

RIT Collaboratory for Cross-Disciplinary Education Implementation Task Force

Executive Summary: Section 6. Recommendations for RIT's Path Forward

The RIT Collaboratory for Cross-Disciplinary Education Implementation Task Force has recommended three overlapping steps to move interdisciplinary education forward at RIT:

- **recognizing and showcasing existing interdisciplinary activities,**
- **fostering new collaborations, and**
- **creating a collaboratory that will focus solely on the activities and resources for interdisciplinary education.**

Their report includes the short-term and long-range ideas that would help reach these three goals, along with implementation timelines, resource needs, and administrative requirements for the broad range of programs and policies that would foster more interdisciplinary collaboration on our campus. It is the recommendation of the task force that the work of the task force be continued through an on-going committee of appointees from the Provost and Academic Senate. These faculty, staff and student representatives from across campus would be formally charged to advance all interdisciplinary initiatives on campus and to oversee the activities that will promote and engage all aspects of the university's cross-disciplinary efforts.

Recognizing and Showcasing Existing Interdisciplinary Activities

One of the most effective methods for communicating and recognizing existing successes would be the creation of a carefully prepared website that aggregates all of our interdisciplinary activities. This would serve as a single point of information on interdisciplinary collaborations for both internal and external constituencies.

Fostering New Collaborations

Students, faculty and staff need to continue not only doing the interdisciplinary work already underway, but to continually develop and work on new cross-disciplinary collaborations. There are several ideas that would be highly effective in aiding this effort.

- Creation of an Advisory Board or "Think Tank" comprised of internal and external members who can suggest strategic direction and serve as idea generators for interdisciplinary curricula and research.
- Host cross-college networking events in diverse locations for individuals from our internal and external communities to learn about their colleagues' research and teaching efforts, with a long-range goal of providing dedicated space to promote networking.
- Grow support for interdisciplinary educational initiatives to address the most difficult problems. Clearly communicate and encourage faculty to engage in interdisciplinary teams working on "preferred activities" that address critical societal needs. Expand interdisciplinary teaching and learning through merit, tenure and promotion criteria revisions. Consider creation of interdisciplinary general education concentrations and minors. Consider creation of a Provost's Intercollegiate Collaboration Fellowship where faculty from two or more colleges may request tuition and stipend support for graduate students to support new topics for thesis-based MS or Ph.D. research.
- Initiate an Interdisciplinary Faculty Classroom Speaker Program that will provide an opportunity for faculty teaching in one discipline to access faculty from other disciplines to provide relevant lectures or learning activities.
- Expand the Honors Program through marketing strategies that highlight interdisciplinary studies, research, global education, career and professional orientation and preparation for graduate studies, with a long-range goal of offering a fully-developed Honors Interdisciplinary Curriculum.

- Develop interdisciplinary Learning Communities where students would enroll as a cohort in two or more classes in which the faculty integrate the curriculum for a deeper, more intentional learning experiences for the students. Interdisciplinary LC's could be focused on first-year students but not limited to that population. For upperclassmen, pairings could easily be developed from the new general education themes.
- Encourage more students and faculty to engage in both credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing projects. Create a project clearinghouse that matches interests and skills. This clearinghouse could be extended to also include research projects and classroom-based educational activities.
- Develop a clear set of guidelines and implications associated with team-teaching cross-disciplinary courses and then use these guidelines to adjust the cost model and/or other resource allocation tools to reflect the importance of encouraging cross-disciplinary team-teaching.
- Demonstrate commitment to interdisciplinary collaborations through a small business innovation research funding model. Seek and/or create new funding opportunities and reprioritize existing funds.
- Leverage the new Student Information System to allow quick searches for key faculty with expertise in interdisciplinary collaborations, tracking, and assessment.

Creating a Collaboratory Focused Solely on the Activities and Resources for Interdisciplinary Education

One of the more difficult decisions is how to organize a structure that will enhance interdisciplinary teaching and learning at RIT. The task force considered many different organizational models and examined a broad spectrum of approaches. There are advantages and disadvantages to both centralized and decentralized models. The task force believes that the best approach for RIT to overcome the barriers to interdisciplinary education and collaboration is a hybrid model that combines elements of both. This hybrid model allows flexibility, presents a more cohesive perspective of our interdisciplinary efforts, and improves positioning for our future trajectory. The embodiment of the hybrid model would be known as the **Collaboratory for Interdisciplinary Education and Innovation**. This center would be led by an associate provost for interdisciplinary education and innovation (IE&I) and house and support the Center for Student Innovation, an educational incubator, and individualized degree programs.

The Center for Student Innovation would continue to serve as an innovation showcase on campus and an ideal location for educational incubator pilot projects. It could also serve as a hub for externally funded projects involving interdisciplinary teams consisting of investigators from multiple colleges that do not have necessary space in their home colleges. The CSI can grow with the Collaboratory.

The Educational Incubator should become the nexus for faculty who want to discuss, propose and pilot new cross-college educational initiatives.

Individualized Degree Programs (IDP) would be available through any RIT college, developed in consultation with affiliated faculty members in the primary college, and approved by the faculty IDP coordinator.

By recognizing and showcasing existing interdisciplinary activities, fostering new collaborations and creating a collaboratory that will focus solely on the activities and resources for interdisciplinary education, the potential to expand interdisciplinary initiatives at RIT is very high. RIT is poised and ready to present to our internal and external audience a more cohesive perspective of the university's interdisciplinary efforts and improved position for our future pathway.