

# RIT Semester Conversion Report

Respectfully Submitted, November 1, 2009

President's *ad hoc* Committee on Semester Planning

Committee members:

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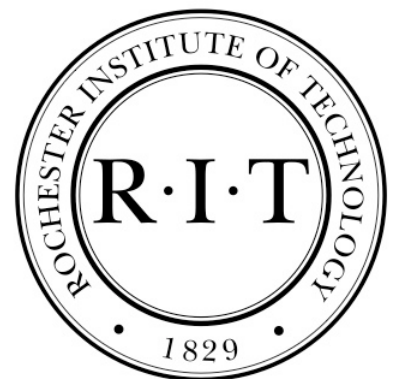
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## Introduction

This report was prepared by the *ad hoc* Committee on Semester Planning. Committee members include Alex Bitterman (CIAS), Tim Engström (COLA), Dan Phillips (KGCOE), Joe Loffredo (Registrar), Kit Mayberry (*ex-officio*), Tom Raco (NTID) and Amit Ray (COLA – Chair). The committee was constituted by President Bill Destler on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009 and given the following charge:

The *ad hoc* Committee on Semester Planning is charged with producing a draft plan for RIT's possible move to a semester-based academic calendar that can serve as the basis for campus discussions during the next academic year. Specifically, the draft plan should include:

1. A proposed calendar for implementing such a change, including milestones to be achieved before final implementation.
2. A recommendation that either the constant-content or constant-format model be used for RIT quarter course conversion to a semester calendar.
3. A proposed formula for converting faculty teaching loads from the current quarter system to the proposed semester system.
4. Proposals for who shall be responsible for curriculum conversion and course revision in each academic program.
5. A proposal for how such a change might be administered across the campus.
6. A list of budgetary issues that will have to be addressed if such a change were to be implemented. A detailed budget for such a change is not required.

The *Ad Hoc* Committee's report should be submitted to the president by Nov. 1, 2009.

The following report addresses these items in the order listed.

## 1. Calendar conversion schedule

The tasks and schedule presented below, which are derived from schedules followed by converted and converting q-2-s (quarter-to-semester) schools, are for illustrative purposes only. The timeline is based upon an April/May 2010 conversion decision by President Destler and a July 2010 approval by the RIT Board of Trustees. The total time allotted to conversion is three academic years plus two months of the summer preceding conversion.

This schedule assumes comprehensive curricular revision and re-structuring.

The major tasks of the calendar conversion process include the following:

- Creation of transitional curriculum
- Revision and approval of general education curriculum
- Revision and approval of academic programs and co-ops
- Development and approval of semester courses
- Revision of transfer curricula and agreements
- Creation and implementation of ongoing communication action plan
- Creation and implementation of advising action plan (graduate, undergraduate, general education, co-op)
- Development of transition guides for all constituencies
- Implementation of new/upgraded SIS
- Conversion of administrative and student services systems to semester calendar

These tasks are represented in the following illustrative schedule:

Preliminary Conversion Tasks: 2009(3) and 2009(4)	
April/May 2010	July/August 2010
<p>President Destler makes semester calendar decision</p>	<p>Trustees approve semester calendar</p> <p>Conversion Director appointed</p> <p>Conversion Office staffed (including Communications staff)</p> <p>University-wide committees named and constituted</p> <p>Academic program/course inventory composed and distributed</p>

College and general education curriculum coordinators appointed

Curriculum approval website developed

Conversion website developed

Communication plan established

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**Conversion Tasks AY 2010–2011**

2010(1) Fall	2010(2) Winter	2010(3) Spring	2010(4) Summer
New course-numbering system developed	Program core curriculum and general education program masks revised and approved		
Curriculum revision/approval policies developed		Program course masks revised and approved (undergraduate and graduate)	
New coop schedule developed			New co-op materials developed
Payment schedule for additional work developed			Advisor training program developed
Program curriculum coordinators appointed			
Faculty Guide for curriculum conversion prepared	New course schedule template developed		
Continuous communication			
Conversion Boundary Conditions developed by Steering Committee		Temporary courses developed, submitted, approved	
Decision made re SIS upgrade vs. purchase			
SIS implementation (either upgrade of legacy systems or implementation of new system)			

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**Conversion Tasks AY 2011–2012**

2011(1) Fall	2011(2) Winter	2011(3) Spring	2011(4) Summer
Semester courses developed and approved		New bulletins, view books, schedules, curriculum and calendar-related publications developed/produced	
Articulation/transfer agreements revised/communicated			
Undergraduate and graduate Academic Advising Action Plans developed			
Student transition guides developed and distributed			
SIS implementation (either upgrade of legacy systems or implementation of new system)			
Continuous communication			

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Conversion Tasks AY 2012-2013

2012(1) Fall	2012(2) Winter	2012(3) Spring	2012(4) Summer
New curriculum and calendar-related publications distributed			
Student Advising			
Policies and procedures revised		Revised policies and procedures printed & distributed	
		Registration for fall semester begins	
SIS implementation			
Continuous communication			

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## 2. Calendar conversion

Conversion from quarters to semesters requires a decision about the method by which a quarter-based curriculum is redesigned into a semester system. This decision in turn defines student course load and faculty teaching load. Ideally, the choice of conversion method is driven by university goals and priorities. A majority of recently converted institutions have capitalized upon the transformative opportunities offered by calendar conversion.

The typical student load at RIT is four 4-credit courses per quarter, 48 credits per 3-quarter year, and (no more than) 192 credits for graduation. On a semester schedule, these figures would be reduced by one-third, as below:

Calendar	Credits per year	Credits per 4 years
Quarter	48	192
Semester	32 (.66x48)	128

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This redistribution of courses and credits can be achieved in one of two ways: 1) converting to five 3-credit courses per semester (5-for-3); or 2) converting to four 4-credit courses per semester (4-for-4).

### 5-for-3 Model=Five courses @ three credits (hence 5-for-3)

In this model, course content remains the same, but because each course is spread over a longer period of time (a 15-16 week semester vs. an 11 week quarter), the number of credits awarded per course is reduced. To graduate in four years with  $\geq 120$  credits, the semester student needs to take at least five 3-credit courses per semester. Using this model, and assuming no hiring of incremental faculty, faculty load converts to three to four 3-credit courses per semester.

This conversion model tends to involve less curricular review and revision than the alternative. It tends, therefore, to provide less opportunity for positive strategic change. Schools that used or plan to use this method include Auburn University, Ohio State, and Ohio University.

### 4-for-4 Model=Four courses @ four credits (hence 4-for-4)

In this semester conversion model, courses retain the same credit-hour value as on the quarter system, but course content is expanded and extended. Moreover, the number of total courses is reduced, and the relationship and/or integration among those courses is reconsidered.

The 4-for-4 model tends to require no change in the typical load of a student: it remains four courses @ 4 credits during each semester, or a one-third annual reduction of the number of courses, while leaving open the question of how content is determined. Likewise, faculty teaching load would typically decrease by one third. See Section 3 below.

Schools that used or plan to use this method include: Georgia Tech, Northeastern, University of Minnesota, University of Tennessee at Knoxville, Michigan State, and California State Fullerton.

### Guiding Principles in deciding between 5-for-3 or 4-for-4 models

Most schools used or plan to use a 4-for-4 model as an opportunity to re-vision, integrate, and strengthen the entire curriculum. This model also permits a desirable adjustment to the typical faculty load, thus enhancing opportunities for research and scholarship. Our inquiries suggest that these are the best reasons for choosing this model.

As RIT moves to improve its overall capacity to create cross-disciplinary and cross-college curricula, and to position itself as a leader in innovation, a calendar change can provide a systemic opportunity for achieving these goals. Compared with the 5-for-3 model, the 4-for-4 model offers sharper academic focus, a reduced teaching load, and the opportunity for curricular reconsideration and revision—all supportive of RIT's strategic goals.

In summary, the 4-for-4 model would, in the view of this committee, provide the better context within which to enhance RIT's curriculum, especially regarding opportunities for review, reinvention, integration, synergy, and collaboration. It would also provide the better opportunity for adjusting teaching loads and, thereby, improving opportunities for research and creative scholarship.

### 3. Faculty teaching loads

Annual teaching loads would, by rule of thumb, be reduced by 1/3 (.667) from the current quarter system. Examples of this conversion include:

Example 1	Annual Teaching Load
Quarter	9 courses (3-3-3)
Semester	6 courses (3-3)

Example 2	Annual Teaching Load
Quarter	6 courses (2-2-2)
Semester	4 courses (2-2)

The semester format would result in 1/3 fewer course preparations, tests, early alert and mid-term student evaluations, and grading cycles for faculty. Also, the university may realize a reduction in the number of adjuncts needed across the colleges over time. Application of this model across lecture, lab, and studio formats may vary within colleges. In general, full time teaching faculty will not be expected to teach more courses in each semester than they are currently assigned quarterly.

### 4. Curriculum conversion and course revision

The basic machinery for these tasks currently exists and is well documented for both undergraduate and graduate level curricula. In short:

- Program and/or department faculty develop new and revise existing courses and programs on a regular basis.
- As required by NYSED and/or approved at the college level (college curriculum committees).

- As required by NYSED and/or RIT policy, these changes are then reviewed and approved at the university level by either the Institute Curriculum Committee or the Graduate Council
- Recommendations for approval of new and revised curricula move to the Academic Senate for discussion and approval and finally to the Provost.
- Upon approval by the Provost, new and revised programs go to the NY State Department of Education for registration.

*Note: There are a variety of accreditation organizations and policies to which any given program may need to be accountable. The timing and schedule of curriculum review by these organizations will vary. This should be anticipated and clearly documented and articulated by the affected programs to the relevant approval bodies.*

Conversion to a semester calendar may precipitate major changes in the current curricula that will require program, department, college and university-level revision, review, and approval. While the volume of curricular review would greatly increase throughout the conversion process, the *process* itself would remain similar—if not identical to—the current curricular review process.

Any comprehensive curricular revision should begin at the core, general education and service course levels, moving out to program requirements.

Because of the volume of curricular revision undertaken during calendar conversion, the assignment of additional personnel for various functions may be necessary. Certainly, each program or each cluster of closely related programs will need a point-person who is responsible for coordinating all program revision work.

At the later stages of review and approval, it may be necessary to expand or duplicate university review committees (ICC and Graduate Council).

Current RIT policies and procedures were devised according to a quarter-based system. Those guidelines will need to be reviewed and modified as necessary to accommodate the conversion to a semester calendar. This effort will be carried out by those individuals, groups and committees normally charged to develop and keep them updated, as well as appropriate governance bodies. If the institute decides to convert, such a review will need to take place immediately.

To facilitate curricular revision, set of guidelines and forms addressing pertinent information, constraints and options must be developed.

## 5. Administering the transition across the campus

The conversion process outlined in this report would be managed out of an *ad hoc* central conversion office staffed as follows:

- Calendar Conversion Director  
High-level administrator dedicated to overseeing the conversion budget, process design, and implementation. In the first year of semester implementation, the director function would continue at a reduced percentage of time.
- Full-time administrative assistant to Director
- Communication Director  
Responsible for the design, implementation, and continuous refinement of communication to all university constituencies and for the oversight of publication revision and production.
- Full-time assistant to Communication Director
- 2–3 student workers

Conversion tasks would be assigned, by category, to a combination of *ad hoc* committees, existing committees, and individuals.

#### Suggested *ad hoc* committees

- Administration Committee
- Advising Committee
- Communications Committee
- Conversion Steering Committee
- Co-op Transition Committee
- Curriculum Revision Website Committee
- Publications Committee
- SIS Committee

#### Existing committees/governance groups

- College Curriculum Committees
- Governance groups (e.g., Academic Senate)
- Graduate Council (could need an additional *ad hoc* Grad. Council)
- ICC (could need an additional *ad hoc* ICC)
- University Policy Review Committee

#### Individuals

- Academic units (departments, programs) will appoint a conversion revision coordinator
- In the event of SIS purchase, we will need to hire contract personnel for system conversion

## 6. Budgetary issues associated with conversion

*Conversion Administration:* Schools with successful conversions often credit their success to a fully staffed conversion office, usually consisting of a full-time executive-level administrator, at least one full-time staff/administrative assistant, and a discretionary conversion budget that rolls over for the duration of the conversion. The conversion director should oversee the entire conversion process and have the authority to make conversion decisions and allocate money from his/her budget for unforeseen conversion expenses. Physical space and equipment needs should also be considered to support the functions of this office.

*Curriculum Revision:* Incremental compensation—in the form of release time and/or summer salary—is commonly available for those faculty and/or chairs responsible for coordinating program revision.

Because of the amount of “new” course and program review and approval, additional *ad hoc* curriculum committees are usually formed. These committees work intensively for approximately three consecutive quarters, and faculty members are usually compensated with one released course.

*Advising:* Some, but not all schools converting to a semester calendar, hire additional temporary advisors. The number of additional advisors required depends upon the current student-advisor ratio, the robustness of a degree audit system, and the organizational talents of the advising task force.

*Communications:* Veterans of successful conversion processes emphasize the importance of constant, consistent, multi-pronged communication regarding the calendar change. To the extent possible, the development and distribution of calendar-related communication should be centralized under one communication professional fully dedicated to the conversion process and widely represented by a communication task force. The communication director and assistant would be housed in the central conversion office and report to the Calendar Conversion Director.

*IT:* Calendar conversion will require the conversion to purchased/vendor-supported student systems or the upgrading of the current SIS. One of the biggest issues faced by schools relying on older student information systems is whether and when to move to a new system. Existing system modification can be expensive, and it is increasingly difficult to find people who can work on legacy systems. Purchasing a new SIS suite is, of course, even more expensive and time-intensive, but overlapping new systems implementation with calendar conversion does offer some synergies and certainly avoids duplication of effort.

*Degree Audit:* The degree audit system will be an essential tool to help manage the transition of current students from the quarter requirements to the semester requirements. Additional staff and vendor consulting support will be necessary to code all the new requirements, to develop the mapping of course equivalencies, and to test

and verify the changes. There will also be a need for advisors in all academic departments to be involved with testing and verification.

*Publications:* Many print publications and forms requiring conversion-driven revision are already regularly revised and reprinted, but there will be additional costs involved in the development of conversion-related publications and the more significant re-setting of templates necessary for representing new curricula, schedules, forms, etc. The latter can be covered by the communication budget.

## Conclusion

It is important to note that the charge of this committee does not involve a recommendation or endorsement of the semester calendar. Rather, the purpose of this report is to establish the concrete particulars of what a transition to semesters at RIT would entail. As this report makes clear, any significant change to an existing calendar presents both challenges and opportunities. It is the hope of this committee that our report establishes an accessible and informative framework for the RIT community to engage in the important discussions and debates ahead of us.

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