Colleagues:

I write today to provide you with additional information about our conversion to a semester calendar.

In his letter to the campus, President Destler outlined the key boundary conditions surrounding this conversion. As we now begin to organize and plan for rolling out the semester calendar, there are some very important guiding principles and planning assumptions that must inform our work within Academic Affairs from the onset. In addition, there are still questions that remain, which we will answer through collective problem solving, collaborative decision-making and shared governance. I’d like to use this communication to begin to address strategic guiding principles, planning assumptions, and process considerations.

**Guiding Principles:** These principles include the parameters set forth in President Destler's letter to the RIT community:

* Student Pledge: Our conversion “products” (curriculum, courses, calendar, student information system, etc.) must respect and adhere to RIT’s pledge to students that there will be no loss of academic progress; no delay in time-to-degree completion/graduation; and no increased costs for degree completion under the semester system.

* Calendar Model: The semester calendar will contain a 15-week fall and spring semester; a 3-week January intercession; and a 10-week summer session. The complete semester dates are appended at the end of this message.

* Course Credit/Scheduling Mode: We will adopt a 5x3 dominant mode for course structure and scheduling. This means that most courses will be 3 credit hours.

* Full Implementation Date: We will go live with semesters for the entering class of 2013. As President Destler indicated, given the complexity of this process, we will consistently be monitoring our progress against benchmark dates.

**Planning Assumptions:** The following assumptions will help further guide our planning process for the conversion period:

* Curricula and Course Development: The semester conversion affords us with a unique opportunity to examine our current academic program portfolio and our course offerings.
We will rethink our programs and our curricula with an eye to re-visioning and redesigning them so they reflect best curriculum practices and pedagogy and be sure that they support strategic objectives related to student success and learning outcomes, career orientation, and our general education principles as well as student opportunities for innovation, creativity, research and global awareness. These objectives will be included in a to-be-developed RIT Academic Program Profile.
* Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Credit Hours and Standard Credit Load per Semester: The total number of semester hours to graduate must be proportionally equivalent to the current number of quarter hours to graduate. As a result, it is expected that our undergraduate programs will require between 120 and 128 semester credit hours to graduate. Full-time undergraduate students, as a general rule, will take a minimum of 15 credit hours a semester in order to complete their degree in 4 years. Masters level graduate programs will require between 30 and 36 semester credit hours to complete while other graduate degrees such as the Ph.D. programs may require as much as 48 semester credit hours in coursework. The conversion will be an opportunity for programs to consider reductions in the minimum number of hours to graduate when current quarter hour requirements exceed these new semester hour guidelines.
* Course Scheduling: In order to efficiently utilize facilities and meet the needs of the market, we will use a uniform weekly schedule that utilizes Monday through Friday for class scheduling as follows:
  • MWF for 50 minutes starting on the hour
  • T, Th for 75 minutes
As is to be expected, there will be a limited number of exceptions to this general scheduling format. Finally, we will continue the RIT tradition of providing a weekly activity period so that our faculty and students will be able to informally interact for projects, research, and meetings.
* Teaching Loads: We expect that after conversion, most tenured and tenure-track faculty will see a reduction in the number of courses they teach in a given year. To realize this reduction, however, it will be necessary for the faculty to redesign the programs so that the curriculum can be taught within the current staffing levels. In general:
  • Tenured or tenure-track faculty will typically teach 4-7 courses a year, but there will be exceptions.
  • Lecturers will typically teach 8-10 courses a year, depending on service assignments within the department.
For example, we recently announced that tenure-track faculty members at RIT are teaching, on average, 24 quarter credit hours or approximately 6 courses in the quarter system annually. Under a semester system, assuming the curriculum is thoughtfully designed, tenure-track faculty
members would teach 16 semester credit hours or approximately five 3-credit hour classes over the course of the academic year. It remains our objective to balance loads with our expectations on scholarship appropriately; we feel that this conversion will assist in this effort.

* Faculty Contracts: The length of the current faculty contract will remain at 9.5 months.
* Cost Neutrality: This conversion assumes that colleges and departments will create a course scheduling plan whereby annual sections offered matches the available staffing and maintains the instructional capacity to handle the student enrollment in various program components. This will require the colleges and departments to make choices with respect to the frequency of course offerings, the balance between the number of required and elective courses, section size and faculty workload. The final program description will include a certification by the department that the current staffing can cover instruction.
* Academic Advising: Effective and accessible academic advising will be critical to accomplishing a smooth transition for students. Each student will work with an advisor to develop an individual transition plan in the AY 2012-2013; this plan will insure that the RIT Pledge to Students is upheld.
* General Education Reform: It is vital that we complete our Core (General) Education reform at the very early stage of this conversion. Consequently, we will need to expedite the development and approval of a new General Education framework. This framework will provide the basis for general education course development and approval in the semester system. This needs to be in place in order for the academic programs to plan appropriately in the program redesign process. Considerable work has already occurred and with the establishment of our new General Education Committee we can move forward quickly to make this a top priority. As a result, it is my expectation that we will have this framework approved by Academic Senate no later than November 2010.
* Writing Across the Curriculum: The Institute Writing Committee has proposed a new curriculum structure for writing across the curriculum, which builds on the recommendations from the Greater Expectations team. It is my expectation that, once these recommendations are vetted and approved, we will incorporate these recommendations in both our general education curriculum framework and academic program redesign.
* First Year Experience: Given the new credit hour ranges for undergraduate programs described above, and the strong recommendations from the Greater Expectations team, Vice President Cooper and I propose that FYE be redesigned in order to become a required 3 credit hour general education course offered in the fall to all first year RIT students. Development of the course will require deliberations with our college faculty,
collaboration with the Division of Student Affairs, and close articulation with the General
Education Committee.

**Process Considerations:** In the very near future, I will be conferring with the Executive
Committee of Academic Senate, the deans, department chairs and the leadership team within
Academic Affairs about specific aspects of our conversion planning process. I anticipate that we
will establish an ad hoc central conversion structure staffed appropriately, and supported by a
combination of ad hoc committees, existing committees and individuals similar to what was
recommended in the ad hoc Committee on Semester Planning Report (2009). We will also use
the experience of other institutions as we consider the infrastructure needed and assistance
required. It is my expectation that a comprehensive plan for the academic affairs conversion will
be established before the end of this academic year.

There will, of course, be some central steps that need to be built into our plan and associated
timeline. Let me mention just a few:
1. Expedited Academic Program Review: We will develop an expedited program review
   process that will precede department-level program redesign efforts. Among other things, this
   expedited process will provide critical enrollment, marketability and financial data to colleges
   and require that analysis be conducted to determine whether existing programs should be
   transitioned to semesters (with or without substantive modifications), rolled into another existing
   program, or phased out.
2. New RIT Academic Program Profile: As programs undergo redesign, it will be vital to
   understand the characteristics of an academic RIT program to fit our portfolio. To that end, we
   will soon establish a collaborative process of identifying these characteristics so that faculty can
   redesign their programs with this profile in mind.
3. Moratorium on New Program Development: It will be necessary to place a moratorium on
   all new programs until academic year 2013-2014. Any program currently in the final approval
   stages will be exempted from this moratorium. This action is taken for two reasons. First, we will
   need to have a stringent focus on the redesign of our existing programs. Second, we want to
   make sure that the New York State Department of Education, which must approve any of our
   programs that have substantive change, will have ample time to focus on our conversion process.
4. Articulated Faculty Governance Processes: We need to prepare a blueprint that outlines
   how we will follow our current faculty governance processes. This becomes particularly critical
   for the curriculum process and for needed policy revisions due to the calendar conversion. As
   part of this conversion, we are expecting the New York State Department of Education to
   approve any programs that have had substantive change. As a result, we will likely need both an
expedited review as well as additional academic committees to participate in the approval process.

5. Preparation of Middle States Periodic Review Report: Our MSCHE Periodic Review Process and Report is scheduled to begin September 2011 and conclude in submission of the report to MSCHE on June 1, 2012. This process requires university-wide involvement and culminates in the submission of information and specific data prescribed by Middle States. A key focus of our periodic review will center on student learning outcomes assessment processes and results at the program level and within General Education.

6. Resource Considerations: It is recognized that there will be one-time costs for the conversion of the curriculum, student information system and student advising needs. We will, as part of the conversion plan, allocate and distribute resources so that the work and tasks can be completed without compromising our values and the quality of our educational programming.

7. Faculty and Staff Pledge: While our pledge to students must be our top priority in this conversion process, we also understand that it will be our faculty and staff who will insure that this pledge is upheld. The conversion will take a significant amount of work and will require decision making that is expeditious, fair, and respects shared governance. Our pledge is to provide our faculty and staff with superior communication, extensive collaboration with the governance groups, and fair and equitable workload allocations.

In closing, we all realize that an undertaking of this proportion will require the cooperation of everyone and will touch every corner of the University. We have had an ambitious agenda within Academic Affairs over the past 18 months and are making phenomenal progress. Many of these initiatives, such as our continued focus on student success, must continue. Notwithstanding, I am prepared to postpone some initiatives and slow down others in order for us to have the time and energy to devote to this conversion process.

I look forward to working with you on this transformational work. If you have an interest in participating on some aspect related to the conversion, please let me know. Many hands will make the work lighter! And, of course, if you have particular questions please pass them along. As always, my commitment to you is to be open, honest and supportive. Toward that end, you can expect me to continue sharing important information directly with you. We will also be developing a comprehensive communication plan to ensure effective sharing of this information.

With great respect for the work you do in support of our students,

Jeremy Haefner, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
The 2013-2014 Academic Calendar: Note that the normal academic year for students consists of fall and spring semesters. The winter intersession and the summer periods of instruction are optional for students.

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