RIT Intersession Considerations
From the Student Affairs Perspective

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I. INTRODUCTION

As RIT moves closer to AY2013 and we engage in planning for semesters, a number of questions continue to surface from people working within the diverse programs of Student Affairs. This division has a great deal of interest in the opportunities that the intersession offers for our students. Having read the report of the Intersession Sub-Committee, we welcome the possibilities of engaging our students in innovative learning experiences. We submit this document to you with the hope that more definitive operational information about student involvement during the intersession will be forthcoming that will enable us to plan student-responsive and engaging programs and services that enhance the academic experiences that will be offered.

During the past year, the Division of Student Affairs has been actively developing a new strategic plan that will carry us through 2015. The vision for this plan is bold: Student Affairs will lead RIT in developing the nation’s most engaged campus community. Aligned with this vision, most of the objectives for our centers revolve around the concepts of student success and engagement. During divisional planning meetings and retreats, the intersession has emerged as a time that holds great possibilities for implementing some strategies to achieve our goals and objectives. Many creative and collaborative ideas have arisen out of our shared vision, and we are eager to pursue their development. However, we find that we return to some common concerns and questions that remain unanswered and are identified below.

II. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

With engagement of students, staff, and faculty as our divisional strategic plan vision, we noted with great interest that the Intersession Report suggests a model that edges toward an inventive character that is driven by student, faculty and staff participation capable of transforming the campus environment in educationally “bold, imaginative and different” ways. How to accomplish this is a complex question…and Student Affairs has begun to explore some innovative, out-of-the-box ideas that could be developed (discussed in Part III below). Intersession needs to be highly attractive for students and well-promoted. In order for our division to fully plan these types of experiences, further definition/understanding is needed about some critical areas that enable student engagement during intersession such as financial aid, student enrollment numbers, and housing and dining services.

III. OPTIONS FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

Intersession is a prime opportunity for divisional collaboration, especially between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. Multidisciplinary experiences, retention programs, global and cultural activities are all well within the realm of possibility for these three weeks in January. The combination of curricular, disciplinary knowledge enhanced with an extra-curricular experiential twist could create powerful educational opportunities for students. Some examples of the many “inventive” experiences that our division has found intriguing include:

- Partnership between the Leadership Institute, EPSCOB, CASH (community organization Creating Assets, Savings & Hope), CARE (Credit Abuse Resistance Education, community organization), and our local Judge Ninno to create a Financial Literacy series for students. It could be for all students or geared toward high risk, low income students.
- Wellness could partner with the Exercise Science Program, Student Health Center, Counseling Center, Study Abroad, Leadership Institute and Community Service Center, and other related areas to recruit more wellness coaches and/or offer a variety of community service opportunities focused on healthy lifestyles for students.
- Social Activism and Change in Action: Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass
  The Center for Women and Gender would collaborate with interested faculty to offer an interactive, educational experience which provides an opportunity for students to learn about two important social justice pioneers. Students would attend various tours, lectures, film viewings and off-campus events. By the end of the experience, students would have visited sites such as the Susan B. Anthony House, the Women’s Rights Historical Park in Seneca Falls, and the burial place of Anthony and Douglass.
• Collaboration between Residence Life, International Student Services, Study Abroad, FYE/ASC and interested faculty to sponsor/coordinate a short trip to Canada or another country during the January intersession. The FYE/ASC connection could be in support of a class assignment/requirement for the Discovery and/or Pathways component of the program. Decisions about the specific country to visit would need to be made by late summer to enable staff and students to secure passports and other organizational necessities. A series of meetings would be held through the semester to market/promote the opportunity and to research the country to be visited and outline expectations. Attempts will be made to align the visit with a university/college of the country. Potentially, lodging and meals could be secured on campuses in the chosen country and residence life/student housing colleagues would be approached for assistance.

• Work with Admissions and develop a cohort of RIT students, faculty and staff to serve as ambassadors to assist with high school recruitment visits. These ambassadors may want to work with their own high schools and might also be able to assist the K-12 program and participate in local high school visits.

IV. AVAILABLE SERVICES

A number of services need to be available for students during intersession, some from units within Student Affairs and many provided by other units. In the spirit of creating an “irresistible” intersession model, the following are some observations, concerns and questions that have arisen within our division:

• Appropriate and attractive housing and dining options need to be available.
  o The current plan that provides intersession housing only at the RIT Inn will not be enticing to many students. This location keeps them at a distance from the activities on campus. Additionally, most residence hall students would prefer to stay in their regular campus housing assignments rather than have to move some or all of their belongings.
  o If students are enrolled in classes and other activities on campus during this winter session, they will need dining plans that are convenient and provide a number of options. It would also be an excellent time to provide something “different”---an opportunity to pilot some new ways of providing food service.
  o Will students be required to pay an additional fee for housing and dining during this time? Is there a way to fold costs into one or both semesters so additional fees may not need to be charged?

• During intersession, services provided by a variety of offices beyond housing and dining need to be available for students.
  o Academic support for students enrolled in classes, including services provided by the Disabilities Service Office, Academic Support Center, Writing Center, Bates & other study centers, tutoring...
  o For all students, even those not attending classes or living on campus: Student Life Center, Counseling Center, Student Health Center, Public Safety, Student Conduct...

• Fees for services that are available during intersession need to be determined. Who will be charged?
  o Only students enrolled in classes?
  o All students living on campus?
  o All students across the board?
  o Only those who use the services during intersession?

• The majority of our students receive some type of financial aid in order to afford their RIT education. The current understanding is that financial aid will not be available during intersession.
  o Without financial aid, will we be able to attract students to our courses and programs during intersession?
  o Are there any other means by which we can provide incentives for students to stay? Intersession scholarships? Research “awards”? Student employment opportunities exclusive to intersession?

• Student employees are important to a number of our programs (for example: Margaret’s House, Residence Life, Disabilities Services, Athletics, and Dining Services in the division of Finance and Administration) and will be in demand during intersession.
  o If student employees are required to pay additional fees for room and board, working at RIT may not be cost-effective for them during intersession.
For student-employee-dependent programs, would departments or RIT be able to cover any intersession-related expenses for the students?

- Given that students may not be required to participate in any RIT-sponsored activities but may continue to live on campus during intersession, concern arises about the potential conduct issues during this extended time.
- Student athletes on winter sports teams (approximately 255 athletes from seven different teams) will be on campus for athletic practices and contests during intersession and will need appropriate access to services and support.
  - Which residence halls and dining facilities will be open for them?
  - Will they be required to pay additional fees for the use of the RIT facilities such as the Student Health Center?
  - Will other students be on campus to attend games? Can we continue to attract faculty, staff and alumni attendance during intersession?
- International students present unique concerns during intersession. Many may be able to use this time to make extended visits back home. However, a number may not choose this option for a variety of reasons.
  - Will ELC classes continue during intersession? Will there be enough students to justify offering a variety of courses?
  - With potentially larger admissions of new international students for spring semester (combining the winter and spring quarter intakes), this would be an ideal time to run a larger orientation but would require additional resources for the extra orientation time. These students would need to be on campus during part of intersession.
- Transfer students may increase in number due to the increased ease of transfer provided by semesters.
  - Intersession would provide an ideal time for an enhanced transfer orientation experience.

V. NEXT STEPS

The Intersession Sub-Committee Report recommended the formation of a new committee to develop the specific intersession model for RIT. Given the many concerns and questions that our division alone has generated about the intersession, we strongly support the immediate constitution of this committee and request that Student Affairs be appropriately represented on this body. Additionally, we request that this committee address the following:

- Develop a timeline and process for making decisions and communicating the results to the RIT community.
- Identify a central coordinating person or office that will provide the vital communication, oversight and coordination functions for the many intersession ideas for courses and activities that will be generated across RIT.
- Consider how the intersession will be marketed and promoted to generate maximum enthusiasm, interest and engagement. Intersession should become an innovative promotional highlight for programs and admissions.
- The questions and concerns identified throughout this document need resolution. Additional questions have been posed within Student Affairs and can be found on the next page. Questions will just keep coming. We recommend that the new committee convenes additional collaborative panels, similar to the Student Affairs Leadership Retreat held in June that called together representatives from a variety of RIT offices, to provide the opportunity to ask questions and share information across divisions and offices. Students should also be included as these conversations move forward.

The entire RIT community has a vested interest in the success of the new semester system, and the intersession provides a unique opportunity for us to explore truly innovative ways to enhance the educational experience of our students. It is out of that desire that we in Student Affairs respectfully submit this document for your review.
ADDITIONAL STUDENT AFFAIRS INTERSESSION QUESTIONS/CONCERNS

- How and when will we know who and how many will be on campus during intersession?
- Will intersession be optional for everyone or could it be required for some?
- Will we be able to offer enough credit classes to entice students to stay during intersession?
- Can courses be successfully taught in a 2-3 week time period? How will students be charged and staff/faculty paid?
- How will registration be handled for classes/programs offered during intersession? Drops/adds?
- What other types of activities will be offered, and how will they work? The intersession report refers to some highly creative intersession offerings at some universities.
- Is there a mechanism to consider giving some academic credit for Student Affairs programs that run throughout the intersession?
- Who is eligible for services during the intersession? Would a student be eligible if registered fall semester and not spring semester?
- Will the physical plant be used more efficiently during intersession than it is currently used during summer?
- Can students be allowed to stay in their permanent on-campus living arrangements during the intersession? Will there be a charge?
- Will students be allowed to move back into RIT housing during intersession, the week before spring classes begin?
- How could intersession be used for study abroad experiences?
- What resources can students access for an intersession mini-study abroad experience?
- Are there resources to cover expenses for staff to accompany students on mini-study abroad experiences?
- Are there co-op resources for collaboration on an intersession seminar?
- Will intersession start in the first year of the semester conversion or will it be delayed one or more years?