

Convocation Remarks

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For the past year, the RIT community – faculty, staff, and students working together – have been developing the Strategic Plan which will carry RIT over the next ten years. Five Task Forces, composed of 340 faculty, staff, and students, have given life and shape to the early work of a Steering Committee of eleven members representing the leadership of the campus governance groups. We expect this plan to be approved by the Board of Trustees at its July 2004 meeting.

What does the emerging Strategic Plan say about RIT's current and future students and programs?

This new Strategic Plan recognizes that right now some of RIT's academic programs are great and most of the other programs are very good. Over the next ten years, we expect every program at RIT to be great, as RIT moves from a very good to a great university. That is to say, we expect RIT over the next ten years to become a Category-of-One University. A Category-of-One University is a university that stands alone in the eyes of its constituents. It is a university that is the benchmark for all universities which have a similar purpose and mission.

What is this Category-of-One University?

The vision for RIT's new Strategic Plan is that RIT will lead higher education in preparing its students for successful careers in a global society. How will RIT reach this vision? How will the mission and values associated with this vision be attained?

Five strategic dimensions give life to RIT's vision, mission, and values. These dimensions are: career focus, student success, scholarship, global society, and community. We shall speak to each of these in turn.

CAREER FOCUS

Career focus recognizes that career preparation is the most important element of the RIT brand. Traditionally, our academic programs have been built upon our significant strengths in teaching, experiential learning, and the creative use of technology. These elements will remain important attributes of RIT's brand in the future.

RIT will establish its career focus by integrating academic programs and experiential programs in a unique way. There will be a broad range of cooperative

education options; student internships; research projects; study and work abroad opportunities; business incubator, entrepreneur, and intellectual property possibilities; and community service projects. Building on what we do today, every academic program will include some type of experiential learning.

This will mean that RIT will depend more than ever on industry and government partners to help it identify emerging career areas and to reinforce the relevancy of the RIT curriculum. Increasingly, our degree programs will help graduates develop the transitional skills necessary for lifelong learning and career flexibility.

STUDENT SUCCESS

The hallmark of an RIT education is to teach students how to learn, how to integrate and apply that learning within professional and personal settings, and how to communicate that knowledge.

This means that you, our students, must be prepared for the significant impact of changes in economic, social, political, and technological conditions. You must be cognizant of the increasing diversity of the United States population. You must utilize the leadership skills you have learned here to support the public good. We hope that we have provided you the ability to learn, the encouragement to pursue learning, and a lifetime commitment to practicing that ability. Because of our technology-based, career-oriented curriculum approach, we expect you to thrive in a world where career discovery and transformation will be the norm, where the only technological constant will be change, and where information breeds exponentially.

SCHOLARSHIP

The foremost activity of the RIT faculty is to facilitate, enable, and support student learning. Scholarship is an essential ingredient of an effective learning environment. Faculty scholarship, practiced at the highest level, strengthens the faculty's ability to teach and the students' ability to learn. Scholarship – in terms of the teaching, application, integration, and discovery of knowledge – is integral to all aspects of a student's total educational experience. By successfully and fully integrating scholarship and teaching into a single process dedicated to the education of students, we hope to inspire students to want to do more for the sake of learning.

GLOBAL SOCIETY

The world becomes smaller every day. As you pursue your careers and live your lives, you will be working and interacting with people from many different cultures on every continent. Your success depends not only on competence in your chosen field of study but on your global awareness and understanding of cross-cultural issues. During your time at RIT, you have had an opportunity to interact with a geographically diverse faculty, staff, and student body. This informal learning, taken together with the global aspects of some of your formal course assignments, will help you be the world citizen you need to be. In the future, RIT will focus even more on the challenges and opportunities of a global society.

COMMUNITY

We strive to make RIT a diverse, connected, and mutually supportive community that has pride in who we are, what we do, and how we accomplish our goals. In many ways, this is a most difficult strategic dimension to master. On some days, we announce remarkable achievements, which we celebrate. On other days, we seem to face daunting challenges as we attempt to build a sense of community in all of its aspects.

We want to foster among the RIT community a sense of caring, mutual respect, and participation among all its family members throughout the world. We want to place a high value on personal and professional development. We want to be proud of and loyal to RIT. We want every RIT community member to believe that by being a part of this university community, he or she will grow and be enriched personally and professionally.

This means:

- We must engage all members of the campus community in the shared responsibility for an enriching and inclusive experience for all.
- We must create a learning environment that is second to none and that will have a transformative life impact on all members of the campus community.
- We must be distinguished among our peer institutions by individual and collective commitment to the personal and professional growth of our students and ourselves.
- We must celebrate RIT – its history, its accomplishments, and its people – in our day-to-day activities and university-wide events and programs.

CONCLUSION

These five dimensions are closely connected, integrated, and synergistic. For the past ten years, we have been working to build this strategic synergy. We shall continue this momentum over the next ten years.

RIT will continue to shoot for the stars. Today, RIT shines brightly in the sky. I believe that you, our 2004 RIT graduates, will travel ever upward. Because of your accomplishments and achievements in the years ahead, you will make it possible for RIT to shine at least as brightly as the brightest stars in the sky. And who knows? I believe we can be the brightest star. We can be a Category-of-One University.

Thank you for your brilliance and may your odyssey be as fulfilling and rewarding as you deserve.