Dear Former Committee Members,

By now each of us should have received President Simone's letter expressing his satisfaction with our report.

Kit Mayberry is preparing an e-mail that the President plans to send to all faculty and staff within a week. It will announce the availability electronically of both reports. Kit told me yesterday that she anticipates having our report on-line within a few days, and she'll advise us on how to access it.

In the meantime, you now are free to share the report as you see fit, should any wish to see it before the President's e-mail is distributed. For that purpose, I attach a document that contains two minor corrections and that is the document I've asked Kit to put on-line.

Since it differs (quite slightly) from what I sent you most recently, I encourage you to delete all earlier versions and rely on the attached for your reading pleasure.

Tom

Final Report.doc
A REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT
July 2000

Emanuel Contomanolis
Thomas Hopkins, chair
Margaret Ferber
Frank Lamas
Douglas Merrill
Dan Vilenski
Walter Wolf

Executive Summary

Much has changed in the university’s environment since a 1995 report concluded that RIT should remain on a quarter calendar. Retention of students has become a more important priority, and a recent study by the Retention Task Force concludes that shifting to a semester calendar would better enable retention tactics to function more effectively. Other universities increasingly are shifting to semester calendars, including those with strong co-op programs against which we compete. Our responsiveness to the educational needs of the 18-22 year-old full-time undergraduate is of rising importance relative to RIT’s education of part-time and graduate students. RIT is stronger than perhaps it ever has been in terms of the quality of our students, faculty, staff, facilities, programs and finances. RIT is now in the fortunate position to be able to afford investments that safeguard and further strengthen our future. As a group, these developments represent a significant change in circumstances since 1995.

The Retention Task Force has identified a variety of reasons for expecting that improvement in retention may be easier to achieve with a semester calendar. In our view, the Task Force correctly emphasizes that a host of changes all must take place if retention is to improve. We also agree with the Task Force that a change in calendar alone will have no beneficial effect on retention. An array of changes will be required. In our judgment, however, insufficient evidence exists to warrant any conclusion that a calendar change is a necessary condition for improving retention. Some of the requisite changes surely would be easier to achieve on a semester calendar, but others would not. Further, some important improvements that have been under discussion for years could generate improved retention, whether or not the calendar changes.

Semesters provide more opportunity for social integration than do quarters. While many students find attractive the flexibility and diversity of courses in a quarter calendar, such flexibility could be part of a semester system as well through creative use of modules and shorter course combinations. But the intended semester-calendar benefits of less stress, less administrative burden, and less hectic pacing then would not be so likely. A shift to a highly flexible semester system with extensive use of short courses would beg the question of “why shift from quarters” if we then seek ways to imitate them. Given the information we have reviewed it is difficult to assess how much student dissatisfaction has to do directly with our calendar system, as distinct from the manner in which the Institute conducts day-to-day activities.
To assess fully the impact of a change to a semester system on the quality of the RIT program portfolio is as difficult as it is important, although the 1991 and 1995 Calendar Committee reports constitute thorough reviews of much that remains highly relevant. Based on these reports and such consultation with faculty and staff as we could undertake during our two-month review, we think the most important programmatic advantages articulated by advocates for each system are:

Perceived Advantages of the Semester System Over the Quarter System
- Quality of instruction would improve
- Programs would be “in synch” with other colleges and universities
- Administration of the curriculum would be easier
- Student adaptation and progress toward degree completion would be enhanced

Perceived Advantages of the Quarter System Over the Semester System
- Curriculum is more flexible and dynamic
- Co-op and experiential opportunities are better
- Opportunities for part-time and graduate studies are stronger

Some programs doubtless will be strengthened following a calendar change because of the many pedagogical advantages available in a semester calendar. Other programs, particularly those whose uniqueness and attractiveness are rooted in their menu of technical electives and the flexibility and diversity of their course offerings, may suffer. This scenario is likely to hold true for cooperative education as well, since it can be managed effectively under a semester system with higher costs in some areas than others. What is unclear is how a calendar change will affect, through its collective impact on all programs, the very identity of RIT. This issue is perhaps even more critical than the issue of retention and it deserves at least the same level of attention.

Achieving net benefits from semesters would require substantial revisions in curricula, and transitional burdens would be significant for faculty, staff, and students. Some $3.7 million would be needed merely for converting administrative and educational records systems. Quantifying other costs (curriculum reform, Distance Learning transition, and lab and classroom space needs) was not within this committee’s charge, but such costs do need to be reckoned with as RIT moves toward a decision. During the transition, other initiatives such as new doctoral programs and honors programs may have to be deferred, depending on the pace of implementation and available resources. Once past that transition, the university should face no particular difficulties in attracting strong students and providing them with excellent educations. Our programs for full-time undergraduates probably would operate more successfully, and encounter fewer transitional problems, under a semester calendar than would our part-time and graduate programs.

Changing the calendar could entail either comprehensive or limited revision to our curricula and programs, depending upon the particular calendar model selected, the length of the transition period, and the resources made available for the transition. Such decisions lie beyond the scope of this review, but RIT could benefit from the experience of other universities making such a transition. For example, Northeastern University has a comprehensive revision underway, involving a four-year transition from quarters to semesters and a September 2003 implementation date. For RIT to implement a semester calendar as early as September 2002, in half that time, would be ambitious. Further campus-wide discussions should help clarify the feasibility of acting this quickly, and the final section of this report offers some suggested next steps.
Introduction

The February 1995 report of the Calendar Review Committee recommended that RIT retain its quarter calendar. President Simone, in accepting this recommendation, concluded that further action on the calendar should be deferred to 2005, absent significant change in circumstances or new evidence warranting earlier action. The work of the Retention Task Force (referred to in this report as RTF) during the past year raised again the calendar issue, but in a different context, linking it to new information about RIT’s retention challenge.

On May 31, 2000, acting in light of the RTF study, President Simone appointed this committee to examine, on an expedited basis, whether changes that have occurred since 1995 should trigger early reconsideration of the calendar. More specifically, the President charged the committee with the following tasks, about which he asked it to consult broadly with RIT constituencies:

1. Does the RTF have sufficient and reliable evidence to warrant a finding that changing to a semester system is a necessary condition for successful implementation of its retention enhancement strategies?
2. What would the likely impact of such calendar change be upon the quality of RIT’s portfolio of degree programs?
3. What would the impact, if any, be of such change on student recruitment and co-op opportunities?
4. What would the impact and cost of such change be upon RIT’s administrative systems?
5. What would the impact and cost of such change be upon RIT’s educational records systems?

President Simone requested a report from the committee by July 31, 2000.

The members of the committee have reached consensus on the issues, as described in this report to the President. Our review necessarily is exploratory and tentative in nature, since the many questions that a calendar change raises require broader consultation across the RIT community than could be accomplished during the time available to us. However, the report does incorporate the results of those discussions it proved possible for us to undertake with faculty, staff and students. We distributed a set of questions listed in the appendix to representative faculty and staff who were readily accessible during June. The questions served to frame discussions that took place within the committee and with faculty and staff at each college, but the results are impressionistic and anecdotal rather than statistical. We characterize those faculty/staff comments that reached us in several sections of this report; as noted later, while not many student comments reached us, Student Government intends to seek additional student input this fall. (Also, see our appendix for examples of comments.)

The first draft report of the RTF reached our committee June 30, a revised version reached us July 17, and it became generally available across the entire campus July 21. One consequence of this timing was that our discussions with constituencies, and much of our own deliberations, took place before the report of the RTF was completed. Now that both reports are ready for review, we hope they will facilitate the further campus-wide discussion that the President urges take place this fall on calendar issues.
In urging a shift away from our current calendar, the RTF did not advocate any single variant of a semester calendar, and several are plausible. Indeed, one alternative that some believe preferable is a trimester model dividing a 52-week year into three 15-week terms (including exams); this is a model that the 1995 Calendar Committee thought worthy of consideration. However, a more commonly encountered semester calendar has two 15-week sessions, each followed by a week of exams, along with a summer session of 12 weeks, and this we used as our default model.

This report contains six sections and an appendix:

I. Changes in circumstances since 1995
II. Calendar change and the retention issue
III. Impact on the quality of RIT programs
IV. Student recruitment and co-ops
V. Administrative and educational records systems
VI. Implementation and scheduling issues

The appendix contains President Simone’s charge to the committee, the list of questions that guided our deliberations, and three statements representative of the sharply diverging views we encountered on campus.

I. Changes in circumstances since 1995

No university operates within a static environment, and significant changes have taken place during RIT’s past five years. These we highlight below:

Semesters rapidly are becoming the calendar of choice among American universities. Many other universities have switched away from quarter calendars since 1995, while none have adopted quarter calendars.

In 1995 the experience then known about universities that had switched from quarter calendars was filled with difficulties and unexpected problems. By contrast, according to the RTF, several universities that changed more recently have had quite manageable conversions. RIT would be able to benefit from these successful experiences in planning our own change. More information about these experiences at peer schools is needed, however, since we have received conflicting reports.

Making a calendar change imposes transitional costs, and RIT is much better able to afford those costs now than in 1995, due to our more robust financial health.

RIT’s emphasis on retention of our 18-22 year-old full-time undergraduates has increased since 1995, and any evidence that a calendar change may affect their retention carries
greater weight now. The ratio of all full-time to all part-time students has risen from 2.2 to 2.7 during the interval between Fall Quarter 1995 and Fall Quarter 1999. Full-time undergraduates now generate some 70-75 per cent of all RIT credit hours.

RIT’s strategy in 1995 anticipated an expanding role for co-op programs, envisioning more programs with mandatory co-ops. The 1995 calendar report concluded that retaining the quarter calendar was important to the success of our co-ops, noting that other universities with flourishing co-op programs remained on quarter systems. Our co-op programs do remain strong, but cooperative education has not expanded at RIT in the way and to the degree that had been envisioned as part of the university’s strategic planning process. Rival institutions with strong co-op programs, such as Georgia Institute of Technology and Northeastern University, have decided to make the calendar change.

II. Calendar change and the retention issue

RIT’s graduation rate is low relative to that of other universities to which we benchmark our programs. The RTF suggests that progress on persistence and college success, as measured by increased graduation rates, is problematic without a shift from a quarter to semester calendar system. Sources of data consulted by the RTF indicate concerns related to the following key areas that must be addressed if we are to make progress toward the goal of improved retention:

- Connectivity
- Social Activities
- Development of Physical Spaces
- Student Stress

The RTF concludes that “the majority of its recommended strategies have limited chance of substantial success if implemented within our current calendar quarter.” (p. 13) The RTF report specifically recommends the following array of steps/focus areas (as RTF explains more fully at pp. 16-38 of its report), and for each we indicate whether our committee believes there exists an important linkage with the calendar:

- **Improved faculty advising for all first-year students.** The RTF believes a quarter system handicaps effective advising by compressing key decision points (whether to add or drop a course, whether to withdraw, setting up help for a student in academic difficulty). Our committee concurs.

- **Improved faculty advising for at-risk first-year students.** The RTF advocates, for students whose profiles suggest relatively greater risk, “proactive, intensive faculty advising from the very beginning of their first academic term.” The RTF does not link progress on this to the calendar issue, and we agree.

- **Early warning system for first-year students.** The RTF urges adoption of a better early warning and support system, which it believes cannot work well on a quarter calendar because too little time is available. Our committee believes it
would indeed be easier to operate an effective early warning system on a semester calendar.

- **Attracting high quality first-year students.** The RTF believes that the quarter calendar “works against our granting maximum AP credit,” and thereby interferes with attracting strong students. Our committee is not persuaded that a calendar change is the best way to address this problem.

- **Learning communities for first-year students.** The RTF stresses the importance of “keeping a small group of students together in a course or courses that last over an extended period of time,” and by definition a semester calendar offers that longer time period automatically. Our committee agrees that this desirable outcome is easier to achieve with a semester calendar, but it should be achievable as well with a quarter calendar.

- **Teaching excellence for first-year students.** The RTF points out that other universities often cite improved pedagogy as “a driver for conversion to semesters,” and it concludes that adopting more effective pedagogical techniques is more practicable in a semester system. Most but not all faculty probably agree; our committee is ambivalent.

- **Research opportunities** for undergraduates improve retention, according to the RTF, and they are most effective when spread over an entire academic year. Our committee agrees that these are easier to arrange with a semester calendar, but whether this is likely to prove important for first-year student retention is not clear.

- **Department traditions for first-year students.** The RTF endorses the value of student-faculty traditions at the departmental or college level, but sees no linkage with the calendar. We agree.

- **Gathering places for first-year students.** The RTF recommends RIT provide more pleasant gathering places for students, but does not link this to the calendar. We agree.

- **Stress reduction for first-year students.** The RTF urges reduction of unnecessary stress on students and thinks that a semester calendar would be inherently less stressful. Our committee is not persuaded that a calendar change would lessen stress. Stress would rise during the transition, and it would not necessarily decline thereafter unless stress issues were central to the specific design adopted.

- **First-year enrichment/wellness course.** Having a supportive contact point and advocate throughout a student’s first year would increase student success, and this will be impossible on a quarter calendar, according to the RTF. Our committee suspects this would be difficult to accomplish even on a semester calendar, although we agree it would be easier.

- **Summer orientation.** The RTF advocates an extended summer orientation program for new students, but does not link this to the calendar. We agree.

- **Student interaction.** The RTF advocates greater interaction between first-year students and older students, but does not link this to the calendar. We agree.

- **Social activities and spaces for first-year students.** The RTF concludes that a semester calendar would increase the number of weekend opportunities available for planning social events each year, and our committee agrees.
• **Minority student programs for first-year students.** The RTF urges RIT to provide more intensive academic intervention and other initiatives aimed at improving minority retention. While it does not explicitly link these to our calendar, the logic applied above in the case of improved early warning systems probably suggests that progress here too might be easier with a semester calendar. Since the RTF’s appendix presenting this set of initiatives is not yet available, the committee lacks a basis for judgment.

• **Campus environment—Connectivity.** The RTF concludes that a semester calendar is more conducive to the formation of strong student/faculty connections, and our committee concurs.

• **Campus environment—Recreational/social activities.** This restates the point made above in the category “social activities and spaces.”

• **Campus environment—Physical environment.** The RTF believes that a semester calendar would provide more time during which students could take advantage of whatever attractive gathering places we provide. Our committee thinks there is some merit to this point.

The RTF believes that the eighteen steps/focus areas listed above (fifteen aimed at first-year undergraduates, and three at the overall campus setting) should constitute the priority areas on which RIT initially should focus its attention. Our committee sees a valid connection between a shift to semesters and greater student success/retention in roughly half of these steps, as noted above.

The RTF also identifies several other (some closely related) areas to which RIT should turn after plans are in place for the eighteen it sees as priority areas. These items for later attention include an array of steps in the general categories of academic advising and teaching excellence, where the focus extends to all students, rather than first-year students. No linkages between these subsequent items and the calendar exist beyond those mentioned in related steps listed above.

At least three of the strategies/initiatives suggested by the RTF plainly can be implemented more successfully in a calendar of semesters. However, as the RTF acknowledges, much improvement could take place within our current quarter system configuration. Certainly much more than a calendar change would be needed to change the culture of the institution in a way that would address student dissatisfaction stemming from perceptions of “RIT as a high pressured, hard-hearted, excessively business-like institution offering too few of the activities, relationships and attitudes they expect from their college experience” (RTF Report, page 7). Given the information we have reviewed it is difficult to assess how much of this dissatisfaction has to do directly with our calendar system, as distinct from the manner in which the Institute conducts day-to-day activities.

RIT should consider whether it is in our best interests in the future to be part of an ever dwindling number of institutions of higher education that retain a quarter system calendar. Yet the report of the RTF does not provide sufficient evidence to justify a change in calendar as essential for the improvement of retention.
The RTF examined the situation confronted by relatively small numbers of disgruntled students, identifying important steps RIT should take to lessen their dissatisfaction. The judgment of the RTF was that, while the quarter calendar rarely surfaced explicitly as a leading cause of discontent, it could be inferred as a prominent contributor. However, the profile of the non-retained RIT student, as presented in the RTF report, does not include a characterization of these students’ application credentials (e.g., SAT scores). It also does not include a breakdown of how many transfer to community colleges. We suspect that such data (which we understand are available) would help confirm the merit of the retention strategies/initiatives outlined by the RTF.

The RTF report also does not address the sources of satisfaction for those students who take pride in their RIT education. Thus we have no basis for knowing whether such students’ satisfaction levels would be lower or higher were RIT to adopt a different calendar (see, for example, student comments in the appendix). Whether a calendar change might lessen retention of currently satisfied students has not been addressed. We understand that the recent transition from quarters to semesters in the Georgia university system adversely affected enrollment, at least during the transition itself, which leads us to flag this issue for closer attention.

The RTF completed a thorough and highly useful study of many of the strategies/initiatives utilized nationally by institutions of higher education to address student retention. Yet the information assembled thus far does not suggest a compelling argument—on retention grounds alone—to change our calendar from quarters to semesters.

Although faculty, staff and students did not have an opportunity to review the RTF report before sharing comments with our committee, we do have some preliminary input from these constituencies on the question of how retention and the calendar may be linked. Most but by no means all who responded to us accept the notion that a calendar change ultimately would have a positive impact on retention of undergraduates. While some think the effect would actually be negative, a more commonly encountered view is that the calendar is only one issue impacting retention and that others (isolation, lack of transportation) must be addressed as well. One suggested that the “semester system would be ideal if we wish to become a liberal arts school, but it will require a complete change to the corporate culture at RIT.”

Those who see a calendar change as having a positive effect on retention typically point to the consequent stress reduction, closer linkages with faculty and classmates over a longer time period, improved opportunities for heading off academic problems, and greater similarity with other universities. Those who are skeptical point to the disruption of the transition, coupled with doubts that stress will fall, as well as a belief that many of the needed improvements can be accomplished without a calendar change.
III. Impact on the Quality of RIT’s Portfolio of Degree Programs

The central mission of a university is to offer academic programs through which enrolled students obtain the education and training they require to meet the personal and professional goals that brought them to that university. Hence any issue that impacts the quality of those degree programs is of paramount importance. In attempting to address the second charge, namely to “ascertain the likely impact of [a change to a semester calendar] upon the quality of RIT’s portfolio of degree programs,” this committee sought information from faculty, administrators, and staff of the seven colleges. All deans were contacted individually and asked for their assessments. Faculty and staff were contacted by e-mail and asked to respond to a list of eight questions (see appendix) written to address, in part, the specifics of this charge. Staff Council disseminated our questions to its constituents, soliciting their views. What follows is a summary of the approximately 125 responses generated by these efforts. We want to emphasize that our summary, while having some value, is not comprehensive nor does it represent a statistically significant sampling of the population that will be most impacted by a decision to change calendars. This process occurred during the summer when most faculty were off campus and not actively engaged in the business of the university. Thus, our summary should be viewed as anecdotal and, perhaps, best used as a platform upon which a more comprehensive discussion and debate can be conducted.

There are both short-term and long-term consequences to a decision to change from a quarter system to a semester system, and both were the topics of faculty/staff responses. It is very clear that achieving any net benefits from a change to a semester calendar would require substantial revisions in curricula, and transitional burdens would be significant for faculty, staff, and students. During the transition, other initiatives such as new doctoral programs and honors programs may have to be deferred, depending on the pace of implementation and available resources. Faculty professional development and productivity would be expected to suffer during the transition period as more time and effort is expended in re-designing new courses and curricula. There were comments to the effect that the endeavor would be cost-prohibitive and that there must be better ways to spend those sums of money that would both enhance student retention and improve the quality of the academic programs. There was also concern expressed for students caught in the transition between systems and that many might decide to leave RIT rather than endure the uncertainty about how such a change might impact the quality and duration of their education. It would be fair to say that most objections to a change in calendar addressed these short-term consequences.

On the other hand, most responses to the survey were directed toward the long-term consequences of a calendar change. While this committee made no attempt to assign quantitative significance to the opinions expressed, there did appear to be more support for a calendar change among the faculty and staff who responded than opposition. In preparing this summary the committee chose to organize the responses into the following categories.
Perceived Advantages of the Semester System Over the Quarter System
- Quality of instruction would improve
- Programs would be “in synch” with other colleges and universities
- Administration of the curriculum would be easier
- Student adaptation and progress toward degree completion would be enhanced

Perceived Advantages of the Quarter System Over the Semester System
- Curriculum is more flexible and dynamic
- Co-op and experiential opportunities are better
- Opportunities for part-time and graduate studies are better

Now we provide details for each of the above bullets.

**Perceived Advantages of the Semester System Over the Quarter System**

- Quality of instruction would improve

Given the paucity of universities that use the quarter calendar, it is not surprising that most RIT faculty were educated in a semester system and that they find it a more natural system for educating students. Textbooks are written for either yearlong or semester-long courses, and there has always been a certain degree of faculty “angst” about what to cut out when teaching a course for only 10 weeks. The central argument comes down to breadth vs. depth. Semesters are longer periods and they permit opportunities for more extensive reading, thinking, assimilation, and development of ideas rather than engaging in a process of “drill and fill” of basic factual information. Long-term assignments, such as term papers, research reports and group projects, permit opportunities for cooperative work and for re-writing and editing of assignments that simply do not exist in the shorter context of the quarter system. Faculty feel more comfortable adding extras, such as films, fieldtrips and internet explorations to semester courses to supplement the traditional lecture instruction. Faculty also feel that the semester system allows them more time to get to know the students and to properly evaluate their performance and it requires less of their time on exams and course administration. Many faculty view the winter quarter, which would be eliminated in a switch to semesters, to be a lost quarter already. Its elimination, in favor of continuous semesters, would enhance the programs. Finally, several faculty welcomed the notion that a switch to a semester calendar would require a wholesale review and reorganization of the curriculum that should occur on a regular basis, but is largely impossible with the pace of a quarter system.

- Programs would be “in synch” with most colleges and universities.

The benefits to the academic program of being in a calendar system that mimics that of other universities are related largely to the ease with which students can move easily between universities. Many feel that the semester calendar will make RIT more competitive for top-notch students, both entering freshmen and transfer students from other universities. Others believe that efforts to establish honors programs and study abroad programs, both of which impact the quality of students attracted to RIT, will be improved significantly under a semester system.
• Administration of the curriculum would be easier

Many respondents felt that the quality of the academic programs would improve if administrative duties and responsibilities unique to the quarter system could be eliminated. For example, fewer registration events each year would reduce faculty, staff and student stress involved in scheduling courses, organizing exam schedules and making adjunct faculty hiring decisions. In the latter case, the point was made that a semester system would lead to better recruitment and retention of adjunct faculty. It was also noted that a switch from 4-credit hour courses to 3-credit hour courses (if adopted by the programs) would bring an end to the awkward four classes per week (e.g. M,T,W,F) schedules, often with meetings in different classrooms at different times of the week.

• Student adaptation and progress toward degree completion would be enhanced.

Many faculty believe that the rapid pace of the quarter system often makes it difficult for students, particularly first year or transfer students, to transition into a course and reach an understanding of the expectations of the course before the first round of exams or assignments are due. Without that period of adjustment, many students who perform poorly on the first round of exams spend the rest of the quarter trying, often unsuccessfully, to recover. Alternatively, they withdraw from the course because they perceive that it is impossible for them to make necessary corrections and still stay current with the work. The same can be said for students who miss a few classes because of illness. They often feel that they simply cannot make up the work they missed without jeopardizing their grades. For their part, faculty often feel pressured to offer a semester worth of information in the 10-week quarter format. There is, therefore, little time available to make adjustments in the syllabus to accommodate students or to even work with students who are not yet ready to meet their expectations. The impact on the quality of the program is that many students are out of sequence and courses are filled with students who are retaking courses they withdrew from earlier. Others become disenchanted with their slow progress toward completion of the program and leave the program or the university entirely.

Perceived Advantages of the Quarter System Over the Semester System

• Curriculum is more flexible and dynamic

Proponents of the quarter calendar believe that one of its strengths is the breadth vs. depth issue. While few believe that a one quarter course can rival the depth and development of a one semester course, they argue that an undergraduate education is enriched through opportunities for students to explore a wider variety of courses and, therefore, to acquire a more diverse set of skills, particularly technical skills. This is what makes RIT unique and why RIT graduates enjoy a significant advantage over other college graduates for employment and acceptance into postgraduate programs. One unique feature of a quarter-based curriculum is an opportunity to add new, elective courses that represent cutting edge or emerging technologies. This would be much more difficult in semester-based
curriculum where a single course accounts for such a significant percentage of the credits needed to earn the degree and where there are fewer numbers of elective courses available to students. Some felt that the quarter system imposes a level of rigor and discipline that prepares students better for the real world. They argue that one element of the success of RIT graduates is that they completed an educational system that closely resembles the pressures and deadlines of the current workplace. In short, the quarter system makes RIT lean, mean, and easily adaptable to changes in the workplace, which, in turn, make RIT graduates more successful in that workplace. The semester system would destroy the uniqueness of the RIT degree and remove its competitive advantage over other schools with a technical focus.

- Co-op and experiential opportunities are better

A more detailed examination of the co-op issue is presented in Section IV of this report. However, it is appropriate at this point to mention that many respondents felt strongly that programs with required co-op programs would suffer and that this would weaken the attractiveness and quality of the RIT degree programs. This theme was repeated often but few details emerged as to how the co-op program might suffer.

- Opportunities for part-time and graduate studies are better

Respondents believed that part-time students, particularly those with fulltime jobs who are engaged in graduate studies, are attracted to RIT because of the quarter system. The shorter blocks allow for more rapid progress toward the completion of degrees. Also, they provide an element of flexibility that allows part-time students to take courses whenever their work schedules or private lives permit. Section IV addresses this further.

In sum, our committee found it difficult under the circumstances of limited time and limited availability of faculty/staff/student input to assess fully the impact of a change to the semester system on the quality of the RIT program portfolio. Some programs will doubtlessly be strengthened by such a change because of the many pedagogical advantages available in a semester calendar. Other programs, particularly those whose uniqueness and attractiveness are rooted in their menu of technical electives and the flexibility and diversity of their course offerings, may suffer. What is unclear is how this change will, through its collective impact on all programs, affect the very identity of RIT. This issue is perhaps even more critical than the issue of retention and it deserves at least the same level of attention.

IV. Impact on Recruitment of Students and the Cooperative Education Program
Student Recruitment

In regard to assessing the potential impact of a calendar change on the recruitment of new students, the committee conducted interviews with key members of the Division of Enrollment Management and Career Services. The leadership team of that division pointed out that the successful recruitment of students is dependent on the perceived quality and value of the education experience in the marketplace. As such, the calendar system upon which the academic experience is based is largely an irrelevant consideration for prospective students. In the short-term, a change to a semester system should have little or no adverse impact on the recruitment of our primary population of full-time undergraduate students. In fact, the ability of students to more easily transfer to RIT from other semester-based institutions should have an immediate and positive impact on transfer student enrollment.

There is concern in the short-term with regard to the recruitment of new graduate and part-time students. Faculty in the Colleges of Applied Science and Technology, Business, Engineering, and Science have expressed to the committee their concerns in this area. These student populations tend to value academic program flexibility and, in particular, the sense of moving quickly through an individual course or program of study. The multiple entry points and relatively short coursework periods under the quarter system are attractive features to these students. This situation does not, however, preclude a shift to a semester-based system. RIT has been successful in attracting students with the weekend college and executive programs and as long as the university continues to be creative and flexible in packaging coursework and programs to these students, then any adverse impact in the short-term will be negligible.

In the longer-term, a shift to a semester based calendar system may actually enhance RIT’s ability to recruit students. High attrition rates hamper the ability of the institution to attract the most desirable students since unhappy students function in this instance as unhappy customers whose negativity affects the perspective of other students and their families. If a change to semesters is embraced by the faculty in a way that results in the types of environmental changes suggested by the RTF and increases student satisfaction, then it is quite likely prospective students may find RIT to be even a more desirable institution at which to enroll. Further, if RIT maintains its historic sense of creativity and sensitivity to the marketplace, there is no reason for the perceived quality of RIT’s academic programs to do anything but grow, also enhancing the ability to recruit students. If, for example, the semester system is used to creatively package short courses then we will be even more competitive in attracting graduate and part-time students, providing them a level of variety and flexibility in coursework that is important to them and similar to that available under the quarter system.

It is the assessment of the committee that a shift to a semester calendar system should not be expected to have an adverse impact on the recruitment of full-time undergraduate students but might have some impact in the short-term on the recruitment of graduate and part-time students. Over the longer-term, a shift to semesters combined with other
significant changes may have the potential to enhance our overall student recruitment efforts. Nonetheless, the evidence is more promising and conclusive at the undergraduate level than at the graduate (and part-time) level. It should be noted that the Simon School at the University of Rochester, which enrolls only graduate students, remains on a quarter system, and most top business schools operate with schedules that utilize sessions shorter than a semester in length. To remain competitive, simple conversion of quarter courses into semester courses will not suffice.

Cooperative Education

In considering the potential impact of a shift to semesters on the cooperative education program and opportunities for cooperative education students, the committee had the opportunity to hear from several faculty members and administrators representing key academic programs with co-op components. The committee recognized early on in the process that the perceived adverse impact on the cooperative education program has often been cited as the primary reason that a change from the quarter system is problematic. The committee also recognized that cooperative education at RIT is not a university-based program with consistent guidelines and expectations across all academic units. Instead, it is primarily a college-based program, with differing goals and requirements from academic department to academic department. As such, it can be more difficult to generalize about the potential impact of a calendar change on the program.

The 1995 Calendar Committee Report outlined succinctly the advantages of the quarter system to cooperative education and concluded that a change to a semester system was not desirable. The conceptual advantages of a quarter system to the operation of a cooperative education program have been well documented and are accepted widely in the co-op community. Simply put, the greatest degree of flexibility exists for students, participating employers, and the institution under a quarter system. From a student perspective a quarter system allows for the greatest number of work periods and consequently the greatest potential exposure to different employers and work assignments. Participating employers, under a quarter system, have four potential start periods during which to bring co-op students into their organization. Employers also have a choice of employing students for a three or six month work period. This flexibility allows for shifts in employer demand and changes in the nature of student work assignments. The shorter three-month work period is also helpful to students in that it affords those with other commitments (e.g., athletics, student organizations) greater ability to schedule their co-op assignments around other on-campus or personal commitments. From an institutional perspective the quarter system also allows for the greatest flexibility in the scheduling and availability of courses which is, of course, essential in allowing co-op students to complete their degree requirements in a timely and supportive way.

While the committee does not take issue with the rationale outlined in the 1995 report it does, however, believe that at least one significant condition has changed since the 1995 Calendar Committee Report was issued. At the time that the 1995 report was being developed, the five largest cooperative education programs in the United
States—University of Cincinnati, Georgia Institute of Technology, Drexel University, Northeastern University and RIT—all were operating under the quarter system. The fact that these benchmark institutions were committed to the same calendar system and all believed that this was the best system for cooperative education was cited in the 1995 report as an important reason for RIT to remain on the quarter system. Since 1995, however, the national landscape for cooperative education institutions has changed. Mirroring the general shift among all higher education institutions away from the quarter system, one institution—Georgia Institute of Technology—already has transitioned to a semester system, one other—Northeastern University—is making this transition now, and a third—Drexel University—expects to reach a decision within a year on whether to change to semesters. While the reasons for a shift to semesters vary among the three institutions and none have cited retention as the primary reason for a change, the committee notes that most now believe co-op can function effectively under the semester system. The cooperative education staff at Georgia Institute of Technology adamantly opposed the shift initially but now have confirmed that the transition to semesters was a relatively smooth one and did not result in any of the potential problems they predicted.

The 1995 Calendar Committee Report noted that cooperative education programs exist under every different calendar system and can be offered in such a way as to accommodate any particular calendar model. Certainly, the vast majority of cooperative education programs exist under the semester system. For example, of the 148 engineering/engineering technology co-op institutions listed in the 1999 ASEE/CED Directory of Engineering Cooperative Education Programs, only 20 (or 13.5%) — including RIT, Northeastern, and Drexel — are on the quarter system. From this perspective it is clear that most programs can function and function effectively under a semester system. Discussions with the various academic representatives confirm that at RIT co-op is “doable” under a semester system. In fact, some academic units have already mapped out various scenarios that include cooperative education within a semester-based schedule or have indicated that such scheduling scenarios are easily developed. Others, however, have expressed concerns.

The Engineering Technology programs, for example, have not yet been able to establish a co-op schedule that would allow students to graduate at the end of a spring semester rather than at the end of a fall semester. The Kate Gleason College of Engineering has indicated that in order to maintain its distinctiveness as a cooperative education based engineering program it must continue to offer a minimum of a calendar year of co-op. In order to best allow for the scheduling of both courses and co-op work assignments, they advocate very strongly that if a semester based calendar system is adopted, then the summer term must be as close as possible in length to the other two terms. Under such a calendar system, the summer term could then be interchangeable with the other class periods with regard to the number of credit hours that could be completed, greatly facilitating the scheduling of necessary trailer courses for co-op students and allowing students to complete the program efficiently. Without this, they feel they would no longer be able to compete effectively for students.
The committee believes that the availability of appropriate co-op work opportunities for students is based on the perceived quality of the students and academic programs by employers; the ability of the institution to develop successful partnerships with employers which address their hiring needs; and the strength of the overall labor market. These dimensions are largely irrelevant to the institutional calendar system. Indeed, representatives from Eastman Kodak – one of RIT’s largest and oldest co-op employer partners – were asked to assess the impact of a change to semesters on Kodak’s co-op hiring relationship with RIT. Their response was that there would be no change whatsoever in the relationship and, in fact, Kodak staffing might benefit from having all the institutions they partner with use the same calendar system.

While the committee accepts the assessment that cooperative education can be offered under a semester system, it is important to note that RIT must have more than an “acceptable” co-op program. As a recognized world leader in the field of cooperative education and with an institutional mission and history so firmly rooted in experiential education, it is vital that the guiding principles, which allowed for the establishment of this leadership role, not be sacrificed in a possible shift to semesters. These program dimensions are vital to any cooperative education program of our size, scope, and market position. Cooperative education must remain a substantive and integrated part of the academic curriculum. It is vital that a shift to a semester based system not result in a significant decrease in the amount of cooperative education expected of students. It is also vital that as a national leader in co-op, and the institution of choice for so many employers throughout the United States, that the semester system allow for the year round availability of co-op students to prospective employers. A semester system which would make such student availability problematic or, worse, channel most students toward summer only employment opportunities would be a tragic mistake that would ultimately destroy the integrity and market position of RIT’s program.

A shift to semesters provides the opportunity for academic units to consider questions such as: How much cooperative education experience should be required within a given unit? Should co-op employment opportunities in certain academic programs be offered on a more fixed schedule rather than completely at the choice of students? Should certain optional co-op programs move to mandatory status? Should co-op be added to certain academic programs that currently do not have such a feature? The opportunity to ask these questions within the context of the academic curriculum review demanded by a shift to semesters may result in new paradigms and commitments to cooperative education, which may result in an even stronger and more vibrant program at RIT. The committee believes that RIT should not prescribe any particular scenario or structure and that it may be premature at this juncture to finalize any particular co-op schedule until various other issues relevant to a semester system implementation process are agreed upon and finalized.

It is the committee’s assessment that a shift to semesters does not preclude the continued existence at RIT of a co-op program consistent with our high institutional expectations and role as a world leader in this form of education. There are obvious benefits to the co-op program under a quarter system, which the committee recognizes and accepts. The
program flexibility that RIT now enjoys would be sacrificed to some extent by a shift to a semester system. It is the committee's assessment that this loss of flexibility should not prevent continued consideration of such a shift. The committee hastens to add, however, that this assessment is based on the provisos described above. Should a shift to semesters include the sacrifice of the key co-op program dimensions outlined here, then the program and RIT's market position stand to be irreparably damaged.

Those comments that we received from faculty and staff were split as to whether co-op would be hurt by a change to semesters. Some felt it would suffer due to lowered flexibility and ability to meet companies' needs. Others felt it would not suffer, since a year's co-op still can be arranged, and industries that hire co-ops from other schools as well as RIT would have an easier scheduling task. The KGCOE concludes there will be little effect if the summer session is equal in length to the other terms, but an adverse effect if the summer is shorter.

V. Administrative and educational records systems

This section addresses the impact and cost of a change from the present quarter calendar to a semester calendar with regard to the administrative and educational records systems. For purposes of this analysis, we assume:

- two 15 week semesters in the Fall and Spring plus a four day exam period and a 12 week summer semester plus a three day exam period
- basic course coding structure will be maintained
- no additional functionality will be built into existing systems, and no significant changes to definitions of data elements will occur

Offices consulted include Information Technology Services, Finance and Administration, Enrollment Management, Registrar, Financial Aid, Bursar, Institutional Research, Business Services (Apartments, Book Store, Food Service), Residence Life, NTID, Human Resources, and Budget. Interviews with the various administrative units produced a number of consistent comments, as noted in the paragraphs that follow. The potential impact of a change from a quarter calendar system to a semester-based calendar system is generally believed to result in improvement in customer service resulting from somewhat longer periods of time for the accomplishment and review of numerous administrative functions (e.g. registration, financial aid processing, bill presentment, etc.). It is believed that the reduction in the number of registrations/billing cycles, and the resulting longer periods of time for processing forms, student appointments, and problem resolution can enable these departments to redirect staff to more service-oriented interaction with students. This is consistent with the view expressed in both the 1991 and 1995 calendar studies.

There is concern that the positive effect of reducing the processing cycles might be negated if we transition to a format of developing a multitude of short courses to be
offered during the regular fall and spring semesters, starting at various points after the beginning of the enrollment period. Rather than reducing the number of registrations, billings, financial aid recalculations and data collection points, this approach might actually produce an increase in administrative effort and complexity.

Impact and Cost

If the decision to convert to a semester calendar is made by November 2000, all offices indicate that they would be prepared for implementation by Fall 2002, subject to ITS conversion support. There was nearly universal concern that many of the conversion cost estimates, revenue analyses, etc. were predicated on an assumption of two 15 week semesters and a 12 week summer semester plus final exam periods. Since the actual calendar format that might be adopted is not known, precise implications cannot be fully developed.

Historical data and resulting trend analysis will be difficult for several years and will be limited to annualized summaries. Data involving quarterly information such as that associated with quarterly GPA, cost per credit hour, or hours generated and consumed will not be able to be compared to new data in a semester system. It will be some years before comparable data can be accumulated.

The largest cost impact relating to the potential conversion will be that of software revisions to the affected student information systems. These conversions will consume a significant amount of ITS resources as well as resources within the various functional offices affected. The Bursar, Admissions and Financial Aid directors and Registrar, among others, do not support replacing any major systems such as STARS, especially at the same time as a conversion to a new calendar. Most offices indicated that the present system, which is very customized, meets their needs. No viable vendor-supplied software solution is currently on the market. Those vendor-supplied systems currently being offered are not deemed mature enough to meet RIT’s needs. On-going system enhancements (such as web enabling the present system) should be continued as such maintenance will continue to add functionality and user friendliness to the software.

The Office of Information Technology Services has reviewed the programming changes necessary in each of the primary systems affected by the calendar change. Based upon their analysis, and presuming a project starting January 2001 and ending in December, 2002, ITS anticipates that the programming changes can be accomplished through the dedication of eight internal staff members from the Systems Development Group on a full-time basis, the retention of contract programmers, the deferral of several projects, and the understanding that no new major software acquisitions or enhancements can take place until after any conversion. The estimated cost of the dedication of these internal staff members for the two-year period and the retention of contract programmers as needed is approximately $1,900,000 (including both compensation and benefits where applicable). Non-salary costs within ITS related to this project are estimated at $300,000.
In addition to the commitment of staff within ITS, a number of staff members within the functional administrative offices will be dedicated to this project over the two years beginning January, 2001. The primary units affected will include the Registrar’s Office, the Bursar’s Office and the Office of Financial Aid. It is estimated that each of these units will commit one full-time staff member, and that a number of the secondary units affected (Business Services, Institutional Research, Residence Life, etc.) will each commit one-half of an FTE for two years. The total estimated cost of the functional unit staffing, including compensation and benefits, is estimated at $575,000.

There will be additional one-time conversion costs within the administrative offices impacted, including new and revised forms, incremental mailings of brochures and other printed materials, revisions to web sites, policies and procedures, timelines and related processes. In addition, some costs of this nature are expected within each of the colleges as they seek to augment Institute-wide communications with specialized discussion pieces for their students. The administrative offices and individual colleges are expected to expend approximately $400,000 on these out-of-pocket expenses.

A project contingency budget has been estimated at 15% of costs identified above. In total, it is estimated that the changes to the administrative information systems can be accomplished in time for a Fall 2002 calendar change at an estimated cost of $3.7 million. While this figure significantly exceeds that presented in the 1995 report, it is important to bear in mind that the 1995 report captured only incremental external costs, and did not attempt to incorporate the dedication of existing Institute staff. This $3.7 million cost estimate, of course, only represents that portion of transition costs associated with administrative and records systems.

Other Recurring Budget Implications

In addition to the one-time costs of revisions to the administrative information systems, there are implications on the Institute’s on-going revenue and expense budgets resulting from a transition to a semester-based calendar. The most significant impact is the potential change in the overall tuition revenue mix (a possible decline in part-time/graduate studies offset by substantial growth in full-time undergraduate tuition). At the same time, the calendar change may result in a reduction in gross margin and profit at the Bookstore, in Food Service, and potentially in Apartment Housing. These operating units will endeavor to implement business process changes to minimize the potential lost surpluses (estimated at a maximum of $1 million per year).

Whether improved retention, if achieved, would be accompanied by an offsetting reduction in intake of transfer students will determine whether any change in total enrollment occurs, once the calendar changes. That is, calendar change, retention, and total enrollment are linked but somewhat separable issues. If the net outcome were larger total enrollment, there would of course be revenue increases (that would more than offset the reduction mentioned in the previous paragraph). But the full import of any such enrollment growth would require careful assessment of the corresponding increases in the cost of providing educational services (faculty, staff and space requirements). This we have not addressed.
Additional cost considerations

A change to semesters would have as yet unexamined implications for the number and size of classrooms and labs necessary to accommodate the changed pattern of course offerings. The KGCOE, for example, has already indicated that it would be impossible to accommodate under a semester schedule all the students required to take the mechanical engineering design lab course given their current lab facilities. Since campus classroom and lab space utilization has been designed with a quarter system in mind it is critical to review the implications of a shift to semesters carefully with regard to the potential impact on current and planned space. A shift to semesters also would necessitate additional costs associated with transforming quarter courses to semester courses. This required effort also extends to distance learning courses whose revision by necessity includes additional expenses associated with the technical aspects of course delivery. In some cases the expense of course changes will be minimal. In other cases, they perhaps will be more substantial as costs for faculty release time or the greater use of adjuncts may be necessary. There also are other opportunity costs. For example, with the explosion of the web and the impact of technology on business practices, resource constraints for 18-24 months, while ITS and individual offices divert staff to work on this initiative, could be significant and might put us at a competitive disadvantage. All such costs should be considered in making a final decision.

VI. Implementation and scheduling issues

A decision to change the calendar would mark the start of what President Simone rightly characterizes in his charge to this committee as “a challenging endeavor for the entire Institute.” Our charge did not include studying implementation of a new calendar or indeed even recommending if such a change should take place. However, after looking at this idea rather closely we want to offer some observations we think may be helpful to those who will further consider the question. We first identify some general considerations and then suggest several specific steps that we believe will expedite reaching a sound outcome.

A. General considerations

As mentioned often in both the RTF’s and this committee’s reports, several of our competitors recently have started or completed a switch from the quarter system to the semester system. While many details of the implementation process can be learned from their experience, our overall impression is that calendar change is a truly monumental process requiring buy-in, not just participation, by the faculty, staff and students.
With this in mind, we suggest the following points should be part of the campus discussion that is to follow:

1) The President has pointed out that an Institute-wide process such as this requires “…trust and goodwill…” by RIT’s several constituencies. The process of consultation called for by the President will be an important step in achieving the broad buy-in so essential for smooth transitions. Certain individuals will be intransigent no matter what happens, but a strong core in each constituent group should be on board for a calendar change to be implemented effectively and with minimum disruption.

2) “Changing to semesters” is something of an empty phrase if the exact form of the semester system is uncertain. We made an operational assumption of a 15-15-12 model as the primary alternative to the status quo, but we made no effort to assess that model’s net benefits relative to those of other alternatives. Such assessment was not part of our charge, and we do not endorse any particular calendar variant. We have heard reasonable proposals for a three-equal-term model, a “split-summer” model and others. Clearly some course redesign can proceed without knowing this, but full curricular work cannot.

3) When people who already are working full-time undertake a task of this magnitude (see point 4, below), some other tasks must be put aside. We are in the midst of several exciting Institute initiatives, none of which will benefit particularly by a one to two year hiatus. For example, the Ph.D. development work in the KGCOE might have to slow and might lose momentum. Other programs (e.g., honors, first in class) could also be negatively affected. Without adequate leadership, particular groups might decide to drop certain activities, interfering with all of them being able to go forward. Central coordination might be able to preserve some of these activities, but it is difficult to see how all of them could proceed in any event.

4) Adding tasks requires either additional support or removing or deferring other responsibilities. Placing additional duties on people who are already stretched thin is not a formula for success. For example, an extremely aggressive 12-14 month implementation time is under consideration. However, if no extra funds are supplied for July and August, then those on 9- or 10-month contracts cannot reasonably be expected to work these months, meaning actual implementation time is 2-3 months less.

5) As the RTF report states, “all RIT units need to know that they will be supported in the development and implementation of retention-directed programs.” Since the curricular redesign would be undertaken in part for retention reasons, it should fall under this designation. Note that point 3 implies that no matter how we do this change some things will be set aside. Points 4 and 5 imply that, if we do not supply adequate support, some other areas will be slighted and the calendar implementation will still not be done as well as it could be.

1 The 1995 Calendar Report used the term “trimester” in referring to a calendar that divides the 52-week calendar year into three equal length 15-week academic terms (each having 14 weeks of classes and one week of exams) -- others use this term differently.
B. Proposed next steps

The President noted in his June memorandum to the RIT community (see Appendix) that "as we sort through this entire process, hundreds of questions will arise." He stressed "the participation, cooperation, trust, and goodwill of all members of the community are necessary for us to navigate successfully the process of making the best decisions on this entire matter." The work of this committee and of the RTF constitute a start on addressing these questions, and we believe that the next steps in the process of reaching a decision about whether, when and how to change the calendar should include the following:

1) Further informal consultation should take place with a few peer universities that have made calendar changes recently. Deans, Vice Presidents, and governance group leaders could be asked to contact their counterparts at, say, Georgia Tech and Northeastern, to gain a mix of perspectives. Schools that recently have undergone a quarter-to-semester transition (especially those that are heavily co-op) are valuable resources. RIT should find out more about their experiences and benefit from them. This includes, but should go beyond, the likely effect on retention at these schools, even where retention was not a driving force behind the calendar change. Discussions should probe:
   - Length of time from decision to implementation that appears desirable based on their experience.
   - Most troublesome aspects of the transition and how they best can be addressed.
   - Once over the transition, how to characterize the net benefits (or overall success) that reasonably can be anticipated.

2) Clarity is needed on whether the November 2000 date suggested for a final decision includes (a) deciding on the form of the semester system, or (b) deciding whether to change calendars, followed later by selection of the particular calendar that RIT will adopt. Since revised degree program grids must be completed by the end of the November preceding implementation, much would need to be accomplished by November 2001 if a change were to take effect September 2002.

3) Specification of the particular alternative calendar (whether a 15-15-12 week semester or other) best suited to RIT should be followed by confirmation of the adequacy of available classroom space and faculty/staff to accommodate the particular calendar envisioned.

4) If the calendar is to change, an oversight committee should be formed to set general parameters and identify and address issues as they arise. Many departments supply services to others and there may be conflicting pressures on how to deliver these services and how much of them actually are required. That committee also must ensure that students currently attending can finish their program in an educationally rational and sound manner.
APPENDIX

This four-part appendix contains President Simone's charge to the committee, the list of questions that guided the committee's deliberations, and three statements representative of the sharply diverging views we encountered on campus.

Appendix A: Charge to the committee

To: The RIT Community  
From: Albert J. Simone, President  
Re: Retention and the RIT Calendar  
Date: June 9, 2000

By now many of you have heard that the Retention Task Force has found a change in RIT's academic calendar to a semester system to be a necessary condition for success in a widespread range of its recommended retention enhancement strategies. I find the Retention Task Force's arguments compelling and would like to move ahead as quickly as possible with consideration of their recommendation of moving to a semester calendar.

I have thus appointed a small group of instrumental people to verify that circumstances have changed significantly and that new evidence has emerged since the last Calendar Review Committee's recommendations (February 1995). I would like this group to move quickly, forwarding their findings and recommendations to me by the end of July 2000.

Members of the group are Tom Hopkins, chair, Peg Ferber, Manny Contomanolis, Frank Lamas, Douglas Merrill, Dan Vilenski, and Walter Wolf.

I have given this group the following charge:

1. Ascertain whether the Retention Task Force has sufficient and reliable evidence to warrant its finding that changing to a semester system is a necessary condition for successful implementation of its retention enhancement strategies.
2. Ascertain the likely impact of such a change upon the quality of RIT's portfolio of degree programs.
3. Ascertain the impact, if any, of such a switch on RIT's recruitment of new students and on co-op opportunities for students.
4. Ascertain the impact and cost of such a change upon RIT's administrative systems.
5. Ascertain the impact and cost of such a change upon RIT's educational records systems.

Once I receive this group's report, it will be distributed in early August to the entire RIT community, along with the full report of the Retention Task Force. Comments on both reports, but especially on the calendar issue will be solicited from everyone, especially the governance groups. I will also address the issue during my Opening Day Community Address on September 5, 2000. A final deadline for input from the governance groups will be set in mid October so that I can make a final decision by the end of that month. If a decision is made to switch to a semester system, the goal for implementation would be by September 2002. This would prove to be a challenging endeavor for the entire Institute, with degree program grids needing to be revised by the end of November 2001, in time for publication in the 2002-2003 RIT Bulletins.

As we sort through this entire process, hundreds of questions will arise. I will make every effort to keep vice presidents, deans, and the executive committees of the governance groups fully apprised as to both the progress we are making and my current thinking on outcomes. Clearly, however, the participation, cooperation, trust, and goodwill of all members of the community are necessary for us to navigate successfully the process of making the best decisions on this entire matter.
Appendix B: Questions that guided discussions in preparation of this report

In June the committee distributed the following to all colleges:

In his June 9th memo to the entire RIT community, President Simone reported that the Retention Task Force offered compelling arguments that “a change in RIT’s academic calendar to a semester system to be a necessary condition for success in a widespread range of its recommended retention enhancement strategies.” He charged this committee to study the recommendations of the Retention Task Force and the potential impacts of a change in the calendar on RIT’s portfolio of degree programs, recruitment of new students, cooperative education, administrative costs, and education record systems.

Our report is due to the President at the end of July and it, along with the report of the Retention Task Force, will then be made available to all members of the RIT community for input. The President intends to make a decision by the end of October.

This committee is seeking your advice and counsel and asks that you take a few minutes to respond to the questions posed below. Thank you, in advance, for your thoughtful input on this important issue.

Regarding a transition from a quarter calendar to a semester calendar:

What do you perceive to be the advantages of such a change?

What do you perceive to be the disadvantages of such a change?

What do you believe will be the impact of such a change on the retention of students? (Please explain your reasoning).

How would such a change affect (positively and negatively) your job?

What would be the impact of such a change on the time it takes for your students to complete their degree requirements?

What are the curricular implications of such a change?

What would be the effect(s) of such a change on:
   The quality of your academic program(s)
   The quality of student life at RIT
   The quality of co-op or internship programs

If such a change were to be required, what should be the implementation process and time table, recognizing that December is the deadline for catalog and course planning specific to the following September?
Appendix C: Comments reflecting contrasting perspectives on calendar issues

Appendix C—Exhibit One: Memorandum from Harvey Palmer and Richard Reeve

To: Walter Wolf  
Calendar Review Committee  
From: Harvey Palmer and Richard Reeve  
Date: July 2, 2000

This memo presents the collective opinion of the Kate Gleason College of Engineering with respect to the proposed calendar change from quarters to semesters at RIT. To establish the KGCOE opinion on the calendar issue, we did a variety of things:

- We asked each faculty member to work with their department head to establish a consensus position for their department on the proposed calendar change.
- We also asked each faculty member to write a personal email to the Deans Office in defense of a semester-based calendar, should they be in favor of such a change.
- We asked Charles Haines, the Associate Head of Mechanical Engineering, to prepare a curricular layout for the B.S. in MechE on a semester-based calendar. MechE was chosen because of its high enrollments and because it is typical in its need to have significant, hands-on, laboratory experiences in their curriculum.
- Finally, we did a phone survey of engineering faculty at schools that recently have changed (or are in the process of changing) from quarters to semesters, to get their perspectives on the pros, cons, and pitfalls associated with such a change.

The results of these activities are presented below as a consensus opinion of the KGCOE faculty. appended to this document are the answers received from the seven KGCOE departments in response to your list of eight questions about semesters versus quarters.

Input from the Kate Gleason College of Engineering  
on the Issue of Semesters versus Quarters

General Observations
First of all, the faculty agree that we can deliver a quality, co-op based educational experience on either a semester or a quarter system. We also believe that the issue of retention is a weak argument for changing the academic calendar from quarters to semesters. There may be many side benefits of a semester-based academic calendar. Also, the faculty believe that retention is an extremely important issue that must be addressed in a substantive way. But the faculty do not believe that low retention is a direct consequence of the quarter system. Instead, we believe that the biggest single cause of poor retention is the negative attitude instilled in students by RIT faculty in many courses. If this “attitude” problem were to be addressed in a meaningful way, we believe that a quarter system can be as successful as a semester system at educating students in a positive, and academically stimulating environment, that would lead to high retention figures.

Advantages of Semesters
From our perspective, the advantages of a semester system appear to be
1. the creation of a calendar that is synchronized with most other universities,
2. an increased opportunity to provide earlier intervention for those at risk in the freshman class, and
3. non-specific improvements in the overall delivery of the curriculum that we hope would accrue from the focused effort required to revamp the curriculum to conform to a new calendar scheme.

There are a few distinct elements to advantage #1. Conformity provides the sociological benefit that accrues from having our students on break with their high school friends who are now attending other universities. Conformity also may be viewed as a benefit to our industrial partners who must schedule our co-op students along with the co-ops from semester-based schools (which are the dominant majority). In addition, industries may also prefer uniformly longer co-op periods—a situation that we can create now
only by encouraging students to do a double-block scenario. Finally, switching to a calendar that makes us look like everyone else eliminates this particular differentiating aspect of RIT as an excuse for less than satisfactory performance on the retention issue.

Advantage #2 is a benefit only in that mythical state where instructors make every effort during the first month of class to identify students who are not performing satisfactorily. If instructors were so conscientious, then much of the retention problem would be solved without a calendar change. Alternatively, one could say that a semester gives students longer to “dig a hole for themselves”—a hole that is deeper and harder to climb out of. In a quarter system, students get a second and third chance to make things right. In a semester system, two strikes and you are out.

The curriculum should always be under scrutiny. Thus, advantage #3 should not exist in an ideal world. In the College of Engineering, the faculty must review and justify their curriculum to a national accreditation team at least once every six years. Thus, curricular evaluation and reform is an ongoing process. Nevertheless, there are faculty members who feel obliged to deliver a semester’s worth of material in a quarter-length course. This situation is partly due to the fact that most faculty members were educated on a semester system, and partly because textbooks invariably have in them more information than can be taught in a semester, let alone a quarter. A switch to semesters will remedy this particular problem without addressing the issue of “delivery rate” directly.

Disadvantages of Semesters
So what are the disadvantages of switching to a semester system, from the viewpoint of the KGCOE?
1. decreased flexibility in delivering a broad range of technical and non-technical electives
2. difficulty in scheduling critical required courses, particularly lab courses, given the limited availability of laboratory space and classrooms
3. the high level of effort required to make the change, at a time when the faculty are being asked to embark on new initiatives like a PhD program, the FIC initiative, and new ABET accreditation criteria
4. less flexibility for the student who falls behind and needs to make up a course

Disadvantage #1 is troublesome because we have used our broad range of elective options as a successful marketing tool. When students compare our many course options with those offered by traditional engineering schools, they are impressed by our diversity of opportunities. To preserve some of this diversity in a semester-based system, the KGCOE would choose to offer electives as 3-credit semester courses. But this would mean that students would be taking five courses concurrently instead of four. (This is Georgia Tech’s current plan.) The negative impact of this is two-fold. Students would find their study time even more fragmented, which probably would increase stress. Also, more courses would be taught concurrently (as much as 20% more), thereby increasing teaching loads (as measured by the number of preparations) and increasing the demand for class rooms. (potentially)

The concern expressed in disadvantage #2 is a serious one. As is always the case, laboratories are “scaled” in proportion to the demand. Thus, the KGCOE has laboratory space, and a level of redundancy in laboratory equipment, that is consistent with the number of students that it needs to educate in each quarter of the calendar year. Much of this laboratory space is shared by several courses, and each of these courses must be taught twice during a calendar year to accommodate the mandatory co-op program. With four quarters, it is easier to schedule these courses without overlap. For example, two courses that require access to the same laboratory facility, each being taught twice per year, can be scheduled without conflict on a quarter system because there are four distinct scheduling blocks available. On the other hand, in a semester system there are only three scheduling blocks, thereby making it impossible to schedule these courses without overlap. If the courses simply required a computer lab, then an extension of the teaching day might be a viable option. However, many of the lab-based courses in engineering require “hardware” that must be configured for the particular course. Furthermore, the students may be building devices that remain in the lab and evolve over the course of the term. Thus, once configured, the lab cannot be used for any other purpose. The solution to this problem, if we were to switch to a semester-based calendar, would be to increase the size of the critical laboratory facilities or decrease the amount of laboratory time required
of students. The second option is distasteful because it is in conflict with RIT's mission of delivering a first-class, experiential educational product.

Disadvantage #3 is self-explanatory. The KGCOE faculty already have several critical issues before them that will require substantial time and attention. The new ABET 2000 accreditation criteria require a whole new approach to curriculum design and, more importantly, a comprehensive mechanism for evaluating the "product" to determine whether the stated educational outcomes are actually met. In addition, by the middle of the fall quarter, the KGCOE will be rolling out a plan for its first Ph.D. degree. At that point, the critical task begins of implementing the stated goals and objectives of that Ph.D. initiative while at the same time improving the quality of the undergraduate experience. Finally, by next year, the First-in-Class initiative will be well into its second year, and the KGCOE faculty must play a critical role in the evolution of this initiative to assure its long-term success.

Other Issues
A primary advantage of the Kate Gleason College of Engineering in the marketplace is its strong emphasis on career-based education. The cornerstone of its programs is the mandatory co-op that is fully integrated into the academic curriculum. In order to maintain our distinctiveness relative to our competitors, it is imperative that the College continue to require a minimum of a calendar year of co-op. If a semester calendar is mandated, the College's intent is to require four semesters of co-op, with the possible reduction to three semesters in exceptional circumstances.

Because the co-op assignments must be fully integrated into the curriculum and because our industrial partners require a year-round supply of co-op students, we must fully utilize the summer term in a manner that parallels the use of the traditional fall and spring semesters. Therefore, if a semester-based calendar is mandated, it is imperative that the summer term be as similar as possible to the two other terms. This implies a trimester model. Furthermore, because the College will want to preserve as many of its elective options as possible, it is important that the College be granted maximum flexibility in the packaging of its courses. In other words, the College needs to have the option of offering courses with various amounts of credit and of variable duration. For example, the College may need the flexibility of offering some electives as half-semester courses, or as two- or three-credit courses.
Appendix C—Exhibit Two: Memorandum from Andrew Moore

Subject: Calendar: quarters vs. semesters
Date: 9 Jun 2000
From: Andrew Moore
To: Thomas D. Hopkins

Dear Tom:

Allow me to offer some brief comments.

From all I have heard, the faculty of the College of Liberal Arts strongly supports the proposed shift to a semester calendar. It is my perception that their desire to move in that direction has intensified in recent months. A few have raised concerns about the process by which such a decision might be reached (President Simone’s e-mail message this morning on that topic may help moderate such unease), but the message is still clear and insistent: we want to make the change.

The reasons given are many, and focus mainly on academic and pedagogical issues: more time to explore a topic in depth, better opportunities to work with students who may be unfamiliar with the subject matter (especially important in the many disciplines we embrace that are taught little if at all in high schools), and sufficiently long terms to get students through uneven patches of work to arrive at a satisfactory outcome. And a semester gives students and faculty more time to get to know each other, and for faculty to provide more individual support for students.

I would add some personal views: the arguments the RTF has made for a root-and-branch approach to retention matters are compelling, and require a strong, explicit commitment to doing business in a new way. A change in calendar would make it clear, above all to students, that we are serious. There are some other issues that have been less discussed, at least so far. In the northeast of the country from where most of our students come almost all high schools and universities are on the semester system. Students who come to RIT not only have to adjust to a, for them, new calendar, but also find themselves on a different schedule from their peers who have gone to other institutions. This imposes an unnecessarily disruptive social change on them at a particularly vulnerable moment in their lives. Changing to a semester calendar would keep them on a familiar timetable, one that was in accord with norms elsewhere. I will pass on any further substantive views that I receive.

Yours,
Andrew Moore
Dean
College of Liberal Arts
Appendix C: Exhibit Three—Views of 15 students submitted by Student Government Historian

Semester Issue: Student Perspectives
Submitted June 16, 2000
Kevin Sheldon, Student Government Historian

Well if you want my official opinion to pass on, I would have to say that semesters are great because they allow the courses to be more in-depth. On the other hand, they also cut down on the amount of courses that can be taken in the 4 years. In order to get peoples’ opinion about implementing the system in RIT, the conversion would have to be explained in great detail to everyone. I think that’s where the biggest problem and question will arise..."How?"

3rd Year MIS student

I have mixed feelings, but a lot of the uncertainty is from a lack of information at this point. Exactly how our respective curriculum and cooperative education programs will change will weigh heavily with many of us. As for vacation patterns, students can always adjust to that, so that’s not as much of an issue. Obviously, some of us will prefer to maintain the status quo, and others will push for change. We just need more information on the subject, plain and simple. What concerns me is that the administration is trying to push this through as quickly as possible, possibly without giving the matter the time it deserves.

3rd Year Software Engineering student

I don’t know about you, but from the engineering standpoint there is no way that we should go to semesters. We offer more classes and a broader scope of information this way. Most other engineering schools on the semester system offer 3 credit classes that meet for 3 hours a week, for fifteen weeks. This amounts to 45 hours a semester, where as we take the classes for 4 hours for ten weeks, amounting to 40 hours. So in one quarter we see as much material as the other schools see in a semester. Now this may be why the RIT sees a problem. This makes for a difficult program to navigate and survive, but I didn’t come to RIT because it would be easy. I don’t want to be an idiot when I leave here just so we can get a few more morons to be able to make it through the program. Now the change wouldn’t effect me anyhow but I still think it would effect the future graduates of RIT and thus the schools reputation for producing quality people. I know how hard going for 10 weeks hardcore and having to deal with so much information is, but I would not have it any other way. I am not here to just get by, I am here to get the best possible education because the rest of my life depends on it, and I don’t feel that would be possible in the semester system. I have a better way to decrease the percentage of dropouts, stop accepting every ... person that applies. Chances are that we are accepting a lot of people that shouldn’t be here, and that is exactly why they drop out. College is not for everyone, and there is a reason for that.

4th Year Aerospace Engineering student

I believe that the semester system will destroy RIT’s Engineering’s edge over other schools.

5th Year Computer Engineering student

I think that from my perspective it would cause a major problem with programs where co-ops are required. Most of the successful co-op schools use a quarter system (i.e. Northeastern). I also think that the system at RIT is designed for a special breed of people who can handle a fast paced atmosphere and that’s most of what makes us desirable as employees upon graduation. If the school wants to increase the retention rate, they should be more selective in their recruiting and acceptance of new students. The fact is that RIT is a difficult school, and to show that you can make it through a 4 or 5 year program is a prestigious honor and is looked upon highly. I don’t think it should be made easier so the less adept students can also do well.

4th Year Computer Engineering student

Basically what I believe retention comes down to is the easy admission process to RIT. So many freshmen are let in that I feel are not qualified to be here.... Our school is overcrowded as it is and classes are overloaded. I’m sure the student to faculty ratio isn’t all that great either.... In sum, I think too many
unprepared, unsuspecting, and under-qualified students are allowed to enter RIT, which causes them to drop out after a year, or so.... Back to the semester thing, bad idea I think. The whole point of the quarter system is to accommodate the mandatory co-op programs in the different curriculums. If you go to semesters then one would have to co-op for at least a six-month block which would cause lots of problems. I guess co-oping in the summer would be good, but it is soooo hard to find a summer co-op and if that becomes one of the more desirable options for RIT students (which it is for semester based schools since you don’t miss classes and have a good summer job) then the local co-op job market will be even more saturated. I understand that the quarter system is more fast paced and rigorous, but it really isn’t. They really don’t squeeze an entire semester into one quarter. Stuff is taken out of the syllabus or the class continues for more than one quarter, but I believe the pace is about the same. The problem lies in the fact that each professor has different teaching and grading methods that you have to get used too in such a short period of time which causes the most problems I believe.... The professors at RIT leave a lot of the responsibility of learning up to the students which is good, but if they got more involved by making even weekly homework assignments due then the students would do better. So basically I believe that switching to semesters in a school that stresses co-op and a main selling point as being a bad idea and not solving the problem. The quarter system was designed for schools like ours, which needs to accommodate various co-op and work schedules. The summer needs to be treated just like any other time of year so that we don’t miss out on a whole 3 months of valuable time that needs to be taken advantage of. ...

4th Year Computer Engineering student

I understand and fully agree that retention is an important and growing issue at RIT. It is a problem that must be solved as soon as possible, but I’m unsure of how effective switching to semesters would be for the university. Although other schools have made the successful switch from trimesters to semesters, our situation is unique. As students of RIT we have the extraordinary opportunity to co-op, and many if not 99% of the RIT population take advantage of this opportunity. I feel that the switch to semesters would highly affect the way co-op’s would be scheduled and participated in, and have a concern that with time, RIT may lose that program due to scheduling conflicts. RIT’s quarter systems allows many students to move in and out of the work situation with leisure, as well as adapt to the high pace situations they will soon encounter in the work place. The quarter systems allows students to come into contact with much more information and classes than a regular semester system, and those that can adapt normally excel to the current style of the college. Although this may be a possible option for the college I don’t see it as fully solving the true issue at hand and benefiting the university as a whole. As I said before, RIT has many unique things that sets itself away from other colleges and challenging academics, a fast pace schedule and co-op opportunities are just a few things that can be listed. I feel that any “change” that could affect these things is not in the best interest of the school.

2nd Year MIS student

Since I’ve been here, I’ve found that one of the most valued qualities RIT has is its quarter system. It compels us as students to study harder and it pushes us harder as students to use the time we have productively. I see other peers from other schools, sitting around, relaxing because they have another 10 weeks before an assignment is due, which isn’t realistic, especially when you look at how the “real world” is once we get out of college. This pressure to perform in the time allowed gives the RIT students who do make it through an edge over their peers from other schools. Another thing is our co-op system. With a semester program, we’d have to compete with other schools for co-op positions. As many students already know, finding a job during the summer can be difficult, since many employers are looking to semester schools, saving RIT for the fall, winter, and summer quarters when we are the only ones available.

Retention of students shouldn’t be the main concern of RIT. That makes the staff sound like “How can we make more money”. RIT is exclusive, that’s what drew me here. RIT is supposed to be one of those places that the brightest and smartest people go to learn and gain an education. Its supposed to be a ton of hard work seat, and learning, that in the end let us look back and feel like we’ve accomplished something. That’s how I feel now, that I’m 5th year and look at what I’ve went through. I don’t want this whole experience to be any easier for the students following me than it was for me. What I do want them to have are better teachers, better lab equipment, and better programs to help them learn as much as they possibly can. There will always be people that leave, because they don’t want to do it, can’t do it, find that it isn’t for them. Making a semester system, a more relaxed learning atmosphere isn’t the way to do this. Yes, RIT is hard,
and that’s partially because of the quarter system. But RIT is definitely not an impossible place to graduate from. I’ve seen people do it and plan on someday doing it myself. :)

5th Year Engineering student

With regards to the switch to the semester schedule, it is necessary to seriously consider the resulting affect on the co-op program. The beauty of the quarter system is the ease of flip-flopping between classes and co-op. Athletes especially benefit from this system. If an athlete wanted to co-op during a quarter, it would simply equate one season (either fall or winter or spring). When you incorporate the semester system, a semester long co-op would entail one and a half seasons (fall and part of winter OR winter and part of spring). This puts athletes in an even tougher spot in terms of scheduling. Another supporting point for the quarter system: yes, it may be stressful and therefore may cause some students to leave RIT. Nevertheless, it prepares students for a fast-paced workplace. This is imperative, especially with RIT’s focus on academic programs related to technology. If that’s not fast-paced, I don’t know what is. Perhaps a few students are being lost along the way, but RIT’s success rate with job placement for those who do make it though should be considered. Lastly, most schools are semester schools. A select few operate on the quarter system for whatever reasons they have (primarily due to co-op schedules), and RIT’s co-op opportunities / quarter system attract many outstanding students to the institution. If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.

2nd Year Science student

I’m against the idea of a semester system. Half of the reason I chose RIT was the quarter system. I like the shorter, more frequent breaks between classes as well as the shorter time period spent in a particular class.

3rd Year MIS student

Thanks for forwarding this to me. I believe that a move to a semester system would adversely impact evening division students. The net affect of changing to this system would be to increase the amount of calendar time required for a part time student to earn a degree by a third. Someone working a full time job such as myself can take at most two classes per academic period. Assuming that one takes summers off (a necessity in order to maintain a healthy balance between work, school, and family), this equates to three to six classes per academic year. Reducing the number of academic periods in a year by a third (again excluding summers) in effect reduces the number of classes that I can take per year by a third. Unless RIT is willing to reduce the number of classes required for a degree, this increases the amount of time to obtain a degree by a third. There will be an adverse financial impact to evening division students as well if this change is implemented. By increasing the amount of calendar time required for a part time student to earn a degree, RIT will expose the student to additional annual tuition increases. Because RIT seems to raise tuition each academic year, any course that is deferred from one year to another will cost more. In addition to this direct, measurable cost, there is an opportunity cost to students that comes from delayed promotions and career advancement because it will take longer to obtain a degree. I work a minimum of forty hours per week in my job and average closer to fifty hours. I simply would not be able to squeeze out more time in order to take another class each academic period. I suspect that if you polled evening division students, you would find a majority have the same problem. One of the reasons that I chose to attend RIT was the institution’s support for continuing education students. I believe that changing to a semester system diminishes this support to such an extent that I would seriously consider transferring to another college if such a move is carried out. ... I only hope that the committee that is assessing this recommendation solicits opinions from the entire RIT community before implementing this change. Thanks again for giving me the opportunity to express my opinion.

Evening MIS Student

Allow me to summarize my thoughts on this monumental change in a few lines. I think that I understand the rationale behind changing to semesters: Many of the academic programs at RIT place too much stress on students by compacting them to fit into ten weeks instead of fifteen. I, too, have felt the crunch of being rushed, being dragged through material. However, this change could have serious negative impact on the Engineering programs. These programs are designed to be five years- under the quarter system, mind you. With so much coursework to be done, I can see the length of the program being extended to preserve the valuable co-op experience, a move which will cause many students to choose another school to begin with. On the other hand, if the decision is to preserve the five-year length of the program, either important professional elective classes or possibly even some core courses may be cut to make this square peg fit that
round hole. A school which has built its academic programs on the quarter system will not have an easy
time transitioning to a semester system; however, if the issue of preserving co-op blocks and program
length can be resolved well, then I am in favor of switching semesters and I will thank RIT as I enjoy my
month-long Christmas break.

4th Year Industrial Engineering student

Although many of us may say, “why aren’t I on spring break in Daytona Beach?” I think the current system
makes RIT unique and fits well with the strong CO-OP program. ....

3rd Year Info Tech student

As I am going into my fourth year at RIT, I realize I have seen several changes in the freshmen classes that
have followed mine. When I was a freshman in ’97, I remember being told that we were the largest class,
with the largest percentage of females ever accepted to RIT. The same was true the following year, and also
last year. I thought that was great! Now I would think that more students would mean in turn, more classes
and better curriculums. However this has not been the case; in fact what has changed is the amount of
students at RIT who really shouldn’t be there. Each fall I see more kids walking around looking like they
still belong in high school. They don’t act like college freshmen should, studying hard to pass classes,
worrying about grades and parents’ opinions. Instead they are more interested in skipping class and slacking
off - looking for an easy way out. Not all freshmen are like this, but even many of the ones, who try to
pass, won’t. It’s a plain fact of life that many kids can’t handle the workload and stress of college. It clearly
shows at the end of fall quarter and more so at the end of winter when students fail to return or begin
switching majors. I think the classic example of this is the CE-CS-IT road. Many high SAT scorers want to
be Computer Engineers. However, they find “the material isn’t for them.” Or more like, they can’t/don’t
want to do the work. So they change to a related field, like CS which is a bit more laid back. The same is
also true with CS. I think a lot of high school kids are drawn into CS because of their childhood
experiences with computer games. They think, “wouldn’t that be neat to make,” speaking of computer
games. But when they try the CS program, they find that it’s a bit tougher than pushing a few buttons on a
remote control, and switch to IT. This year, I’ve heard that IT won’t accept transfers from CS anymore due
to too many CSer’s switching. The quarter system is very fast paced and many, if not most of us at RIT
like it. We have to work hard at class, and often have little time for other activities. However, it does have
its advantages. If we have a class or professor we don’t like, we only have to wait 10 weeks and we’re out.
With the current system there are more classes that are taken in order to cover as much material as possible
and the quarter system lends itself to the “fast paced world” we will soon enter. It also provides a flexible
co-op schedule, which allows us to bounce in and out of school to get a little job experience. I feel that a
semester system doesn’t lend itself to co-op. 4-5 months is a long time to be out of school and which will
ultimately delay graduation more. I hardly see how the retention rate will improve by lengthening to
semesters. To raise the retention rate, RIT needs to raise its bar for letting students in. It is just too easy to
get into RIT in fact I’ve really never heard of anyone being rejected. Too large of an acceptance rate leads
too many problems past retention - housing is one that first comes to mind and students know for a fact that
problem is growing exponentially each year. RIT needs to raise its standards for acceptance along with
slowing its growth rate.

4th Year Biomedical Computing student

I cannot say that RIT’s quarter system is a better solution to the long semester schedule of most other
colleges, however I have become very accustomed to the short turnover of classes. There are advantages
and disadvantages to the 10-week system. Students do not get stuck in a half-year class that they cannot get
out of. There is also less chance of the class losing focus and students falling behind because of it. Yet the
short quarters put more pressure on RIT students and breaks are few and far between. I’m sure there will
be many arguments for and against this proposal, as there are many reasons to go with both. On the other
hand, if the student retention at RIT is the first priority, then maybe you should be considering other ways
to give students a reason to stay, despite the amount of pressure put on them due to the quarter system.
Switching to a semester system would be a long and expensive task. So why not use those resources and
funds to add to the campus and the social lives of students on it? Perhaps these are the issues we all should
be considering instead of drastically changing the school schedule in hopes of generating a better turn out.

4th Year Information Tech student