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RIT prepares a bold vision for the future

(September 14, 2004) — Rochester Institute of Technology president Albert Simone doesn't lack for ambition for his excellent school, and hasn't since he arrived in the early 1990s.

His drive and enthusiasm have enhanced RIT's academic standing and notably improved the attractiveness of the Henrietta campus. The unveiling last week of a new field house exemplified the school's efforts to create a first-class, well-rounded university environment. Doing so combats the image of the engineering school as an all-work, no-play proving ground for math and science whizzes, most of them white and male.

Simone has been notably successful in bringing ethnic and racial diversity to the faculty. In 2002, 26 of about 80 new faculty hires were either African American, Latino or Native American. Now, as the university plans for the next 10 years, Simone, his staff and his board are testing a lot of the conventions that for too long have characterized top-shelf engineering schools.

One of Simone's goals is to bring more women onto campus, to challenge the notion of the engineering sciences as a male domain.

For that, RIT is studying how and why girls veer away from math and sciences in their early school years.

As the school plans for the future, it's important to gauge students' feelings and ideas. One of RIT's problems is retention of students. Its rate is well below that of the elite schools.

If the school divided the year into semesters rather than quarters, as is now the model, there might be less stress on students. A student survey done several years ago supported the quarter system. It's time to ask the question again.

RIT's ambitions are good for the school and for this community. When they reach high, others are made to look skyward, too.



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