ethanol, and less on oil, to contribute to U.S. energy security, and he recommends a two-pronged strategy—both moving away from the use of U.S. grown corn-based ethanol.

ACTUALITY [AMIT BATABYAL]: In the short term, encourage trade—that is, buying and selling ethanol from the Brazilians, who have a comparative advantage; and, in the meantime, you should be trying to subsidize the production of cellulosic ethanol, which is the most energy efficient.

HOST: What gives Brazil this “comparative advantage,” and why is Brazilian-grown sugar cane a better alternative in ethanol production?

ACTUALITY [BATABYAL]: In the United States, we typically grow ethanol using corn. This is an expensive process because, among other things, there is an intermediate

step involved, which is not involved when you try to grow corn from sugar cane. Because of this added expense, making ethanol profitable from corn production in the United States involves a subsidy; in addition, it takes land away that could've been used to grow other things, such as feed, and, hence, there's an indirect effect on food prices, which tend to go up as a result of excessive concentration on ethanol production. That's one side of the picture. The other side of the picture is the fact that to grow sugar cane you need a tropical climate, which Brazil and other tropical countries have in abundance. In addition, they have a lot of unused land, which they could use profitably to grow sugar cane, from which they could then produce ethanol cheaply and in a "green"—by which I mean energy efficient—manner. So our ideal short-term strategy should not be to subsidize ethanol production here, because it's energy inefficient; but, instead, what we should be trying to do is encourage the production of additional sugar cane-based ethanol—not only because the Brazilians have a comparative advantage but, by encouraging economic development in Brazil and Latin America, our image in that part of the world will improve sorely.

HOST: That's RIT economics professor Amit Batabyal.

On the RIT campus this week . . . Chief Communications Officer Bob Finnerty with news and notes about RIT's 122nd commencement and a special honor for RIT President Albert Simone . . . and News & Events Managing Editor Vienna Carvalho has highlights from the May 18th special commencement edition.

SEGMENT [BOB FINNERTY]: This is Bob Finnerty. President Bill Clinton is the keynote speaker. RIT President Al Simone is at his last graduation ceremony before retirement. But the real headliners at the 122nd Commencement are the graduates. And 2007 marks a milestone for RIT: we will surpass 100,000 alumni! RIT has alumni chapters throughout the U.S. and the world. Visit [www.rit.edu/alumni](http://www.rit.edu/alumni) for more. Congratulations Class of 2007. . . . It is time to wish President Simone a happy retirement. June 15th is officially "Albert J. Simone Day" in Monroe County and the City of Rochester. A 10 a.m. ceremony will be held in the administrative circle, near the Sentinel sculpture. Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks and Rochester Mayor Robert Duffy will be on hand to deliver a proclamation. After serving RIT for 15 years, Simone's last day is June 30th. He will continue to serve as president emeritus. . . . This is Bob Finnerty on the RIT campus.

SEGMENT [VIENNA CARVALHO]: This is News & Events Managing Editor Vienna Carvalho. In the current issue of News & Events . . . Read about a wind-powered walkway light created by a team of engineering students for their multidisciplinary senior-design project—one of seven in a new sustainable design and product-development track focused on exploring the capabilities and limitations of sustainable technologies on the RIT campus and determining their feasibility for widespread use. . . . Also in this issue, RIT's microelectronic engineering department is celebrating its silver anniversary this year. Santosh Kurinec, head of the department, sheds some light on how far micro-e has come, the significant contributions the program has made locally and globally over the years and the future of the industry. . . . And,

check out our coverage of the Eisenhart Outstanding Teaching Award winners and read a reflective Viewpoints essay written by RIT President Albert Simone, who will retire June 30th. . . . Read more about these stories and other RIT news in the May 18th issue of News & Events. This is Vienna Carvalho on the RIT campus..

HOST: This has been Dateline: RIT (May 24, 2007). Dateline: RIT begins a reduced summer schedule beginning next month, wrapping up this inaugural season with monthly episodes in June and July. Warm wishes to RIT graduates, and happy Memorial Day. I'm Mike Safran on the RIT campus.

ANNCR: For more on these stories and other RIT news, visit [www.rit.edu/news](http://www.rit.edu/news).  
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