

RIT STRATEGIC PLAN 2005-2015

**Category-of-One University: Uniquely Blending Academic
Programs with Experiential Learning for Students' Success**

A PRIMER

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July 2004

A JOURNEY INTO THE FUTURE

This primer is a story about an exciting journey. It starts in the year 2005 at Rochester Institute of Technology.

Year 2005

In 2005, RIT is a very good university. It has been building positive momentum over the past decade, in accordance with its Strategic Plan 1999-2004.

During these past ten years, the university has increased significantly in student, faculty, and staff size, quality, racial/ethnic diversity, and global diversity. The curriculum has increased significantly in breadth, depth, scope, outreach, and integration across the campus. Sponsored research and other scholarly activity have increased significantly. Interaction and involvement with the Rochester, national, and global communities have increased significantly. The voice, empowerment, and influence of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and trustees in all of the above have increased significantly.

The physical infrastructure of all aspects of the university has increased significantly. The university as an economic driver in the Rochester community has increased significantly. The local, national, and international visibility and reputation of the university have increased significantly. University pride and spirit among all university constituents have increased significantly.

This is the year 2005. What does the year 2015 look like?

Year 2015

In the year 2015, it is clear that RIT is all about its students. Everyone – students (especially the students), faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, parents, high school counselors, potential employers – knows this. What does “all about the students” mean?

In 2015, every RIT undergraduate and graduate student has a close professional and personal relationship with at least one faculty member. Many students also have such relationships with staff, trustees, and alumni. These relationships continue after graduation.

For twenty years, over the period of two ten-year strategic plans, RIT has affirmed that “RIT is for the students”. It is evident in 2015 that this affirmation is the mantra for RIT.

It is true that faculty and staff have advanced professionally over the period; that research, scholarly activity, and curriculum development have flourished over these years; that the Rochester community has benefited from the companies spun out of RIT’s High Technology Incubator; that the Federal and State governments and business corporations across the country have benefited from RIT partnerships; and that RIT’s global contributions have supported academic and economic development in countries around the world.

However, the intent – and the result – of these accomplishments has been to enrich the quality of the educational experience for every student at RIT. These activities and outcomes are not viewed as successes in their own right. They are viewed as successes only to the extent that they enhance RIT students' educational, professional, and personal development. The above outcomes are the indirect consequences of attempting to develop the full potential of every RIT student.

As this implies, no activity is initiated until it is first determined that this endeavor (e.g., faculty scholarship or community engagement) will have a meaningful and positive impact on our students. Student needs are never neglected in favor of other activities. While these “other activities” may be extremely important to the constituencies they serve, if they do not connect directly to student development, RIT resources are not diverted to them. The focus is on the student.

The many important and broad-based programs undertaken at RIT are initiated because they contribute directly to the education of our students. Faculty research and scholarly activity, business partnerships, community engagement, and global interactions contribute immensely to the education of our students. And that is why – and how – they are undertaken. RIT always holds its students as the top priority when considering these activities.

Not every university is able to engage in the full breadth of activities or engage in the depth possible at RIT. RIT is distinct in this regard when compared to many other universities. Not every university that can undertake this scope of activity is able or willing to genuinely place its students in a top priority position. RIT is distinct in this regard when compared to these universities.

EXAMPLES

Specific Examples

The other day, I met in my office with a faculty member from RIT's Kate Gleason College of Engineering. We talked for about an hour and a half. The faculty member, born in an Asian country but now an American citizen, discussed his students, courses, research, philosophy of life, and professional vision and goals. That conversation speaks to the heart of this Primer. I shall briefly relate elements of our conversation.

The faculty member, each year, teaches undergraduate, masters, and Ph.D. courses. His undergraduate courses include the introductory course in his field. He has received well over a million dollars in government and corporate research grants, and as a result, has been able to financially support undergraduate and graduate students in his laboratory on a part-time and full-time (summers and co-op) basis. Some of his beginning undergraduate students have volunteered to work in his laboratory without pay simply to learn more – they were motivated to make this request because of courses they took with him. One time, he ordered a student to stay away from his lab for at least one week because he believed the student was working too hard in class and in the lab, and not allowing himself enough balance (social and just downtime) in his

life. His students – undergraduate and graduate – have co-authored and co-presented papers with him in scholarly journals and national conferences, respectively. The professor is patenting some of his intellectual property and his students are joining him as he forms a company in RIT's High Technology Incubator.

General Examples

Similar examples of student-faculty engagement exist in every college. For example, we have faculty and students in the College of Liberal Arts (together with three other colleges) working with the community leadership in Sector 10 of the City of Rochester to foster community development; faculty and MBA students in the College of Business working in teams directly with local companies to solve company problems; faculty and students in the College of Applied Science and Technology organizing their own start-up company; faculty and students in the College of Science conducting research together in the summer which results in joint paper presentations at scholarly and professional conferences; faculty and students in the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences working together so that students win national awards in film and animation, photography, and art, design, and printing; faculty and students at NTID traveling abroad to replicate the NTID model in other countries; faculty and students in the B. Thomas Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences working, through a senior capstone course, in teams for a year with companies to solve company software problems, with the results presented at the end of the year in a two-day fair and poster program held in the college auditorium; and faculty and students working together in teams for a year to prepare for international and national competition in race cars, cement canoes, robots, photography, and film.

In each of these examples, it is clear that the students' education is being enriched by their involvement – under the leadership and mentoring of dedicated and caring faculty – in research and scholarly activity, entrepreneurial engagements, business problem-solving, community service, global interactions, and national competition in their professional fields. These activities all take place outside of the classroom and normal educational regimen. Yet, they all are integrally connected with the curriculum and the learning process. In each of these examples, it is clear that student growth and development are the priority, and the “extracurricular” activities mentioned foster this development.

While we have focused on faculty-student relationships (the university is “for the students” and “by the faculty”), it is important to note that staff members are integrally imbedded in many of these projects. Moreover, numerous staff members across the campus establish mentoring and support relationships with students, which make all the difference in student success at RIT.

What is my purpose in citing these examples? Simply put: by pointing out what we are actually doing today, we give credence to what we can do tomorrow. As it turns out, in 2005 a relatively small number of faculty and students are engaged in the experientially-enriched academic endeavors just described. In 2015, all faculty and students will be so engaged. The vibrant, challenging, and stimulating campus environment that will evolve will differentiate RIT from other universities.

Personal Example

I would like to offer a personal example of the importance of the student/faculty mentoring relationship. At the beginning of my senior year at Tufts University, I had absolutely no intention of going on to graduate school. In fact, I had no idea of what a Ph.D. program was all about. A professor that I had known for several years became my honors thesis advisor. He spent many hours with me throughout the year. I learned a lot about academia and life well beyond my honors thesis. At the end of the year, because of his careful and caring intervention, I decided to enroll in the Ph.D. program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. My life took a very different road as a result of his mentoring, a road which has defined what I do and who I am. I was 21 years of age at the time.

Four years later, while I was completing my Ph.D. dissertation at MIT, my wife and I worked our way through a most difficult time in which we lost our second child, after a yearlong battle, to cancer at the age of 2. Were it not for the professional mentoring and, especially, personal counseling of a faculty member at MIT, I never would have completed my dissertation and my career would never have begun.

Because of these two gentlemen, my life has been unalterably changed. I am convinced it is a change for the better. I cannot see myself being happier at any other professional endeavor. This life has made it possible for me to continue to learn and study, and to develop whatever leadership and managerial inclinations I might have.

The impact of these two professors on me as a student occurred more than 40 years ago. Yet, I still remember them and the situations as if it were yesterday. We were able to keep up communication for at least 20 years after I graduated, but because of time and distance, have not stayed in touch. Nonetheless, I shall never forget who they are and what they did for me. I know that if they did it for me, they did it for many other students.

I also know that most students at that time did not benefit the way I did. I was fortunate to be one of the relatively few, at that time, to enjoy a student/faculty relationship such as the ones I described. I am convinced that every student should have this opportunity.

The reason I am making this personal statement is that academia has given me the opportunity to “pay back”. I have been fortunate to have been able to develop mentoring relationships with at least several students every year of my professional life. Most of the faculty I have known over the years also relish and applaud such relationships, particularly since many of them have benefited in similar fashion when they were students. RIT must work to give all of its student body the remarkable mentoring opportunities that were (or, in some cases, should have been) afforded them.

RIT must be recognized as an institution that celebrates and rewards these relationships. As we increasingly succeed in establishing successful student-faculty relationships, engaging 100% of our faculty and student body by the year 2015, we clearly will have placed RIT in a distinguished position among the family of universities.

While it is easy to “say” what 2015 will be, it is not so easy to accomplish it. A complex set of intricate and connected activities must occur – some sequentially and others in parallel. The elements of this mosaic are summarized next.

WHAT DOES THE ROAD LOOK LIKE?

The road ahead is named “RIT Strategic Plan”. The houses along the road are numbered 2005 to 2015. Some portions of the road are bumpy. There are some potholes. Parts of the road – particularly near the end – still need to be cleared.

Where is the road headed? The answer is found in the Vision Statement:

“RIT will lead higher education in preparing its students for successful careers in a global society.”

What are some of the defining features of this road into the future? We see three major connected features.

First, there are “students and curricula” popping out from among the trees. The trees represent important species such as: career focus, student success, student centeredness, primacy of teaching, experiential learning, relevance, co-op, entrepreneurship, and global orientation.

Second, the trees are supported by “enabling” stakes and wires described in the tree nursery as: scholarship, applied research, technology base, partnerships, *First in Class*, culture of change, and diversity.

Third, the forest encompassing the road conveys an aura of “community and society” through the permeating aromas of: service to society, sense of community, and alumni participation.

Clearly, the road reflects a commitment to quality in all of its features.

Well-marked signs point out the five scenic vistas which, in a connected and synergistic fashion, reflect the three features just described. These vistas are named: Career focus, student success, scholarship, global society, and community. As we scan the terrain and gaze into the horizon associated with these vistas, we are captured by the 32 breath-taking pinnacles and summits, described on the map as “goals”. We note, again from the map, that 132 hills, valleys, cliffs, and streams – which the map describes as “objectives” – must be mastered in order to reach the goals.

Our road weaves its way through these vistas and takes its character and beauty from them. As the road nears its end, at house number 2015, we realize that it is becoming one of the world’s greatest roads, on its way to becoming one of a kind.

CONSTRUCTION PLANS

Building the road just described requires several construction crews. The core crew is the Agenda for Action crew, which will define the action steps, loci of responsibility, time lines, and

required resources to complete the road. Four specially formed crews, working in coordinated fashion with the Agenda for Action crew, will focus on key road constructs. These crews are the Branding crew, Global Strategies crew, Outreach crew, and the Women's Issues crew.

To be successful, these crews necessarily will reflect the highest standards of quality and a culture of change, guided by bold and creative leadership that exhibit the passion and energy of RIT's faculty, staff, students, and trustees.

EPILOGUE

RIT began its journey in 2005 as a very good university. It completes this journey in 2015 as a great university. In the eyes of its constituents, RIT stands alone. It is a category-of-one university, setting the standard for other universities with related missions.

In the end, RIT students succeed because RIT blends experiential learning into its academic programs in a comprehensive and innovative fashion that no other university can match, and because at all times, RIT holds the educational welfare of its students above all else.

This primer is a short story that sketches a complicated and challenging foray into the heights of academe. The full treatise is contained in the 49-page (30 pages without the appendices) "CATEGORY-OF-ONE UNIVERSITY: Uniquely Blending Academic Programs with Experiential Learning for Student Success", RIT Strategic Plan for 2005-2015.