A message from Provost Jeremy Haefner

Colleagues,

It seems like it was just yesterday when we were celebrating the graduating class of 2010. At the time, we were thinking that the summer was young and that we had a lot of time ahead to relax and recharge for the 2010 – 2011 academic year. But the summer is almost over and, in a mere two weeks, we will be kicking off the next academic year, which I submit will be exhilarating.

Over the summer, the various calendar conversion committees have been busy strategizing procedures and activities while fielding numerous questions. The ICC and Grad Council spent a great deal of time creating their respective program review schedules; the first graduate and undergraduate programs will go up for Grad Council and ICC review in early October. Also, the Gen Ed Committee published an initial draft of the General Education Framework. None of this would have been possible without frank, often lengthy, and always professional conversations, and I am quite thankful to all who have taken part of the summer to work on these matters.

Today I write to you about two issues that seem to be high on everybody’s minds: 1) The undergraduate 16-credit hour limit per semester and 2) The opportunities that the program conversion presents us.

Maximum credit hours per semester

The Program Framework we published in early June states that the typical undergraduate semester credit load would be 15 or 16 credits. That guideline is based on the assumption that a typical undergraduate student at RIT would take either five 3-credit courses or four 3-credit courses and at most one 4-credit course each semester.

Through the summer, the Calendar Conversion Office heard many concerns about the 16 SCH limit. These concerns are focused on two factors: first, many basic science course sequences may require 4 credits per course each, and second, many of our programs need two science course sequences. For example, a program that requires two science sequences (e.g., calculus and biology) during the freshman year, could accommodate two 4-credit plus two 3-credit courses in the Fall and Spring semesters of the first year without exceeding the maximum credit load of 16 credit hours per semester. However, adding another 3-credit hour course to either semester (to fill out a 5 course load) would bump the credit load to 17 credits.

The Calendar Conversion Process Committee recommended that the Program Framework be revised to reaffirm our conviction that the 5 x 3 model is the best for RIT and to encourage programs to follow this model to the degree possible. However, given specific program needs as illustrated above, the committee also recommended that the maximum undergraduate credit load per semester be changed from 16 to 17 and exceptions to this upper limit be handled on a case by case basis. After discussing this with Fernando Naveda, Director of Calendar Conversion, and Chandra McKenzie, Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs, we agreed to accept this recommendation and allow programs to have an occasional maximum load of 17 credit hours. Further, exceptions to this maximum of 17 credit hour load will be granted only through a stringent review and approval.
process as articulated in the Program Framework. In addition I remain concerned about first year retention and
so I insist that programs require no more than 17 credits in any of the two semesters of the freshman year;
exceptions to this rule will be few and programs will have to document a compelling case in order to seek
Provost approval.

Opportunities of the calendar conversion

The calendar conversion is an excellent occasion we have to capitalize on all that we have learned over the
years about our fields, pedagogy, technology and student learning, and allows to re-think programs from the
ground up. I want to encourage you to think about the calendar conversion as an event that presents us all not
only with many challenges but also with many opportunities. Two opportunities come to mind:

1. **Reduced portfolio of courses.** As stated in the Program Framework document, we expect that the active
   inventory of program electives and general education course electives will be reduced by approximately 1/3.
   This reduction translates into fewer courses that must be taught over the academic year, which means less load
   for faculty overall, assuming the curriculum is thoughtfully designed and delivered

2. **Greater use of technology.** Today, more so than at any other time in RIT’s history, we have at our hand
   technologies that can help us deliver our courses more effectively and more efficiently. Many universities
   today are taking advantage of the same technologies we have available at RIT to deliver courses online and in
   blended format. Students are craving more online content, especially course assessment (grades) information.
   Online course offerings allow faculty to interact with students from sites away from RIT, often asynchronously.
   This may translate into greater opportunity to interact with fellow faculty and students on scholarship and
   research during the more active business hours.

While it may not be possible for a department to award its entire faculty reduced teaching loads at the same
time, the savings in courses taught may provide department chairs and program coordinators with added
flexibility to incentivize and reward faculty with time out of the classroom to engage in research and scholarly
activities.

Being able to re-think our programs from the ground up is an opportunity we cannot afford to overlook.
Students today come to college with a wealth of knowledge and skills that were not present when many of our
programs were first created. While our programs have evolved over time by adjusting to newer technologies
and profiles of our students, we have not had the opportunity to think about our programs from a fresh
perspective. That opportunity is here now. Let’s seize this moment and construct programs that will challenge
our students, earn the respect of employers and graduate schools, and catapult the reputation of RIT even
higher.

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