Out of class credit  
By Brianne R. Hashley

What better way to get a "jump" on the real world than to become involved in it? Volunteering can boost self-esteem and build personal relationships while contributing to the world at large. RIT has many avenues through which students, faculty and staff can become involved in our community. The Learn and Serve America program, a partnership with the NorthEast Neighborhood of Rochester and the RIT community, is one of them.

In September 2000, the North-East Neighborhood Alliance (NENA) began a partnership with the RIT community. NENA engages residents in neighborhood revitalization within the northeast section of Rochester. The northeast neighborhood is located in an impoverished area of the city of Rochester. NENA, which encompasses three neighborhoods comprised of 17,000 residents, is working for economic and neighborhood revitalization. These strategies are targeted toward specific neighborhood interests and characteristics. President Simone termed this new relationship, "A part of RIT's commitment to the community."

Within the College of Liberal Arts, faculty from Public Policy, Professional 4 Technology and Society and Social Work departments are incorporating the project into their curricula. Social Work was the first department in the CLA to offer a service learning course. During Fall 2001, Social Work offered a course entitled, Structure and Function, and will offer an extension to this class in the winter quarter, Assessing Community Needs.

Meredith Dalton, RIT's Project Coordinator of Learn and Serve America, says that there has been an overwhelmingly positive response to service learning at RIT. "Students who were involved in service learning last spring and this fall all commented on how rewarding it was to work on a real project, as opposed to a hypothetical case study."

The Liberal Arts faculty involved hope that the students will gain more real-life knowledge from this out-of-the-classroom and into-the-world experience. Students will learn about themselves, the population they serve and the world they live in. For more information about the Learn and Serve America program, contact Meredith Dalton at madgla@rit.edu or by phone at 475-2656.*

Passing on knowledge  
By Erin Julian

In an effort to improve the retention rate among new students, the College of Liberal Arts created a peer-mentoring program. Beginning this year, peer mentors provide additional guidance and support for new students.

The goal of the peer mentor program is to connect currently enrolled students with new students who are in the same degree program. Elizabeth Murray and Alexis Smirnow are mentors for the Psychology majors. "One of my mentees has been receptive," Murray noted. "I have been getting to know about him and his goals while he is here at RIT, and I have provided the same to him about myself. We have built a trust."

Sherdina Ezell, one of three Criminal Justice peer mentors, wants to "be of some assistance and to help the freshmen so that their first year goes by smoothly and less 'painfully' than my own." Brian Dassero and Emily Gillespie also mentor new Criminal Justice students. Jessica Grant mentors Social Work students and Anne McDonald mentors students in Economics and Public Policy.

Professional & Technical Communication (PTC)mentors, Adam Stone and Erin Julian, invented a novel way to reach out to new students. In collaboration with the instructor for PTC's Foundations of Communication class, Dr. Grant Cos, and the PTC chair, Dr. Bruce Austin, the PTC mentors sponsored a department office tour.

Adam and Erin met and introduced themselves to the Foundations of Communication class and then had the class introduce themselves. Next, the peer mentors led the students to the department office where they met and mingled with PTC faculty and staff over pizza. The office tour provided an opportunity for the new students to get in the habit of checking their mail folders as well as getting them acquainted with the PTC office.

Elizabeth Avalos, a student new to RIT as well as the PTC program, attended the office tour. "I was glad to hear about the peer mentor program," she says. "I could really use some insight and guidance from someone who has already been through it." Elizabeth also told her mentors that, "I intend to use you, so be ready!"

Associate Dean Laurence Winnie describes the peer mentors' responsibilities as, "meeting with students informally all through the school year, offering advice and support for the new students' academic and personal adjustment to their program, to RIT, and to college life in general." Dean Winnie meets with the peer mentors weekly to get feedback and provide additional training.*