Rochester Institute of Technology

Calendar Review Committee

Recommendation

February 1995
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Calendar Review Committee

Chair
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Members
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Introduction

In November 1994, President Albert Simone assembled a committee composed of RIT faculty, staff, and students. This group, the Calendar Review Committee, was charged with making a recommendation to the President, by February 1, 1995, on changing RIT's academic calendar.

Specifically, the Committee’s charge was as follows:

The Committee will make a recommendation to the President on the subject of changing the current calendar system to a new configuration. The Committee’s recommendation will be based on the future needs of RIT’s students, faculty, staff and external constituencies. The recommendation will be guided by RIT’s current strategic planning process and existing empirical work which has been completed on the subject of institutional calendars, as well as input from the greater RIT community.

The Committee recognizes six overarching concerns are paramount in the deliberation towards a final recommendation. They are:

- Effects on the quality of education
- Effects on cooperative education
- Effects on enrollment
- Effects on community
- Cost implications
- Strategic advantage to change

The Committee began its task with a detailed review of RIT's Report of the Calendar Task Force -- February 1991 (see Appendix A) as a basis for data and issues pertaining to the many studies on changing RIT's academic calendar. The charge to the 1991 committee was simply to indicate the pros and cons of different calendar models. The charge to the Calendar Review Committee, however, was to weigh and provide judgment on all the relevant issues by determining the best calendar system for RIT.

The 1991 report was distributed to the RIT community via copies placed in the Deans' and Vice Presidents' offices as well as on reserve in the Wallace Library. Two public forums were set up to gather input from faculty, staff, and students. In addition, the RIT community was invited to provide written input to the Committee through electronic mail and a NOTES conference.

Other data sources included RIT’s Strategic Plan and Agenda for Action, reports from other institutions who considered or have changed calendars (see Appendices B - G), studies on national academic calendar trends from the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (see Appendix J), and invited speakers to the Committee on specific issues such as the Strategic Plan and part-time students. These speakers included Joan Stone, Dick Lindner, Lynda Rummel, and Stan MacKenzie. The Committee contacted several institutions: Northeastern University, Michigan State University, Delaware Tech, Virginia Tech, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, and Northwestern University. A phone interview with Michigan State University provided valuable insights into the reasons for changing calendars as well as the impact of the change itself.
The Committee spent much of its time analyzing, discussing, and debating the issues of semester, trimester, and quarter academic calendars. These calendar models are defined to be: semester -- two 15-week sessions and one 12-week summer session; trimester -- three 14-week sessions; and, quarter -- four ten-week sessions. For all of these models, each session has an additional week for exams. A modular structure was assessed and determined to be an overlay to the basic academic calendar. Also, as indicated in the charge, six dimensions were considered. While these dimensions were not prioritized, it became evident that the quality of an RIT education coupled with career experiences through cooperative education were the heart and soul of who and what we are as an institution.

The Committee members brought different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives to the discussions. However, it is important to note that each and every member of the Committee took an "Institute" perspective with regard to analyzing the issues and data. Each raised thoughtful questions and sought to synthesize the body of evidence for the collective good of RIT.

Early in the process, the Committee agreed that the recommendation would be the result of the consensus of the entire group and that a decision of whether or not to include a minority report would be delayed until the final vote had taken place. For this process, consensus was defined to be the position that all Committee members could understand and support the decision of the Committee. After over two months of intense discussions, a single round of votes resulted in the entire Committee agreeing that it had reached a consensus. The vote was: 12 in favor of the quarter calendar system; 2 in favor of the trimester calendar system; and 0 in favor of the semester calendar system. Further, it is also significant to note that the Committee decided a minority report was not necessary.

On the basis of the extensive data available with input from the RIT community, the overwhelming consensus of the Committee is that the best academic calendar for RIT is the quarter system.

The time frame for the Committee's recommendation required that it focus its discussions on which academic calendar model was best for RIT -- to have considered the various physical orientations of the quarter system early in the discussions would have been inappropriate and awkward. In order to safeguard the integrity of the process to determine which physical arrangement of the quarter calendar is optimal, the Committee recommends that a more in-depth study to focus on those specific issues is needed. This second stage of study will involve gathering data and discussing the pros and cons of the various options.

The sections that follow are intended to discuss the defining issues for each dimension and present the Committee's findings and conclusions. It is the sincere hope of the Committee that the RIT community understands that the decision was not made on a single issue but rather by weighing each dimension in different ways. The Committee's investigations raised several issues that simply cannot be solved by a change in the academic calendar.
In summary, the Committee recommends that the best academic calendar for RIT in the long run is the quarter system. However, it is not recommending that we maintain the status quo. The Committee offers several suggestions for improving the current academic calendar as well as recommending other issues for further consideration. In addition, we hope that the community's efforts to address the issues of educational quality raised in this healthy debate will continue. The Committee is convinced that the calendar discussion presented only one of the many opportunities we have to understand the complexity of the quality of education issue. By attempting to find solutions to these problems, RIT will strengthen its strategic position as a national leader in career-based higher education.

Effects on the Quality of Education

The quality of education is a most difficult and complex issue to address -- it is what we are all about. We, the Committee, had to confront exactly what quality of education meant to the RIT community, and then look at the impact of the calendar on our ability to provide it. We spent the greatest portion of our considerable effort struggling with this issue.

The Committee believes that one cannot define the concept of quality of education in isolation. One cannot separate the issue of quality of education from issues of co-op, community, enrollment, and competitive position. These issues are inter-dependent; no one component can be altered without impact on the others. Any discussion of the quality of education must address co-op. We have all learned that co-op is not simply a useful addition to the RIT educational environment, but rather is an integral component of the curriculum we offer in many programs. Other issues, such as the effects of the calendar on part-time students and on the quality of the educational experiences we provide for them, are addressed in other sections of this report. We have also learned in our deliberations that RIT is a diverse community, both in the educational opportunities it offers and in the student populations it attracts.

While no calendar, in and of itself, guarantees a better quality of education, there were strong arguments from within the Committee and from the Institute population at large favoring each of the quarter, the semester and the trimester systems. Some believe that semesters or trimesters provide a better framework within which to learn, and that quarters hinder our ability to provide the educational experience our students deserve and need. There were equally strong views expressing the opposite position. Finally, there were many who felt that there are advantages and disadvantages to both systems, and who either could not determine which were unequivocally most important or believed the issues raised were best addressed in ways other than through the calendar.

Basic calendar-related issues which impact the quality of education did emerge during our deliberations. At the most abstract level, it seems difficult to argue that quality of education may be associated only with some one particular calendar system. Among the strongest American universites are
schools on quarters, schools on semesters, and schools on trimesters. However, important academic matters may hinge on calendar decisions. One of the most debated questions has often been framed in terms of depth versus breadth: What is the most appropriate time frame for a single term course to provide the student with a comprehensive overview of the particular topic and sufficient depth of inquiry to permit a significant level of understanding? How does one balance the advantages of the increased variety of courses available in the quarter system with the increased depth possible in some courses through the semester system? Could the depth of coverage of certain topics be realized under the quarter system by more creative approaches to single quarter courses or through sequenced courses? Is there some type of modular overlay that could stretch quarters when appropriate? Could the semester system be designed to retain some of the broad topic selection possible with the quarter? And what is the shortest time frame necessary to reasonably assess the learning process that has taken place? These proved to be only some of the many questions raised which, in turn, provoked many responses.

In the course of our own consideration of the quality of education issue, the following line of reasoning came to dominate Committee deliberations. We came to see that there are many kinds of courses whose special needs might very well make a longer term of considerable value. It may be that courses outside a student's major are especially likely to fall into this category, and we agree that such courses are clearly an important part of each student's educational experience. Further, it is possible that RIT students, who often come here because of strong antecedent interests in the specialized fields which become their majors, are often very much in need of special attention in areas outside those fields. But, how is this special need best served? Is it through increased concentration in a small number of core areas or through a broad sampling of many available areas outside the major discipline? The Committee became convinced that no single answer was adequate for all areas of study even when attention was restricted to courses outside the major.

The Committee was thus not convinced that the academic needs of RIT students would be better served by longer academic terms. Nor was it convinced, after making inquiries at schools such as Michigan State which have changed from quarters to semesters, that the desired increase in depth was actually realized in any uniform way across the curriculum. It appears that a change to trimesters or semesters might very likely allow some important courses to be introduced to RIT students much more effectively, but this gain would come only at a cost: a cost to some existing courses and program curricula; a cost of no longer being able to expose those same students to the larger array of courses which, we have learned, actually seems to be one of the things that attracts students to RIT in the first place; and a cost to other components of the RIT community such as co-op. It was not at all clear that this cumulative cost is one that should be borne.

Over the years, various groups have voted and been polled to determine their position on this issue, with varying results. In 1992 the Faculty was polled and, while the results differed dramatically from
college to college, a majority of faculty members across the Institute voted in favor of a change to semesters. That same year Policy Council voted to remain on quarters. We have attempted to address the various perspectives represented through these votes and throughout the RIT community. It is our determination that RIT is best served by remaining on the quarter system.

Effects on Cooperative Education

Career education is a fundamental cornerstone of an RIT education. In fact it is, along with our specialized, technical programs, what distinguishes RIT in a very competitive higher education marketplace. The primary means by which we deliver career education is through the cooperative education program. Long recognized as a national leader, RIT has one of the oldest and largest co-op programs in the world. More than 7,500 students are enrolled in RIT academic programs with co-op components, representing every college at the Institute including NTID. Every year 2,500 students from more than 80 degree option programs will go out for at least one co-op assignment and earn collectively in excess of $15 million. One notable measure of the success of this program is the consistently high co-op placement rate (95-100% overall). Unlike most institutions with cooperative education programs, co-op is not an add-on component to the academic curriculum. At RIT, it is central to the core of the educational philosophy and formal structure of many academic units.

Co-op has contributed not only to building the real world career experience of the participating students but also to their ability to understand and put into context their classroom and laboratory experiences. This sort of integrated and comprehensive education model has allowed our graduates to proceed successfully to productive careers and graduate school opportunities. It is important to note that the success of our co-op program is reflected today in the consistent enrollment research data which clearly identifies co-op as one of the single most important reasons for students choosing RIT. Looking to RIT's future, as outlined in the Institute's Strategic Plan, it is evident that career education and co-op will continue to form a significant and fundamental aspect of an RIT education. In fact, a large number of strategic goals and activities reflect an even greater role for all experiential education programs in the Institute's future.

Given this background, the Committee then focused on determining the impact of various calendar models on RIT's co-op program. It is important to note that this review led us beyond the initial analysis offered in the 1991 Calendar Task Force report. The charge to that committee was simply to indicate the pros and cons of different calendar models including the advantages and disadvantages as they relate to the issue of co-op. The charge to our Committee, however, was to weigh and provide judgment on all the relevant issues, including co-op, to determine the best calendar system for RIT. The Committee did this by reviewing the 1991 report and discussing various calendar issues with those institutions most like RIT.
in terms of co-op. Those institutions included Northeastern University, Drexel University, University of
Cincinnati, and Georgia Tech, all of whom have large, comprehensive and mostly mandatory programs
like ours.

A review of co-op programs in the U.S. clearly shows that they exist under nearly every type of
calendar system. In principle, co-op can be offered in such a way as to accommodate any particular
calendar model. A review of the 1991 report might, in fact, be interpreted as concluding that co-op would
work equally well -- with various tradeoffs -- under any of the calendar systems. That conclusion would
be inaccurate and unfair to the original work of that committee. Our group had the more difficult task of
weighing and evaluating all the identified advantages and disadvantages. Our consideration of these
issues and the related concerns emerging from those deliberations resulted in our assessment that co-op
would best be served by a quarter calendar model. This conclusion is based primarily on what the quarter
system provides for co-op that the other two basic models we considered -- semester and trimester -- could
not offer.

There are three distinct advantages to co-op under a quarter system. These advantages proved
decisive in the Committee's final analysis. One advantage is in the quarter system's ability to provide the
greatest number of potential co-op work periods and, consequently, the greatest possible exposure to
different employers, industrial settings and work assignments. Co-op provides an excellent opportunity to
advance the goal of career exploration and discovery by allowing students to experience a variety of work
settings. In a rapidly changing business world, these diverse work experiences provide students with the
broadest possible exposure to potential work environments and significantly strengthen students' ability to
make informed decisions regarding post-graduation employment. Under both the semester and trimester
systems, students would have fewer opportunities for this exploration and exposure; this would be
especially true for Engineering and Engineering Technology programs. For programs such as those in the
College of Business, a suggested reduction from two quarters to one semester or trimester would have the
added effect of losing a competitive marketing advantage. It would be difficult if not impossible to
distinguish, from a marketing perspective, a one semester/trimester co-op program from any of the
internship, summer employment or semester-in-industry programs currently available at our competitor
institutions.

The quarter system's multiple co-op start points (4) provide another distinctive advantage for the
coop program. These multiple start points allow RIT to respond more quickly to employer requests for
students. This is consistent with the needs of the growing number of small employers becoming involved
in the co-op program and more responsive to the just-in-time\(^1\) hiring needs of all employers in today's

\(^1\) Just-in-time is a concept used in various ways to describe the immediate nature and need of various
activities including employment, training and education.
uncertain economic environment. Given the keen competition for quality employer partnerships, these multiple start points provide our students with a notable competitive advantage. The semester and trimester systems provide greater time gaps between potential co-op start dates and fewer potential start times.

The third and most compelling advantage for the quarter calendar system lies in the overall flexibility it affords both students and employers. This flexibility takes on several different dimensions. The quarter system, for example, allows for either a 12 - 13 week (single block) or 24 - 26 week (double block) work period. The semester/trimester systems allow only for a 16-week long assignment. A double block under either of those systems is problematic since the student would be away from campus for such an extended period of time. Sample trimester-based co-op schedules outlined in the 1991 report, for example, show a two-year period during years three and four of the curriculum in which students would only be in school for two of the six trimesters. The quarter system, in contrast, allows for a better balanced and more pedagogically sound combination of classes and co-op work.

The flexibility possible with two different work period lengths better serves the needs of employers whose hiring needs vary over time. Employers outside the Northeast region (e.g., semiconductor manufacturers in California) are better served by the double block option, which is substantially longer than either the trimester or semester periods and, given travel costs and start-up times, is a better investment for the employer. Students are also better served by a double block, for example, when an employer assignment includes longer-term project responsibilities (e.g., systems development projects offered by software houses). Students are well positioned to partner with employers whose hiring needs are based on seasonal employment patterns (e.g., hospitality and resort properties, accounting and retailing operations). The shorter single block work period is also a valuable and important option for students and employers. Many employers prefer the shorter period under certain circumstances. It allows students who have other commitments (e.g., ROTC, athletics, student clubs and organizations) greater ability to schedule their work assignments around their on-campus activities. It is also a very desirable option for local and regional employers who may have already invested an initial co-op quarter in orienting and bringing a student up-to-speed. The subsequent single block assignments are very productive because the initial investment has already been made in the student, and start-up times are greatly minimized. This allows employers to involve students in a short, intensive assignment which may not have been a practical consideration under other circumstances. Students often view a single block, especially toward the end of their academic career, as one last opportunity to explore a particular employer, industry or set of job responsibilities.

The flexibility issue is also manifested in the scheduling and availability of courses. One of the limitations of semester and trimester systems is that the longer periods provide bigger planning and scheduling blocks. This makes it potentially more difficult to offer the right combination of classes and
class sections to allow students the freedom to go out on co-op throughout the year. The notion of year-round availability for both students and employers is a critical competitive advantage. Class scheduling problems relative to co-op are common, for example, under semester system models. Students are often tracked toward the summer as the central co-op employment period. This development would weaken our distinct and competitive position in the marketplace relative to the summer employment programs of nearly all universities and force our students out during the most difficult and competitive hiring time for college students.

The overall flexibility for students, employers and the Institute in providing a co-op program under a quarter system offers the best way to maintain our historically high co-op placement rates. A decline in those rates potentially reflects a decline in co-op program quality. This perceived quality decline would certainly affect our efforts to maintain and expand our overall student enrollments.

It is not by accident that the largest university co-op programs at institutions most similar to ours are also on the quarter system. Co-op administrators and faculty at institutions such as Northeastern, Drexel, Georgia Tech, and University of Cincinnati all favor and use the quarter system. Northeastern, during a recent calendar system review, eliminated the semester system option because of its adverse impact on co-op; however, the trimester remained for them a possible alternative. In the end, Northeastern decided to retain the quarter system.

The Committee wishes to make clear that the factors described above suggest to us that the quarter system best serves the needs of RIT’s cooperative education program. Co-op is an important issue in the Committee’s deliberation process but it remains only one of several interconnected dimensions which were critical to deciding upon our final recommendation.

**Effects on Enrollment**

RIT has been, is, and is likely to continue to be a tuition-dependent institution. Despite excellent performance in our endowment, RIT continues to depend on tuition to fund a major portion of the operating budget. It is within this context that we consider the effect of any calendar change on enrollment.

The majority of RIT students are traditional undergraduates. They enter the institution either directly from high school or from a two-year college. They are attracted to RIT by several defining characteristics of an RIT education: excellent career preparation, cooperative education, high placement rates and concomitant salaries, and an excellent academic reputation as evidenced in several national studies. As the Committee reviewed studies of our traditional students, including the *Admitted Student Questionnaire*, we found evidence that RIT’s quarter calendar directly affects students' choice of RIT
through the facilitation of cooperative education and the broader course selection that is an outcome of the quarter system.

RIT's ability to offer a greater variety of courses, some very tightly focused and applied, is a strength in reaching the market of students RIT seeks to attract. Students and employers both cite the breadth of the RIT experience to be a strength in career employment opportunities.

RIT's transfer students are often thought to be disadvantaged by the quarter system. The Committee's deliberations found no evidence that transfers are negatively affected by quarters. No one would deny that transfers from semester colleges need a period of adjustment to the shorter quarter calendar, but most students come to embrace the quarter as a more efficient time frame, and recognize its strength in accommodating co-op. While some fifth-semester transfers may be inconvenienced by the split-winter quarter, meaning they must wait until March to enroll, there is no evidence that off-term entry is negatively affected by the quarter calendar. In fact, the frequency of starts and stops results in multiple entry points to RIT that actually increase off-term enrollments when compared to more traditional semester calendars.

Transfer credits are often used as an argument for semesters; however, RIT's history as a transfer-friendly institution makes this a moot point. RIT has sufficient experience transferring credits from semester schools to make the transition very smooth. In fact, the difficulty is more likely to arise when a student transfers from RIT to a semester school unfamiliar with quarter credits.

Some RIT programs, where strong transfer relationships exist, have accommodated transfers by permitting transfer from the two-year school to RIT before completion of the associate degree. In these cases, the transfer student completes the two-year degree by transferring credit back to their original college, while keeping pace in the RIT program, participating in co-op, and pursuing the RIT degree with a minimum of difficulty.

Part-time students, both at undergraduate and graduate levels, make up about one-third of RIT's total enrollment. This population, targeted in the RIT Strategic Plan for growth, is well served by a calendar that offers maximum flexibility and access/egress points. The 1987 Community Assessment Program (see Appendix H) indicated that "RIT is almost perfectly in tune with the most substantial share of the [part-time] market." Part-time enrollment, in accordance with Strategic Objective 4.4, is targeted to increase from 4,320 to 5,050.

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Another key element of the Strategic Plan, Action Step 4.4.1, calls for RIT to "aggressively pursue credit-contract partnerships with external clients." In support of this action, the Committee learned from Dr. Lynda Rummel, College of Continuing Education, that external clients such as Xerox, Bausch and Lomb, and Kodak, prefer the quarter calendar since it accommodates some of their just-in-time educational and training needs.

RIT's quarter calendar is also unique in Rochester, providing a marketing advantage, and the quarter credit pricing is a strategic advantage in that it keeps RIT's per-credit costs lower than some competitors.

The quarter calendar also accommodates adult, part-time learners by substantially decreasing the time to degree completion since a higher number of credit hours can be earned in either an academic or calendar year.

The following chart compares time to completion under three different calendar scenarios:

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<th>Quarters</th>
<th>Semesters</th>
<th>Trimesters</th>
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<td>Average consumption</td>
<td>8 cr./qtr. based on 2</td>
<td>6 cr./sem. based on 2</td>
<td>6 cr./trim. based on 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>classes per quarter or</td>
<td>classes per sem. or 12</td>
<td>classes per trim. or 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24 credits per AY</td>
<td>credits per AY</td>
<td>credits per AY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State degree requirements</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of terms needed</td>
<td>(\frac{180}{8} = 22.5)</td>
<td>(\frac{120}{6} = 20)</td>
<td>(\frac{120}{6} = 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of years to</td>
<td>(\frac{180}{24} = 7.5)</td>
<td>(\frac{120}{12} = 10)</td>
<td>(\frac{120}{12} = 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>degree completion</td>
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All of the above scenarios assume continuous enrollment at the given levels, which is an unlikely pattern for any student, and a conversion of four credit quarter courses to three credit semester courses. In this case, a full year or more is added to completion time for part-timers when a move away from quarters is effected.

It may be argued that time to completion may be shortened by converting four credit quarter courses to four credit semester/trimester courses. In that case, the time to completion for both semester and trimester systems is 7.5 years (i.e., \(\frac{120}{16} = 7.5\)); however, this is accomplished by lowering the number

\(^4\)Ibid.
of potential courses by one-third. As stated previously, one of RIT's strengths is the number and variety of possible course offerings, which is best facilitated by quarters. This is best illustrated by comparing the number of courses required under each system. The number of courses in a quarter system, assuming four credit courses, is 45 (i.e., $\frac{180}{4} = 45$); the number of courses in a semester/trimester system, assuming three credit courses, is 40 (i.e., $\frac{120}{3} = 40$); and the number of courses in a semester/trimester system, assuming four credit courses, is 30 (i.e., $\frac{120}{4} = 30$).

RIT part-time students in degree programs typically complete 24 quarter credits per academic year. This is in contrast to the 12-16 credits the same students would be likely to complete under either semesters or trimesters. There is no evidence that part-time students could be compelled to increase their credit consumption rate under a new calendar configuration. This would affect not only the time needed to complete a degree part-time, but also would negatively impact the revenue realized from part-time students in an academic or calendar year.

In addition, part-time students, taking more than one course, tend to schedule their courses on the same evenings in order to minimize disruption of their week. Longer time frames are problematic for part-time students because the longer commitment they require reduces the students' scheduling flexibility.

If there is any doubt that time to degree completion is a concern, one need only examine recent initiatives by Roberts Wesleyan College and Monroe Community College, both of which have time-shortened degree completion programs. Roberts has a one-year baccalaureate degree for students who enter with an associate degree or equivalent, and MCC has started a 15-month associate degree program. In a work world where our clients are being asked to spend more time on the job, and as pressures for greater productivity are mounting, we need to look at more opportunities for time-shortened degrees. The Committee attempted to find comparative data on enrollment from schools that changed to semesters, but found that the part-time populations at Michigan State and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) were too small to offer any basis for comparison.

As will be noted elsewhere in this report, RIT is unique. Finding other institutions of comparable size and complexity, with cooperative education and a strong, part-time, evening mission, is difficult if not impossible.

Finally, as a calendar system, quarters are no better or worse an underlying system to accommodate modules than other calendars. RIT already runs a modular calendar during summer quarter, with over 35 different scheduling options at work. This is most easily accomplished in the summer due to the lower
utilization of the campus facilities, but there is no reason to believe that carefully planned modules would not work during regular academic quarters.

In summary, the quarter calendar directly affects part-time students' choice by offering a shorter degree completion time and lower per-credit costs. Full-time students are positively influenced by the quarter calendar's accommodation of cooperative education and the effect it has on breadth of opportunity for different courses. Corporations are concerned with academic calendars only to the extent that they facilitate the employment of co-op students and are able to meet just-in-time training and education needs.

The Enrollment Subcommittee of the 1995 Calendar Review Committee acknowledges the extensive and comprehensive work done by the 1991 Calendar Task Force. The strengths and weaknesses of all calendar options cited in the 1991 report were taken into consideration, along with an assessment of the current state of RIT and the objectives of the Strategic Plan's *Learning and Careers 2004*.

In light of these factors, and others to be outlined in this report, quarters are viewed as the best calendar under which to meet the enrollment goals critical to the functioning of the Institute and its strategic planning efforts.

**Effects on Community**

The Rochester Institute of Technology's professional and career-oriented educational programs have created a very professional and career-oriented community. When assessing RIT's sense of community, one must not merely compare it to other university campuses, but instead understand and appreciate RIT's own unique, diverse, and focused student population.

RIT's community is made up of many organizations, a number of which are professional or academic in nature. Greek organizations, professional societies, athletic teams, special interest houses, and other student groups have high levels of participation and involvement. These organizations not only provide social opportunities but also complement the classroom experience. The experiences students receive by being involved in the campus community are a very important part of the quality of education they receive at RIT.

Several important perceived and real problems pertaining to the campus community environment were discussed. The Committee considered the possibility that longer academic terms would reduce stress. However, as is stated in the 1991 calendar report, there is little empirical evidence to support this hypothesis. In fact, longer academic terms, as required in both the semester and trimester models, would be just as likely to increase stress, due to increased course loads and consequently more obligations, such as final exams, at the end of those terms. Transfer students and other students who had previously studied
on a semester system reported similar or greater amounts of stress during the longer academic term. Additionally, the short-term and frequent nature of quarters allow students greater ability to recover.

A second perceived benefit from the semester system is that longer blocks of time on campus may foster more sense of community through increased involvement in student activities. Officials from Michigan State University, who switched to semesters from quarters in academic year 1992, reported no such visible impact on the campus community. Additionally, the longer periods students would need to spend on co-op in a semester system would keep students away from campus for longer periods of time. In general, the long co-op scheduling periods may actually prohibit students from becoming involved in student activities.

Additionally, the Committee uncovered several non-calendar related issues which have a negative effect on community. The first of these is RIT's extensive co-op program -- the very nature of which separates students from campus for long periods of time and prevents them from making a more permanent bond with the RIT community. A second characteristic of RIT is the large proportion of part-time students who come to campus to take classes and have little desire or time to take part in the RIT community. Thirdly, RIT's isolated campus presents yet another barrier to developing a traditional college-community atmosphere. RIT lacks a college-town type environment to keep students on campus. This specific point is addressed in the Strategic Plan's Task Force on Community under Goal 1, Objective 1 of their final summary. Finally, low student involvement is often caused by students having to devote most of their free time to part-time jobs in order to afford an RIT education. Greater incentives for students, particularly financial, could foster more involvement. Improved financial aid as outlined in Goal 2, Objective 3 of the Community Task Force's final summary would take steps towards solving these problems.

RIT should capitalize on the strong affinity that students have toward their college. The real challenges in creating a greater RIT campus community are in finding ways to unite the diverse student populations and to cultivate the integration of its many interest groups into its larger community. A unifying factor would not be provided by a change in academic calendar since the problems with RIT's sense of community have not been found to be calendar-related issues.

Cost Implications

Committee efforts have verified that a change from a quarter to a semester/trimester calendar would be very expensive. The initial cost of conversion would be very significant. While many of these costs would be one-time in nature, additional on-going costs would also be incurred. Whether these would be absorbed into normal operations as RIT settled into a new system is open to debate. In any case, as the
Committee went about its work, the issue of costs was very much a secondary part of the criteria used. On the assumption that RIT would fund the change if warranted for the long-term benefit of the Institute, deliberations focused on the programmatic impacts of that change.

Conversion of Courses

Conversion of courses to a semester or trimester calendar system would be a faculty-intensive activity. It would include negotiations of what courses are retained or eliminated both within academic programs and between academic programs and service colleges such as Liberal Arts and Science. It would include curriculum committee evaluation and approval, text book selection, and, eventually, testing new course designs on students. This process would take faculty away from the parts of teaching, learning, and research that are most important to insuring a quality educational experience for RIT students -- the reality is that innovation seldom takes place under the timetable of a conversion process. Considering the competitive challenges facing RIT, it would be better to use our faculty resource in ways that improve the value of an RIT education and, thus, assist in maintaining our market share.

In addition to the loss of faculty time, other universities which have completed this conversion have cited considerable cost for the curriculum change part of this process. For example, Michigan State allocated two million dollars for this process. Discussions with them suggested that they will probably spend three to four million dollars before they are done. It is important to note that Michigan State already was in the process of developing a new computer system for student information, and, thus, none of the costs for that process were considered to be conversion costs. Therefore, they are not included in the cost cited above. It should be noted that RIT has no current need to replace its Student Information systems. We do, however, have a need to replace our Accounting and Human Resource systems although this is independent of and not directly related to the calendar issue.

Conversion of Systems

A detailed estimate of the effort required to convert RIT's information systems, including the Student Records System (STARS), Degree Audit, Billing and Receivables, Financial Aid, Touch-tone Registration, Apartment Management, Residence Life, Co-op/Placement, Health Services, Development/Alumni, and Human Resources, is included as Appendix I. In summary, the effort is estimated to require 14.5 labor years,¹ not including the labor effort within each administrative office required to support the conversion, and not including the retraining of users of these systems in most units at RIT. These estimates are based upon several assumptions noted in the detailed estimate. If these assumptions did not hold true, then an even greater time would be required.

¹ A labor year is defined as the full-time effort of one individual for one year.
Because of the limited number of staff within the Information Systems and Computing Systems Development Department and the necessity of continuing to maintain all existing systems throughout the conversion, we would need to hire outside contractors to perform a major part of this conversion. We estimate that approximately ten labor years of outside contractors and 4.5 labor years of ISC labor would be required. The estimated cost for outside contractors is $1,000,000. The 4.5 labor years provided by ISC staff would result in an equivalent reduction in support for other maintenance and/or projects.

Computer system resource is another component of the conversion cost. The significant additional computer demand from the conversion activity occurring simultaneously with current services will result in the need for a faster computer system. A faster computer system means increases in software cost because vendors in the mainframe market tie their prices to the speed of the computer system. It will also require sufficient disk space to replicate file systems for all of the applications noted earlier. The estimates for these costs amount to another $700,000.

Lost Opportunity Cost

Lost opportunity cost is a greater concern than the actual conversion cost. A decision to perform a conversion to semesters or trimesters forces a commitment of resources to a conversion effort. RIT would face a three to four-year conversion period when most faculty and many staff would spend a significant portion of their time involved in the conversion process. As identified above, these resources include faculty and staff time which would be diverted from other important tasks. Faculty would be diverted from improving the currency of their courses, developing new courses, developing new academic programs, and using technology to improve courses and deliver them in new ways. Would the opportunity costs be worth any benefit derived? The Committee did not believe the benefit would be worth this cost.

Potential Savings

The issue of potential savings also came up during the Committee deliberations. The area most often mentioned is the reduction of one registration period resulting from a conversion. The reality is, however, that with the improvements in technology in recent years, the cost of registration has declined. It was pointed out in the 1991 report that "The benefit of one less registration period does not profoundly affect office workload." Though it is true that one less grade report would save approximately $10,000 in forms and mailing, it is not at all clear that the savings would occur. For example, some semester schools send out mid-term status reports to their students. Such an addition would more than off-set the savings associated with one less grade report. The Bursars Office indicated that cost reductions due to a conversion would "...approach $20,000 per year." In any case, it is clear that any savings would be overwhelmed by the increase in expenses and other revenue loss.
Revenue Loss from Auxiliaries

The 1991 RIT committee study did an excellent job of highlighting the operational impacts of conversion for many of the support and administrative units such as the residence halls, food service, bookstore, personnel, security, etc. This information, which appears to continue to be relevant today, would indicate that in operational terms, revenue would be negatively affected in the range of $700,000 per year.

Possible Revenue Loss from Enrollment

As stated earlier in this document, part-time students prefer a quarter system; therefore, it would be reasonable to expect that a change to semester or trimester systems would reduce the current level of tuition revenue. This is particularly likely in non-technology-oriented programs. When one compares RIT tuition for a semester with tuition for other local schools, we do not have a competitive advantage. In fiscal year 1994, part-time programs generated $20,000,000 in revenue. Even a modest decline of 5% would result in a reduction of $1,000,000, which would have to be made up from other areas of operation. Another way of underscoring the risk of a calendar conversion at this time is to note the number of students involved in programs which, in the view of the Committee, would be negatively affected. More than 7,500 students are enrolled in programs that have co-op as a part of the curriculum. In Fall quarter 1994, there were 3,679 part-time students enrolled at RIT. RIT clearly cannot afford to do anything that would not enhance enrollments in these areas -- a calendar change, even under the most optimistic of scenarios, would not accomplish this.

Faculty Cost for Summer Teaching Assignments

Our investigations also noted that formulas for summer teaching for faculty would need to be reviewed. Under the trimester system, the summer session would, in effect, be like any other session. What is equitable for faculty and possible for RIT would be the subject of negotiations which would have the potential to result in some increase in overall faculty costs. It seems clear that the likely strong discussions on this issue would create feelings that would not improve the RIT community atmosphere.

Summary

In summary, although the role that cost played in the Committee decision was secondary to other impacts, if a decision was made to convert to another calendar system, RIT would clearly need to reevaluate its Strategic Plan priorities and other institutional priorities because the resources available, both in time and dollars, would not allow many other needs to be addressed during the several years of a conversion. The long-term impact on enrollment, due to the perception students have of an RIT education, also is a significant concern.
Strategic Advantage to Change

The Committee agreed early in its deliberation to consider six fundamental issues as they relate to a possible change for RIT. The question of competitive advantages was one of the six issues and believed to be of paramount concern to this institution, particularly in light of the strategic planning process currently underway, and intense competition in the marketplace. As the Committee proceeded with its discussion and debate of alternative calendars, it became increasingly clear that the calendar configuration could, indeed, have a significant impact on the competitive advantages of this institution. The Committee further concluded that competitive advantage is truly a composite of the other five issues identified in this report.

This conclusion was reinforced as the Committee began to realize that the strategic direction of an institution, and its resulting ability to remain competitive, was largely determined by how it elected to define its own existence and come to terms with these major issues. The advent of strategic thinking in higher education has had an impact on virtually every aspect of how a college or university functions today including organizational structure, leadership, governance and the ideology of community. As can be seen on virtually every campus, regardless of size or character, a great many decisions are being made to position the institution for long-term competitiveness in the marketplace. Whether it is yet widely recognized or not, these are strategic decisions, based on an analysis of the particular strengths of the institution as well as its ability to be responsive under continuously changing conditions. Throughout RIT's long and rich history, it has demonstrated an ability to react strategically to these changing conditions. It is doing so now through the current strategic planning initiative, which was always considered in the deliberations of the Committee.

After careful consideration of all the alternatives, the Committee concluded that it would not be in RIT's best strategic interest to change from the quarter calendar configuration. It should be noted that the Committee's recommendation to remain on a quarter calendar configuration is seen as being fully supportive of the expected outcomes of strategic planning.

There are several components to the Committee's rationale for their determination. Historically, RIT has positioned itself as a competitive institution, by being highly sensitive and responsive to the external social and economic conditions of the times. As a leader in career education, RIT has helped define this unique educational model, with its applied academic programs that are grounded in the liberal arts. RIT has also been a competitive institution due to its ability to recognize the value in serving multiple constituencies including full- and part-time students, employers, feeder schools, and the community-at-large. Sensitivity and responsiveness to changes in technology in the business and industrial community is fostered by calendar flexibility.

As was expressed in other sections of this report, RIT's reliance on the cooperative education experience and other forms of creative programming, such as distance learning, flexible degrees for part-time students, and
weekend undergraduate and graduate degrees, has certainly contributed to its competitive advantage. The Committee not only believes the quarter calendar has provided the optimal time frame for delivering these programs, but other configurations which were considered could prove to be detrimental. Neither a semester nor trimester configuration can match the flexibility afforded the institution through a quarter configuration.

The Committee further believes that, in many respects, RIT is unique among universities, not only in the type of programming that it provides but also in the culture of the institution. Acknowledging the fact that the quarter calendar can be fast-paced and, at times, even stressful for the entire community, as any competitive environment would be, it is, nonetheless, what the Committee believes to best serve the type of student RIT attracts.

The Committee further agreed that to ignore the question of context in making such a critical strategic decision such as calendar configuration, would be negligence of responsibility. Strategists will tell you that decisions not made in the context of the organization's environment, to include what you are as an institution as well as who you serve, are ill-conceived. An RIT education has been one which is best characterized by being highly focused, career-oriented, competitive, responsive to the changing world of work, and sensitive to the other demands that students have in their lives. The Committee believes that the quarter calendar provides the greatest flexibility and conditions for learning that will continue to sustain this character.

Recommendations for Further Consideration

During the course of the Committee's deliberations a broad variety of topics and issues were raised which were related in varying degrees to the central question of a university calendar. The Committee would like to speak to some of those issues and recommend possible ideas for further consideration and action.

Modules

If anything has become clear to this Committee, it is the incredible diversity of needs in the RIT academic community and the importance of flexibility and responsiveness to changing market forces in planning for our future growth and development. The Committee believes that modular course offerings may provide an opportunity for RIT to make its calendar system innovative, strategically optimal and balanced in its attention to the needs of various constituents. Currently more than 35 different modular plans are utilized each summer in delivering for-credit academic courses and programs. We believe that the success of those efforts warrants further investigation of the concept and that its application be more broadly considered throughout the university.

Modules provide the opportunity to offer courses in units longer than the academic quarter as well as units appropriately shorter than the quarter. Our conversations with Northwestern University, for
example, introduced the concept of a K-grade registration. While not fully utilized by Northwestern, the Committee feels it has potential for RIT. Under such a plan, a course may run in a varying time frame. Students would register for the course and receive a K-grade at the end of each quarter prior to completion. Their final course grade would be assigned at the end of the final quarter. The Committee felt such a concept could be useful as a tool for rethinking certain course offerings, connecting and integrating courses in new and innovative ways, and providing greater opportunities for students to absorb complex material in a more effective manner. Such a concept could also have the benefit, for example, if scheduled over the Fall and Winter quarters, of better utilizing the three week period at the beginning of the Winter quarter. Students in the second half of a K-grade course during the Winter quarter would be able to continue immediately their course of study, eliminating the problematic interruption often experienced during the split-winter quarter. This type of offering may allow faculty to use the scheduled breaks in a more positive and productive manner and provide students with greater time for research, project work, and more complex writing assignments.

Shorter-term modules may allow RIT to package course materials in various ways and provide students with potentially even greater exposure to various subject areas. Shorter-term modules could also foster greater opportunity for the application of competence-based teaching, whether in a distance learning setting, an independent study plan, or in the classroom and lab. Students who finish material more quickly could receive their grades sooner; students who need more time would not have to take incompletes, and could have the work they are involved in more adequately accounted for in their course loads.

In presenting its views on modules, the Committee is quick to point out that a number of steps need to be taken before modules could be considered as a viable option in the quarter calendar system. The Registrar would need to be consulted more closely to identify any scheduling related issues (e.g., course offerings, room utilization, class times, student record maintenance, registration reports) that should be addressed prior to the implementation of modules. The Director of Student Financial Aid would need to review pertinent federal and state financial aid policies and guidelines to ensure compliance with accepted standards and the protection of student grant and loan eligibility. Faculty would also need the time and support to build courses with varying time periods and a determination of how those would comprise an appropriate course load. RIT would have to commit to providing resources to support the increasingly flexible offerings.

In short, the Committee recommends that the Institute undertake a series of pilot studies exploring the appropriate use of modules in selected areas and programs. This effort is consistent with RIT's long history of innovation and academic leadership.
Curriculum

It is impossible to discuss a university calendar without also discussing the various academic programs and curricula. It is clear that any university calendar merely supports the academic curricula and the Committee feels that any effort to review and enhance the organization and delivery of RIT's programs is to be encouraged and supported.

The successful completion of Strategic Plan objectives in the areas of developing cluster-based core competencies; the greater integration of courses and elimination of unnecessary redundancies; and the development of combined degree programs, major/minor options and greater interdisciplinary learning opportunities are all critical to the ultimate success of RIT in a competitive academic marketplace.

Full Utilization of the Academic Quarter

To make effective use of the quarter calendar system, we need to insure that all faculty provide a full ten weeks of instruction and an eleventh week of either instruction and/or evaluation.

Community

The Committee’s report addresses what we believe to be the unique nature of RIT’s community and our conviction that concerns about the extent of community transcend the calendar issue. The Committee again wishes to point out the importance of the current Strategic Plan document and the Agenda for Action Committee report in fully exploring and addressing the concerns and issues regarding community at RIT.