



Students compete in the 2008 'Mud Tug' Greek event, which raised money for the national Breast Cancer Education and Awareness organization. The percentage of women students at RIT increased to 33 percent this year, up 1 percent. (Photo by Charles Neumann, second-year biomedical photography major)

# Pulling for women

## RIT strengthens efforts to improve gender balance on campus

Basketball brought Emily Hughes to RIT. The third-year international business and marketing student wasn't initially attracted to the place.



Emily Hughes

active in campus organizations including Student Government.

"The aesthetics," she says, were a turn-off. Too many bricks, too stark, not enough color. But the 6-foot-3-inch basketball player from Fayetteville, N.Y., "felt wanted" and is glad she decided to give RIT a try. Besides athletics, she's been

"Once I learned how amazing this place is, I fell in love with it," says Hughes.

**U** Mary-Beth Cooper, vice president for Student Affairs, isn't surprised to hear Hughes' assessment of RIT's curb appeal. More can be done, although RIT has invested more than \$350 million in campus improvements since 2000, including construction of the Gordon Field House and Activities Center, new apartment complexes and several new academic buildings as well as residence hall renovations and campus beautification projects.

"We've done a lot with the physical plant in the past few years, but we still need some softening, we need some color," she agrees.

However, she and other university leaders know it will take more than decor to increase the percentage of women to 40 percent of first-year students by fall 2012



Mary-Beth Cooper

more than 25 years," Cooper says. "We're working to move that number."

— a goal articulated by the RIT Commission on Women and endorsed by President Bill Destler. In the U.S., slightly more than half of students entering college this fall were women.

"We've been consistently at 30-32 percent women for

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A century ago, when RIT was known as Rochester Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute, women students outnumbered men.

"There were women enrolled in Mechanics Institute's very first class – mechanical drawing – in 1885," says RIT Archivist Becky Simmons.

In fact, the university's history is studded with milestones for women.

- Rochester businessman Henry Lomb, one of the founders and first president of Mechanics Institute, championed practical education for women.

- In 1892, Betsy Andrews, wife of Trustee Ezra Andrews, helped found the Domestic Science Department. The department attracted 120 students during its first term.



Betsy Andrews

- Mrs. Andrews became the first woman trustee in 1893.

- By the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the two-year domestic science programs included chemistry, physics, physiology and hygiene – courses that became the foundation of the College of Science.

- During World War II, women students were recruited for programs including machine shop, drafting, inspection and management.

- Edwina Hogadone, named first dean of RIT's College of Business in 1960, was the first woman to serve as dean of any business school in the nation.

- In 1998, the Kate Gleason College of Engineering became the first engineering school in the country named for a woman. Kate Gleason (1865-1933), an engineering and business pioneer, was a member of a Rochester family that has been associated with RIT since the late 1800s.

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Tiffani Williams, a student ambassador for RIT's Office of Undergraduate Admissions, is among the first people to welcome families to campus. The conversation often turns to the male-female ratio.

"Usually I tell them that it really isn't as noticeable as you would think," says the fourth-year graphic media major. "Also, the ratio at RIT reflects the ratio in most technical industries, so working alongside mostly males is simply a taste of what's to come. And sometimes I jokingly mention that even though the numbers sound overwhelming, think of the great odds!"



During World War II, RIT recruited women to learn skills needed "to man the victory machines of industry."



Tiffani Williams

All kidding aside, Williams believes that RIT is an increasingly great place for female students.

"RIT gives us a chance to excel in some traditionally male-dominated fields," she says. "It also encourages and nurtures our interest in technology rather than attempting to steer us in other directions. There's a multitude of outlets and support for us on campus, and there always seems to be a lot of strong female figures to look to for models of success."

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RIT is making deliberate efforts to ensure that Williams' upbeat viewpoint becomes the standard perception.

In 2004, former president Albert Simone formed the President's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women to look into issues related to recruitment and retention. Last year, President Bill Destler continued the group under a new name, the RIT Commission on Women. In July, the group presented two pages of recommendations centered on two areas: institutional transformation and curricular-related initiatives.

The commission recommends consideration of new academic options and programs aimed at increasing the numbers of women students. For example, biomedical engineering has been suggested, and a program in journalism was launched this fall. In addition, the recommendations call

for creation of a university-based exploration/general studies program that guarantees transition into degree programs.

"We know from PSAT data that a staggering number of high school juniors – men and women – don't know what they want to do," says Vice President Cooper. "We need to provide more opportunities for students to explore."

Recommendations related to "institutional transformation" include recruiting and supporting excellent female faculty; encouraging gender diversity in special events such as guest lectures as well as in student organizations and publications; recognizing people who champion gender diversity; and fostering traditions for women.

"We need to be very intentional about having women represented in what we do," says Cooper. "We have to be very conscious about our efforts. If we stop moving, we lose ground."

As for traditions, RIT's Women's Center has created several events recognizing women. Lighting the Way, which takes place during orientation week, is an annual ceremony begun in 2006 in which the light of knowledge is symbolically passed on to first-year women.

The annual spring Women's Career Achievement Dinner, sponsored by the Women's Center, RIT Leadership Institute, and the Office of Alumni Relations, honors invited alumnae from RIT's eight colleges and women students at RIT.

"RIT is really recognizing that we want more women here," says Donna Rubin, director of the Women's Center. "It's wonderful to see the response."

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The Women's Center opened in 1999, but dating to the mid-1980s or earlier, there were women faculty and staff who got together to advocate on behalf of women.

"The culture was waking up," says Rubin. "Women's Centers began popping up on college campuses in the 1970s in response to the women's movement. At RIT, with the high percentage of men, it took a little longer."



Donna Rubin

Today, the Women's Center provides services such as Campus Advocacy Response and Support (CARES), an anti-violence

program, and Gender Communication and Respect, which is presented as part of the First Year Experience program.

"We're not implying that all women need support," says Rubin. "But we're here for anyone who needs us – men or women."

"We want to help people develop interpersonal skills and have a good understanding of civility and respect. When you make an environment that benefits women, it benefits everyone."

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In fact, most women students at RIT don't seek out help in dealing with gender issues. Cooper says that the majority of RIT's women students – even those in programs where they are vastly outnumbered – cope extremely well.

Melissa Muscato '98 (civil engineering technology) was the only woman student in most of her classes.



Melissa Muscato '98

Even so, Muscato, who came to RIT after graduating from Alfred (N.Y.) State College of Technology, found the atmosphere supportive, even nurturing.

"I never wanted to be treated differently, to be thought of as a minority or play 'the sex card,'" Muscato says. "I was a member of SWE (Society of Women Engineers), but I didn't feel I needed a support group and I don't highlight it on my resume. I know that some companies don't want you focusing on that."

After graduation, Muscato went to work for the engineering and architecture firm Whitney, Bailey, Cox and Magnani out of

## Where the women are

The overall percentage of women, holding at 30-32 percent for more than 25 years, increased to 33 percent this year. The ratio varies from college to college and some of RIT's 200-plus academic programs attract a majority of women.

Here's the percentage of women by college:

College of Imaging Arts and Sciences: 56 percent

College of Liberal Arts: 54 percent

National Technical Institute for the Deaf: 51 percent

College of Science: 48 percent

Saunders College of Business: 41 percent

College of Applied Science and Technology: 29 percent (not counting the college's programs in Croatia and Kosovo)

Kate Gleason College of Engineering: 15 percent

Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences: 10 percent

Towson, Md. She left to pursue an engineering position with Clark Patterson Lee's Atlanta office and has since relocated to their Charlotte, N.C., office.

"Real life is no different than the college experience – this is a male-dominated field," she says. "Out on the project site, some contractors don't like getting direction from a female engineer. That's where it can get uncomfortable."

"One thing I learned from Professor (Maureen) Valentine is confidence. If you have done your homework and know what you are speaking about, you can handle any situation."

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When Stephanie Walker came to NTID's summer Explore Your Future program, it was the first time she had been in the company of many deaf/hard-of-hearing people.



Stephanie Walker

"At home, I was always the only one," says the fourth-year industrial and systems engineering major from Lake Charles, La. "After that camp, I decided this is the place I wanted to go. I absolutely loved it."

Being hard of hearing and a woman have posed no particular obstacles: Walker has been a resident assistant (RA) and an orientation assistant and has a student job in the Center for Religious Life. She is a member of the student chapters of the Society of Women Engineers and the Institute for Industrial Engineers and plays intramural volleyball. She's completed three of five co-ops.

Sure, there are times when male students can be irksome. But, she says, "The guys don't bug me. After freshman year, you get used to what they do."

She adds, "I've made good friends, and friends really help you through."

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RIT fosters a sense of community, Britta MacIntosh '89 (mechanical engineering) believes.

"Learning to be an engineer is very challenging, but I always felt I had a strong support structure around me," says MacIntosh, vice president of business development for NORESKO LLC, a major international energy services company, in Westborough, Mass.

"I felt the school was trying to make women feel welcome. I certainly didn't feel lonely or intimidated, and I never felt excluded from any opportunity based on gender."



Britta MacIntosh '89

Her background no doubt helped: MacIntosh attended a science and technology high school and she was a volunteer fire fighter before and during college.

On recent visits, she has noticed changes that make RIT more appealing to women. For instance, there are many more gathering spaces, and "women like to work in groups."

Subtle changes are adding up to a noticeable difference, she says.

"It's exciting to see so many more women."

Kathy Lindsley

# Reaching out to future engineers



RIT's Women in Engineering hosted a summer camp for middle school girls in July. Here, girls test the bowling game they created from recycled materials.

RIT is striving to encourage the movement of women into science and engineering while also creating a stronger environment for women engineers at RIT.

The effort has included initiatives such as the creation of a student section of the Society of Women Engineers, which now has more than 40 members from the Kate Gleason College of Engineering, the College of Applied Science and Technology and the Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences.

In addition, the Kate Gleason College of Engineering has taken the lead in development of the Women in Engineering program, or WE@RIT, which includes an outreach effort seeking to promote enthusiasm and understanding of engineering concepts among elementary and secondary students and teachers.

"The college made the decision in the late 1990s that we wanted to improve our own ability to recruit and retain high quality women engineers while also serving as a model for additional colleges and universities," says Margaret Anderson, assistant dean for student services in the Kate Gleason College of Engineering and adviser to the Society of Women Engineers student section.

With financial support from the Gleason Foundation, the college created the Kate Gleason Endowed Chair. "In recruiting a person to fill the position, we made the decision to seek out a person with a strong interest in gender equity in engineering as a means of taking our efforts in the area to the next level," says Harvey Palmer, dean of the Kate Gleason College of Engineering.

Margaret Bailey, an associate professor at the United States Military Academy who had been highly involved in enhancing the climate for female cadets, was selected to serve as the first Kate Gleason Endowed Chair and worked to launch WE@RIT in 2003.

"WE@RIT is a two-pronged effort that seeks to both enhance understanding of engineering concepts among elementary and high school girls while also improving the social and educational envi-

ronment for women engineering students currently enrolled in the college," says Bailey, who also serves as an associate professor of mechanical engineering and the executive director of WE@RIT.

The program offers educational and social activities, volunteer and co-op opportunities for RIT students, plus numerous on and off campus events and camps throughout the year for girls in grades K through 12. In addition, it works to assist elementary and high school teachers in enhancing engineering and science education. It also enlists RIT engineering students to assist in classroom activities and serve as mentors through the Traveling Engineering Activity Kit program.

Presently, WE@RIT reaches more than 2,300 students and educators annually and has received national recognition, winning the 2008 Women in Engineering Program Award from the Women in Engineering Proactive Network (WEPAN). In addition, Bailey received the 2008 Maria Mitchell Women in Science Award for her work in creating the program.

"It is our hope that the continued efforts of WE@RIT and the Kate Gleason College of Engineering as a whole will ultimately enhance the overall number of women and minorities going into science and engineering fields and allow these disciplines to more directly mirror the national population as a whole," says Bailey.



Margaret Bailey

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