Putting it to the Test:
Social Work students learn about advocacy from the flip side
by Kayla Zerby

The news came as a shock to third-year Social Work student Genevieve DeGuire.

On February 20, she and her fellow peers received a letter from the College of Liberal Arts that could change everything.

Within the letter was Dean Andrew Moore’s official proposal to discontinue the Social Work degree program

DeGuire, also President of the Student Social Work Organization (SSWO), was organizing a community service trip to New York City when she read the news.

“I was just shocked,” she said. “From then on, I knew I had a lot more on my plate as president.”

Since then, more than 40 Social Work students—well over half of the program—have joined together to become advocates for change.

Their mission? Save RIT Social Work.

Meeting every Monday, the organization has developed several strategies to “raise awareness about the social work program and why it’s important in a technical school,” said DeGuire.

From campus-wide petitions, requests for letters of support, and buttons that read “RIT has Social Work,” to a detailed PowerPoint presentation about the importance of the degree program, the students have put their knowledge of the field of social work to the test.

Dr. Burt Rodenhauser, Chair of the Social Work department, noticed the irony of his department’s situation. “Everything that’s happening to us is exactly what we advocate for with our own clients,” he said. “I’m thrilled to see the initiative and energy that these students have put into this.”

The RIT Social Work department, founded 33 years ago, prides itself in providing students with the opportunity to gain hands-on experience during their field placements.

Over the years, students have worked in a variety of different arenas that have put them in direct contact with professionals in the field. Some have worked on large-scale social work efforts within the Rochester community, others have worked in counseling centers, and others have chosen to work with drug and alcohol abusers.

This time, however, students aren’t learning about advocacy by helping an outside oppressed community; they’re learning it by empowering themselves to work towards a common goal.

It is yet to be determined what will happen to the program. The College of Liberal Arts Curriculum Committee, after hearing from both the Social Work department and a number of its students, is reviewing the dean’s proposal. If it is accepted, the Committee will make a recommendation to Provost Stan McKenzie. If it is rejected, the Provost will meet with the Committee and/or the COLA faculty to try to resolve the issue.

For now, the students within the program are doing what they do best: advocating for change.

Success in the Making... continued from front page

media, popular culture and the political arena. Presenters from Alfred University held a session discussing challenges in contemporary journalism, and four poster presentations were held to complement the other panels.

The conference keynote speaker, Ms. Kerstin Navik, addressed the conference following lunch. A 1995 graduate of RIT’s Professional & Technical Communication program, and presently a user interface designer for Paychex, Inc., Navik offered lighthearted humor and emphasized the application of her undergraduate education in a corporate environment.

The conference capstone was the award ceremony, honoring the three top paper submissions and top poster. Fiona Lee of SUNY Geneseo earned first place for her submission, “Redefining the Sweatshop Issue Through the Framework of Globalization.” Second and third place went to Tracy Portle and Alexa Kaiser, both from Ithaca College. Elizabeth Gorman, Amy Penrose and Lauren Werle from SUNY Geneseo were honored with the top poster award.

Students attending the Communication Conference observe one of the poster presentations given by fellow participants.

Well over 100 students attended the day’s events. Conference co-organizer Pat Scanlon was pleased by the turnout. “This turned out better than we had hoped for,” he said. “It’s not often that we get together like this, and it was great to see some of the research going on elsewhere.”

Keith Jenkins, RIT assistant professor and conference co-organizer said that the conference was “not only an opportunity to showcase our own students, but to expose them to research from their peers at other institutions.”

“I was greatly impressed by what I saw today,” said Austin. “These presentations have really been superb.”

Based on the success of the conference this year, communication undergraduates will have much to look forward to in the years to come.