AALANA
STUDENT SUCCESS
TIGER TEAM

R·I·T

Final Report & Recommendations
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I. INTRODUCTION

The AALANA Student Success Tiger Team was charged to review RIT's undergraduate AALANA student success and provide recommendations concerning those efforts. Specifically:

1. Collect relevant data from university sources about AALANA student success;
2. Provide an inventory of AALANA student success activities and access effectiveness of these activities as evidenced from data;
3. Perform an external environmental scan of peer institutions vis-a vis AALANA student success;
4. Analyze data collected;
5. Provide report with specific recommendations; this report should include recommended outcomes by which the institution can measure its success and an assessment plan that incorporates a continuous improvement cycle.

To some extent, the Tiger Team and AALANA Student Success Tiger Team Reports illustrate common challenges and parallel each other's work. The AALANA Team is in general agreement and supports the Tiger Team's recommendations. The following report lends focus and strength to AALANA student concerns and issues reflecting a compilation of efforts by a team of RIT faculty and administrators who support and serve AALANA students through academic and student services units.

II. FRAMING THE CHALLENGE

The issues of poor retention and modest graduation rates at RIT have been discussed in the "Framing the Challenge" section of our companion Tiger Team's report. The issues that underline this Tiger Team's report are "Why AALANA?" Is it necessary to have a special focus on AALANA student success or any other subgroup in our student body? What is RIT's definition of AALANA student success? It is difficult to separate the issues of AALANA student success from the broader issues of race, gender, class, culture and equity in the broader society. However, for RIT as an institution of higher education and a community of learners we must acknowledge these realities but not be limited by them. RIT as an institution and community must continually learn and develop in order to make inclusion a reality.

Institutionally, we use the term AALANA to cover a diverse group of approximately 1400 RIT students. The different cultural and ethnic groups that make up our AALANA population have many differences as well as similarities. Approximately a third of this population has GPAs over 3.0. They come from urban,

suburban, and rural communities. They have all come to RIT to succeed. Most students want and all deserve to be treated as individuals.

RIT does not use AALANA as a stereotype. The term is used as a category for focus and analysis. The culture and functioning of RIT may be consistent; however, that culture is experienced and/or perceived as significantly different by various groups. An example is the graduation history of Native American, Latino American and African American students at RIT. The following chart, Figure 1, compares the AALANA graduation rate to the RIT general population.

Figure 1:

Rochester Institute of Technology
Six Year Graduation Rate
First-time Full-time Freshmen Entering in the Fall Quarter (Seven College)
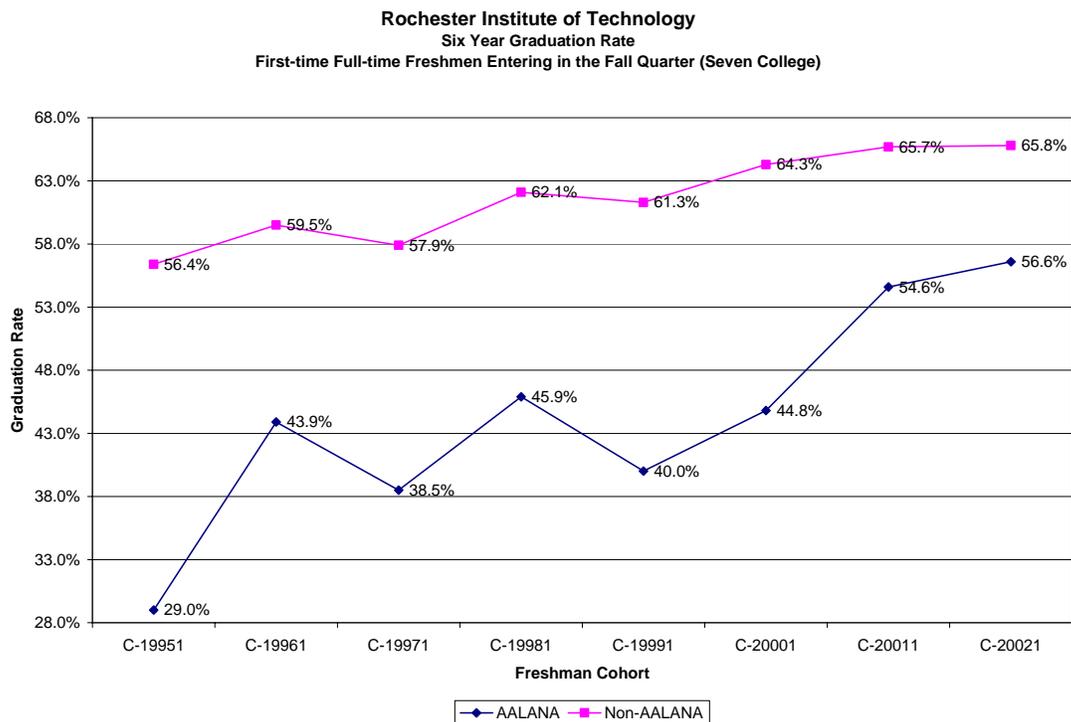
In the not too distant past (1995), RIT had 7 of 10 AALANA students leaving without a degree. During this same period, approximately 1 of 2 RIT students in general, was graduating. Currently, we have 1 of 2 AALANA students obtaining their degree while RIT's general student population has 6 of 10. There has been demonstrable progress over the last decade and a half.

The progress in graduation rates has been accompanied by a noteworthy expansion in the enrollment of AALANA students (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Diversity Enrollment: A critical success factor
(Eastern Europe excluded; EMCS 21-Day Enrollment Report)

	1997	2007	2008	1 Yr. % Change	11 Yr. % Change
African American	539	648	743	15%	38%
Native American	50	55	75	36%	50%
Latino/ Hispanic	327	536	568	6%	74%
Totals	916	1,239	1,386		

RIT has set goals of 93% for the retention of freshmen at the end of their first year and 72% graduation in six years. These goals are to be achieved by the year 2012, three years from now. The students who will make our goal in 2012 are already at RIT. The freshman class of 2007 has already lost 12% of its members. There will need to be some dramatic (16%) improvements in AALANA graduation rates in a relatively short time frame of three years.

93/72 Goal

Creating a framework from which to increase our persistence and graduation rate remains a challenge. The following projections were created from existing metrics to identify the actual number of AALANA students needed to achieve the Institute's persistence and graduation goals (93/72). These projections are designed to create dialogue within the broader context of current realities and future goals.

Persistence:

Our 20071 AALANA entering college cohort (N = 212) persistence rate was 85.8% one-year after entry. In using the AALANA 20071 cohort data, we would have had to retain 197 students to achieve the projected 93% goal. The actual number of students required to meet our retention goal would be an additional 15 from the 20071 cohort. In using the 20081 AALANA entering college cohort data (N = 220) we would have had to retain 205 students to achieve 93% in 2012. In utilizing our most recent AALANA persistence rate (20071 - 85.8%), we would need to retain an additional **16** students to achieve a 93% persistence rate from the 20081 AALANA student cohort.

Insights into persistence can be illuminated by studying retention rates as they relate to class rank with a particular emphasis on academic and non-academic factors which affect student success from pre-freshman through graduation.

Graduation:

20041 AALANA student cohort data (N=153) was utilized to benchmark current and projected graduation rates. Our current AALANA graduation rate is 56.6%; 87 of the original entering cohort (153) successfully completing their studies at the conclusion of year six. An additional 25 students from the 20041 AALANA student cohort would be required in order for us to achieve our targeted 72% graduation rate.

III. THE CURRENT CONDITION

As cited in the Student Success Tiger Team's report - A Campus-Wide Culture of Assessment and Data-Informed Decision Making (Recommendation 14, pg. 32), "*the use of data to inform decision making historically has not been pervasive throughout the RIT campus.*" In general, the lack of programmatic data, consistent assessment practices and corresponding outcomes is absent among most academic support and student service units across the Institute. Thus, AALANA Tiger Team requests for evidence of AALANA student success, usage and effectiveness was difficult to obtain. The Office of Institutional Research and Policy Studies provided the greatest detail with respect to AALANA student's grades, courses and evidence of D, F, and W grades among AALANA students.

a. D, F, W Grades and Student Success

The negative correlation between student success and D, F, W grades in the freshman year has been demonstrated through previous retention reports and cited under *The Current Condition* (pg. 11, Item 7) in the Student Success Tiger Team's report. A review of current data suggests that student success – continuation and completion of their degree program – is much greater when students do not receive a D, F, or W in their first-year of study.

A review of 2005, 2006, 2007 attrition patterns (Figure 3) reveals a greater than 8 - 11% margin when comparing those students who persist and those who leave after receiving a grade of D, F, or W.

Figure 3: Attrition & Grade of D, F, W (all students)

Attrition
Grade of D, F or W in 1st Year vs. no D, F or W (First Time Students)

	2005	2006	2007
■ D, F, W	14.0%	16.2%	14.6%
■ No D, F, W	6.8%	5.1%	4.7%
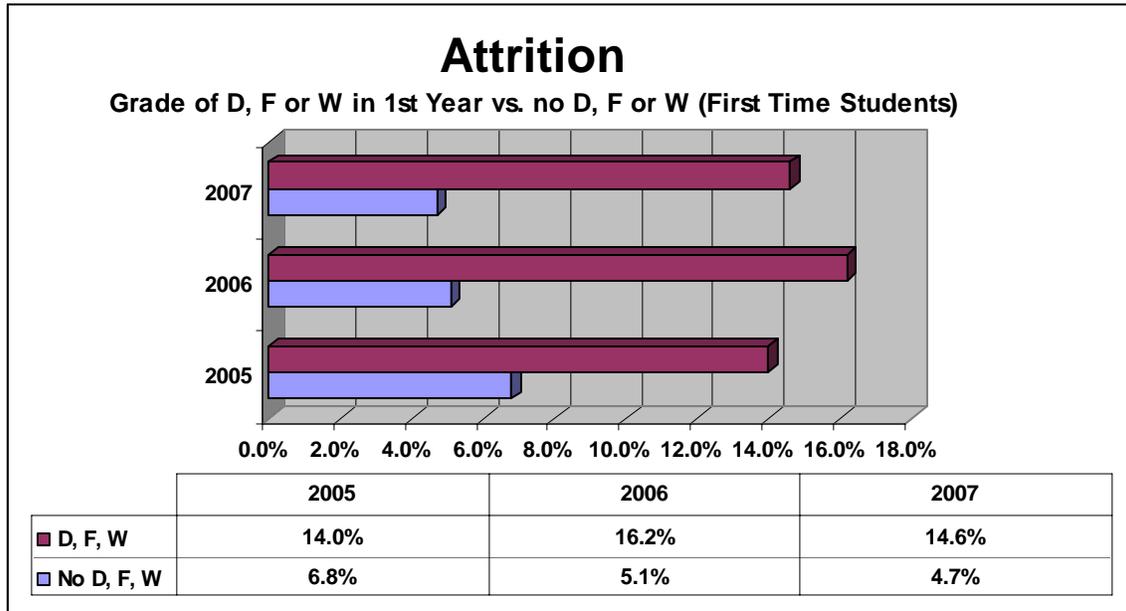
Graduation rates demonstrate similar patterns. Years 2000, 2001, and 2002 were benchmarked at the six year graduation rate. Two patterns emerge upon review. The consistency of data across the three year time span and by designated grade criteria is strong. In addition, the margin of difference between the two groups (those with and without the D, F, or W grade) clusters within .1 and .4 each year. This finding confirms a strong correlation between no D, F, or W in the first-year and graduation.

Figure 4: Graduation & Grade of D, F, W (all students)

Graduation
Grade of D, F or W in 1st Year vs. no D, F or W (First Time Students)

	2000	2001	2002
■ D, F, W	52.6%	52.1%	52.9%
■ No D, F, W	81.2%	81.1%	81.8%
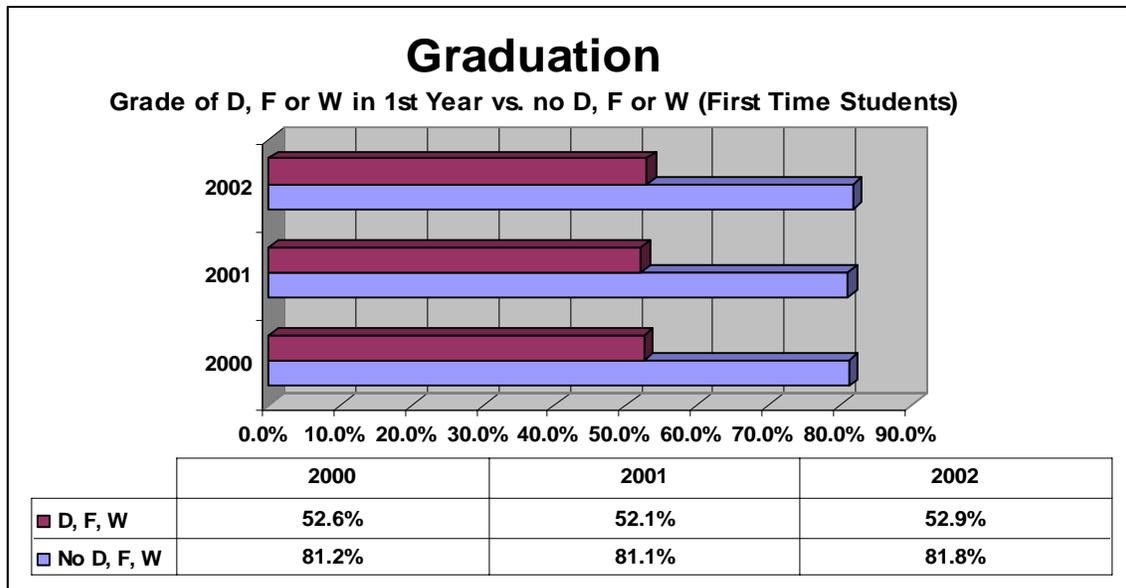
b. AALANA/Non-AALANA D, F, W Grades (first-year), Persistence & Graduation

A three-year comparison of 20051 AALANA and Non-AALANA cohort data
(7 - college freshman) reaffirms a lower persistence and graduation rate among
AALANA students with a D, F, and W grade in the first-year. While cohort
comparisons at the end of year 1 are similar and reflect a decrease by both groups, the
persistence gap widens for AALANA students than those in the Non-AALANA cohort
by the end of year 3.

Figure 5: Persistence % after First Year & Grade of D, F, W

AALANA Cohort		First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Year 1/ Year 3 - % Change
20051	Got D, F, W	82.9	72.7	59.7	- 23.2
	No D, F, W	89.6	85.4	85.4	- 4.2

Non - AALANA Cohort		First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Year 1/ Year 3 - % Change
20051	Got D, F, W	85.2	69.5	62.7	- 22.5
	No D, F, W	94.1	90.5	86.4	- 7.7

Figure 6: Six-Year Graduation % after First Year & Grade of D, F, W

AALANA Cohort		End of Year 3
20021	Got D, F, W	48.1
	No D, F, W	79.6

Non - AALANA Cohort		End of Year 3
20021	Got D, F, W	52.7
	No D, F, W	82.6

Graduation rates produce similar results among the 20021 cohorts.   Analysis of
the AALANA cohort reflects a 31.5% difference in student graduation rates when
comparing those who received a D, F, W grades in the first-year with those who did
not. Non-AALANA students who received a D, F, W grades in the first-year produced
a higher graduation rate (+4.6%) when compared with AALANA students.

Analysis of 2007, 7 – College AALANA/Non-AALANA cohort data
demonstrates a higher frequency rate of D, F, and W grades among RIT's AALANA
students. Figure 7 reveals a 24.45% difference of D/F between the two populations.

Figure 7: 7 - College Cohort AALANA/Non-AALANA D, F, W Comparison

7-College		Student Count						Percent of Total				
Cohort		**#**	**# D's**	**# F's**	**# W's**	**# DF**	**# DFW**	**%D**	**%F**	**%W**	**%DF**	**%DFW**
20071	AALANA	213	125	88	134	145	175	58.69	41.31	62.91	68.08	82.16
	Non-AALANA	2,063	765	474	897	900	1,249	37.08	22.98	43.48	43.63	60.54
	TOTAL	2,276	890	562	1,031	1,045	1,424	39.10	24.69	45.30	45.91	62.57

Please note: Numbers within each column will not equal total # of students as each student may have received more than one type of grade.

The demonstrated patterns of attrition and graduation and D, F, or W grades among all students combined with analysis of disproportionate grades among AALANA students establishes the potentially profound impact of D, F, or W grades within the first year of study and AALANA student success.

c. Winter Quarter, 2008

A review of Winter Quarter, 2008 courses identified 3,992 D, F, I, W records among all RIT students (Data Source – Institutional Research; Withdraw 20082-EOT-al, 3/5/09). These records reflect a total of 2,576 (**all**) students with 1,416 of those students receiving more than one D, F, I, or W grade in multiple courses.

254 AALANA students (10% of **all** students) received a D, F, W grade during the 2008 winter quarter. This constitutes 24% of our total 7-college AALANA enrollment (254/1,039 - Enrollment Figure Data Source – RIT Public, Institutional Research, November 2008). There were a total of 1,658 D, F, W records (constitutes 42% of the total records) among **all** *full-time, first-time students in the freshman cohort* for the winter quarter, 2008. Breakdown by ethnicity reflects:

- African American – 158 records, 90 students; 52 Male; 38 Female
    - ✓ **57%** received multiple D, F, W
- American Indian/AN – 8 records, 4 students; 1 Male, 3 Female
    - ✓ **50%** received multiple D, F, W
- Latino – 88 records, 54 students; 35 Male, 19 Female
    - ✓ **61%** received multiple D, F, W

d. Math and Science Courses

Current data identifies several science and math courses which continue to prove problematic and disruptive to AALANA students throughout their academic studies. The following courses had the highest failure rate among AALANA students (with greater than ten AALANA students enrolled) during the fall 20081quarter: University Physics I (59%) & III (57%), Cell Biology (57%),   College Algebra and Trigonometry (63%), Algebra for Management Science (54%) and Pre-Calculus for Engineering Technology (44%).

The College of Science's Teaching Learning and Student Success Team (TLAST) identified an 82% overall passing rate and 17.9% failure rate for all students taking first-time math courses taken between 2004 - 2007. Further data analysis identified a 77.08% success rate among AALANA students and 22.94% failure rate. This reflects a lower (8%) overall passing rate and a 5% increase in failure rate for AALANA students.

Of the AALANA failure rate, students in the non-stem disciplines produced higher failure rate **(26.84%).**   Year 1 yielded the highest failure rate **(24.88%)**, although rates fluctuated between 20.53 – 24.88 over the five-year span.   Male AALANA students produced greater failure rates (+3.52%) than females. 28% of those who failed math courses did not pass on the first or second retake. 18% did not re-take failed courses. This is an institutional as well as a student failure. Where does the responsibility for intervention lie?

e. Affective Student Development

Students encounter a number of stressors within their first-year collegiate experience.   These stressors have particular ramifications for AALANA students who may lack appropriate support mechanisms or understanding of the academic process.

Some studies have indicated that the predominant causes of attrition in first-year students are non-academic. A study by Pritchard & Wilson (2003) surveyed over 200 undergraduate students regarding emotional and social factors (i.e. stress, frequency of alcohol consumption, etc.). The results indicated that these factors most likely do play a role in attrition. We believe academic and non-academic stressors play a key role in student success.

A comparison of RIT AALANA/Non-AALANA student hold data captured on December 8, 2008 by last term registered (20081) reveals a snapshot of issues facing AALANA students during the first week of winter quarter. Analysis identified 25/220 AALANA students (11%) *appeared to* be academically ineligible (suspension for academic reasons); 34/220 of AALANA students (15%) *appeared to* have financial holds; 7/220 of AALANA students (3%) *appeared to* have a Dean's hold.

This data suggests that on Day 8 of the Winter Quarter, 2008, approximately 29% of our first-year AALANA students were designated as academically ineligible, had a financial hold or hold by the Dean on their record.

A recent analysis of AALANA students who failed to persist between the fall (20081) to winter quarter (20082) was conducted to assess barriers to persistence. Nine individuals were identified. Four were male students, while five were female. Three students resided in state; six out of state. With respect to ethnicity; six were African American, one was American Indian/Alaska Native and two were Hispanic. Four students were suspended based on their academic performance. Three withdrew, two of whom cited health reasons. One student failed to continue their studies based upon financial resources and another student withdrew due to an illness and death in the family.

Heightened emphasis and attention to transition points, linkages with the RIT community, consideration of families as partners, and enhanced outreach in the development of parental relations would support and address AALANA student's social needs and campus integration.

Recognition of internal processes (financial aid, advising/support services), adjustment of quarter system timelines due to the compressed schedule, consistent policy implementation, and consideration of affective student development issues could have a positive impact on and reduction of student stressors during critical academic time periods.

f. AALANA Student Co-Curricular Issues

A review of retention literature suggests linkages between student engagement and improved retention rates. Social integration outside of the classroom connects students with faculty, staff and peers and in residence settings improves critical thinking and sensitivity to cultural understanding (Astin, 2000, Pascarella and Terenzini, 2001). Social climate is important in creating a sense of belonging. A 2005 RIT study of fraternity and sorority participation suggests that students with slightly lower GPA's are retained longer most likely due to social networking.

There are presently thirteen clubs with an AALANA focus. Seven clubs focus on African American populations, four clubs focused on Latino/a populations and two clubs focused on Native American populations. The AALANA Collegiate Association (ACA) is a major student organization at RIT, whose purpose is to be an inclusive organization that works to change the current status and sustain an awareness of the AALANA (African American, Latino American, and Native American) population as being an integral part of the RIT campus and surrounding communities. (http://campuslife.rit.edu:81/main/clubs/mso)

Approximately 805* AALANA students are registered participants in RIT student clubs and organizations with an AALANA Focus.

- **African American Student Clubs** (428)
- **Latino Student Clubs** (Total Students - 282)
- **Native American Student Clubs** (Total Students - 37)
- **NALFO** (National Association of Latino/Fraternal Organizations, total students - 47)
- **National Pan-Hellenic Conference** (Fraternities/Sororities) (Total Students - 11)

*The actual number of student participants may be inflated as individuals often are members of multiple clubs and organizations.

These figures do not take into account AALANA student's participation in non-AALANA focused clubs and organizations due to the lack of an overall student participation tracking system.

IV. BEST PRACTICES: UNDERSTANDING WHAT WORKS

Retention Research

Retention and attrition of undergraduate students is an important issue facing colleges and universities in the United States (Bedford & Durkee, 1989; Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994; Glass & Garrett, 1995; Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). The growing competition among undergraduate schools in attracting quality students also places emphasis on institutional reputation (Astin, 1997). Reputation is directly tied to retention and attrition rates (Murtaugh et al., 1999) making these statistics vital in the portrayal of the college. Retention is a concern for students, minorities, non-minorities, males, and females (Horn, et al. 2002).

The successful completion of a college degree is imperative for most students to achieve their professional goals (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). Despite this, national attrition rates have been on the rise since the early 1980s at four-year institutions (Berkner, Cuccaro-Alamin, & McCormick, 1996; Postsecondary Education Opportunity, 2002). It has been estimated that attrition rates may approach 50-60% of all students, with the largest percentage of those being first-year undergraduate students (Astin, 1997; Murtaugh et al., 1999; Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto, more students leave their college or university prior to degree completion than stay. It was estimated that the average graduation rate for four-year colleges was 41.9% in 2001, down from 52.2% in 1983 (PEO, 2002).

There are a variety of factors that affect student retention. These may include academic, social, financial, psycho-emotional variables, and other health and medical related issues, among others (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992a; Murtaugh

et al., 1999; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; St. John, Hu, Simmons, & Musoba, 2001). There is sizable literature available that evaluates the causes of high attrition rates (e.g., Bedford & Durkee, 1989; Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994; Cabrera et al., 1992b; Glass & Garrett, 1995). Several areas have been examined in correlation with variables such as pre-existing academic measures (i.e., high school rank or grade point average and standardized test scores), social characteristics (i.e., personality traits, risk factors such as drug use), and personality disturbances (Murtaugh et al., 1999). Substantial studies have examined variables such as gender (Sanders, 1998), perceptions of prejudice and discrimination (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1996; Hurtado, 1992; Nora & Cabrera, 1996), and the educational background of one or more parent (Ting & Robinson, 1998).

Other studies have indicated that a lack of involvement on the part of the student has a powerfully negative impact on student outcomes (Berger & Milem, 1999). Student involvement was identified as class attendance, meeting with professors, interacting with student groups, participation in academic or social services, and many other action-based determinates. They also determined that student integration from a social and academic perspective was an ongoing process, with most integration occurring during the first year.

Other studies have suggested that African American students' academic experience, performance, and integration at predominately White institutions are influenced by nonacademic factors (Guiffrida, 2003; Lang, 2002; Oliver, Smith, & Wilson, 1989). Guiffrida stated that African American organizations play an integral role in the integration and success of African American students.

Retention Checklist

A Retention Checklist, adapted from National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering (NACME) an RIT partner, suggests a number of best practices including:

1. Financial support and counseling.
   a. RIT has a significant commitment to providing financial aid to all students and AALANA as a specific population.
   b. There is a disconnect between the financial aid awarded and the "perceived need" of students.
   c. Some of the "perceived need" gap and the financial aid need determination can be addressed in financial counseling and outreach. The Office of Financial Aid and Scholarship and the Student Financial Services Offices have engaged students and families. They have offered to develop outreach financial counseling programs to admitted and current RIT students. This financial counseling should be part of an overall institutional retention strategy.

d. There needs to be an ongoing group that plans and coordinates leveraging financial aid with external funding and "perceived needs".

2. Faculty/student mentor program and clustering of students to support effective study groups.
   a. The North Star Center and Ethnic Faculty and Staff Committee are coordinating mentoring efforts. These efforts should be supported and expanded.
   b. Undergraduate research opportunity is an important mentoring program.
   c. Clustering students in "key" courses provides opportunities for group mentoring and academic support services.
   d. Develop a proactive outreach program for academic support services.

3. Student drop-in centers and aggressive First Year Program.
   a. Student drop-in centers in addition to North Star should be developed.
   b. As "Greater Expectations" are developed, there should be ongoing input from professionals focused on AALANA student success.

4. Effective academic advising provides intentional and developmental academic advising. Developmental academic advising recognizes the importance of interaction between the student and the campus environment: it focuses on the whole person, and works with the student at that person's own life stage of development (http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/clearinghouse/Advisingissues/dev_adv.htm). Involve families in the student advisement process.

5. Summer programs designed to support academic excellence with undergraduate student research opportunities.
   a. The current summer programs, North Star and HEOP serve approximately 40-60 of the 230 AALANA freshmen. Given the effectiveness of the summer bridge programs, a unified and expanded summer bridge with research opportunities for at least 50% of the AALANA freshmen should be developed and offered.

6. Faculty incentives are needed for effectively engaging and supporting AALANA Student Success. Adequate institutional resources are also important to support intervention programs.

7. Facilitate special affinity groups (NSBE, SHPE, AISES, etc.).
   a. The role of special affinity groups such as NSBE, SHPE, and AISES should be recognized, encouraged and supported within a special structure for their impact on retention as well as student development.

8. Help with co-ops and internships.
   a. The work and programs of Co-op and Career Services including special programs such as the Affinity Fair (part of the annual Career Fair) need to be supported.

9. Commitment to data collection and analysis of student and program success and standardize quarterly data requirements and data collection procedures with systemic intervention across academic and student service units.

Studies from the Field

In early February 2009, a series of student focus groups were arranged by Sean Bennett, Director of the North Star Center and facilitated by Laurie Clayton, Ed.D. and Eulas Boyd, Assistant Provost with approximately sixty students from the following AALANA organizations - American Indian Science and Engineering Society, the Native American Student Association, LA VOZ (Hispanic Programming Board), Latin American Student Association (LASA), Black Awareness Coordinating Committee (BACC), Unity House and the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE). A series of questions regarding **Organizational Culture** (Have you felt academically successful as an RIT student? Why, Why Not? Have you known students who have left RIT? What were some of their reasons?); **Stressors** (What have been the greatest support and/or barrier to your academic success? How would you describe communication on-campus? Too much, too little? Is there one piece or a series of communications that has been the most useful?); **Programs/Services/Academic Advising** (Which programs and/or services have been most useful to you in supporting your success as an RIT student? Least effective? Do you feel like you receive important & timely information from Financial Aid Services? Tell me about your Advising Experiences); and **Final Recommendations to improve student's academic success.**

The use of technology and the Early Alert System provided much discussion among focus group participants. A graduating senior suggested that RIT utilize its technology resources such as pod-casting lectures, *MyCourses* and Early Alerts (already developed and in place) to improve retention.

> "For example, the use of *MyCourses* – some faculty use it, some do not. This would be useful for students to receive feedback. In certain courses, students receive no feedback, they don't know how their grades add up and may be putting their study efforts toward the wrong course, and then they find out too late."

Students in each focus group supported the use of *MyCourses* campus wide vs. its sporadic use across colleges and majors. Students in general like and support faculty using My Courses with the exception of quizzes. Many students felt that the Early Alert System was a good time management tool. One student felt that early alerts were a good idea, however, "faculty send them in Week 8, when it is too late" (several others agreed with this statement). Another student felt that the intent of the early alert system was compromised by the bureaucracy within his department. Many felt that Early Alerts were useful, *only if not* using My Courses. Several students suggested combining the Early Alert System with the use of My Courses. Additional comments included "I have no idea where I'm at (in a course)." Some students indicated they simply, "close their eyes and wait until the end of the quarter."

Student satisfaction with academic advising was most frequently referenced by the type of advisor. All students were able to identify each of their advisors and who they sought out based on their needs. Most sought the advice of their academic advisor for course information only. Students sought assistance from The North Star Center for academic, personal, social reasons and for financial support. Responses also varied by the type of program and/or College that the students were affiliated with. Within designated academic discipline – most were very pleased with their College/Faculty advisor and program chairs. Less satisfaction was expressed within the Liberal Arts disciplines. A GCCIS student indicated that advisors (academic and faculty) have very limited time available and it often takes 2-3 weeks to receive a response to a question via email. One engineering student said his faculty was not very interested in providing guidance. He found using his North Star liaison very useful in providing him with a "roadmap" for his coursework vs. his academic department. Another student confirmed her similar experience and said Dr. Greene at North Star was very helpful in identifying scholarships.   Another student described her CIAS faculty advisor as "great", often receiving two emails a week accompanied with an actual meeting**.**

Students in all focus groups said that they knew of someone who had left RIT. Most cited *financial reasons* as <u>the</u> reason for leaving RIT. Additional aid would be useful to help out ("so that you don't have to work two jobs to stay in school") with academics. Two students felt that many students leave because they are not comfortable at RIT. They suggested programming and reaching out could help, however, some students just don't fit in and many don't or can't transition from high school or they may be bringing negative impressions of RIT with them.   Orientation is good – however – it is packed with activities and then the first-semester freshmen are given the wrong impression that college is always this way and the pace slows down once classes begin. Students cited *academic reasons* as the secondary reason for many students leaving RIT.

One student referenced the pressure of the quarter system as the reason for academic difficulty. One female student mentioned that students have left because the social life is not the "typical" college experience.

Students expressed their concern relative to The Office of Financial Aid and Scholarship and the Student Financial Services. One student recommended *more financial aid* is needed so that students wouldn't leave.   Another student cited – "retention rates are linked to financial aid." Student Financial Services drew mixed reactions from students. One female student "loves" my financial advisor. Another female student said that the quality of her financial advisor interactions have not been positive since a change in advisors. Previously, she had a very good relationship with her advisor whom she met with before she began her studies at RIT. Another male student cited incorrect information with regard to his financial aid package. As a graduating senior – the student mentioned that this caused major problems for him. Another mentioned a hold being placed on his account where the timing was off. Several others confirmed that they had received holds that were perceived to be based on the wrong information. One student recommended that the *hold system* be reserved for case by case situations that are critical. Another felt that there is a lack of initiative on providing information. Two other students cited that the quarter system (vs. semester) presents difficulty in receiving timely disbursement of awards and scholarships.   One student felt that Student Financial Services pushed loans vs. aid or scholarships.

At the conclusion of each discussion, students were asked to share their final recommendations. Topics focused on academic concerns, faculty issues, student transition and technology. Academic concerns ranged from varying opinions relative to changing or retaining the quarter system, adapting the grading scale to include +/- grading which may deter students from attending RIT, changing the on-line registration system and limited course availability.   Several focus group participants were critical of adjunct faculty (lack of quality, limited to no office hours, offer no benefit to students – "I feel like I'm paying a lot of money but not getting the quality of teaching"), inexperienced faculty teaching at advanced, higher level courses, recommending a review of faculty teaching styles as some are very poor instructors. Other concerns included switching assigned faculty to individual course selections to accurately reflect who will teach each section. Focus Group participants encouraged earlier student engagement through Orientation, special interest housing, (i.e. Unity International House), and Learning Communities.

Summary

Several themes emerged from student focus group discussions. Consideration should be given to these areas of concern within a general context while understanding that participation and feedback was limited and may not be generalizable to the total AALANA cohort.

Student feedback strongly recommends consistent use of technology including the use of My Courses and the Early Alert System. Feedback focusing on financial aid reflects compelling challenges for our AALANA students and RIT's retention efforts. Student Financial Services feedback also presents contradictory evidence with information gathered and shared in AALANA Tiger Team meetings. Team discussions suggested that student financial concerns are a contributing factor in student attrition. Student feedback suggests it is the primary factor for student's leaving RIT. Student perception of Student Financial Services was generally negative. Data gathering through committee presentations did not identify this as an area of concern. This may warrant further investigation based on student feedback. While topics ranged at the conclusion of each focus group's open discussion, most concentrated on grading, course offerings or faculty. These concerns have been addressed to some degree in the Student Success Tiger Team's review of *Previous Retention Committee Recommendations: Progress and Status* (pgs.7-11) and *Student Interactions with Faculty Members* (Recommendation 26, 27 and 28).

V. What Our Peer Institutions Tell Us Works

In early February 2009, Eulas Boyd, Assistant Provost for Student Success, met with representatives from peer institutions - Syracuse University, Cornell University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology to assess academic advising models, creative approaches to improve retention and identify metrics used to assess impact of retention strategies.

Syracuse University

Syracuse representatives (Youlonda Copeland-Morgan, Assoc. V.P. – Director of Scholarships and Student Aid; Tim Wasserman, Asst. Director – Institutional Research; Sandy Hurd, Associate Provost, Academic Programs; Donald Salah, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management; Eileen Strempel, Associate Dean, Graduate School) felt that their schools' most significant retention issues are based on unmet financial need. Their greatest challenge is defining measureable need as calculations and definitions differ based on family need and contribution. Syracuse has had some success in looking at flexibility of financial aid policies, benchmark data, and willingness as an institution to increase cost of education calculation to adjust or offset– external funding such as the

LSAMP STEM Book Allowance. This creativity requires systemic advocacy – within context of educational mission, integration of thought, wholeness of process, and institutional uniqueness.   The responsibility for tracking retention was shifted to Institutional Research approximately three years ago. Sharing of information is now coordinated through Academic Council with on-going collaboration of retention efforts coordinated through Enrollment Management.

Each school and college is responsible for its retention efforts and graduation rates – to reach established University rates. Models, context and success rates differ for each school. They maintain a "One student at a time" retention philosophy. Retention efforts are shared between Academic and Student Affairs" with Student Affairs considered "Another Set of Eyes" in efforts to improve retention. Much of the retention and graduation strategies and corresponding responsibility lies with the Associate Dean at the College/School or College level. The mission of Institutional Research has expanded beyond "more than just numbers", serving a robust and expansive role in current operational models. Information is now pushed out through a Dashboard system, with efforts moving toward data analysis and research in combination with data generation. A recent partnership with Enrollment Management and Institutional Research has created a model which identifies attrition factors with at-risk populations. The model emphasizes a "beyond academics" approach and will be implemented as early as this fall.

Syracuse's Academic Advising Model is decentralized, with utilization of various models by schools and colleges. Multiple advisor systems are in place with faculty fulfilling traditional course/curriculum advisor role. In general, students within professional schools have a positive experience, while Arts & Science remains a challenge. The data gathering piece is missing within the Academic Advising System. No formal methods of assessment or evaluation are in place. Although some efforts are made on an informal, ad hoc basis. An Early Alert System for students in academic distress is in place. Each school/college utilizes and implements the system differently including documentation of conversation. The system can be set-up and modified for first-year students, transfers, any populations – i.e. Athletes. There is flexibility within the system including access "Intrusive advising" and Mid-term progress reports. System is administered through "home office", college with the undergraduate advisor responsible for follow-up. No system impact study has been conducted.   Most retention efforts remain separate, although Syracuse hopes to combine efforts and reporting out systems soon. This is in response to RCM (Response for Cost Management), a driving force behind institutional accountability. *Team Meetings by Freshman Cohorts* (similar to K-12 model) emanating from Student Affairs but crossing divisions/departments is currently under consideration.

<u>Cornell University</u>

   Cornell representatives (DiOnetta Jones, Director of Minority Programs in Engineering; Kathy Dimiduk, Director of Teaching and Excellence Institute in College of Engineering; Linda Tompkins from Engineering Learning Initiatives; and Fran Shumway, Director of Engineering Advising) cite a decentralized, college based model of advising, student services and retention initiatives. They anticipate centralization of several service areas. Coordinated strategies and programs include first and upper-class coordinated team review. The Office of Diversity Programs in Engineering was created to serve as a retention initiative. Varied methods are utilized to determine effectiveness. A centralized, student information system does not exist although each College is responsible for formally tracking their students. Informal financial aid counseling is available.

<u>Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute</u>

   RPI cites its comprehensive first-year program as its most successful effort in improving retention. Programs are coordinated through the Assistant Vice President for Student Experience. The Freshman Intervention Program offers a model through which on-going retention efforts are implemented. Each College offers a student support team. Academic Advising is housed and implemented centrally for first-year students. After the first-year, advising is then coordinated within colleges and departments.

<u>Massachusetts Institute of Technology</u>

   MIT has a 98% first-year cohort retention rate and a six-year graduation rate of 93%. They have no system assessment of their retention programs and student services. MIT has a decentralized advising system. Freshman advising is centralized in the office of undergraduate advising and planning. Faculty and administrators volunteer for freshman advising. New faculty is not encouraged to advise freshman. Upperclassmen are advised by departmental administrator or faculty who report to a department chair. The dean has written statement of advising as part of faculty annual review. There are "required" meetings between the advisor and advisee. Advisor sign off is required for registration. There is no formal evaluation or tracking. These reports call for enhanced advising. There is an early alert system for freshman, but none for upperclassman. Science core and high enrollment courses have required the early alert system. A diagnostic math exam is given during new student orientation for course placement. There is a university-wide academic review committee that reviews academic actions concerning students (probation, dismissals, etc.) The Registrar's Office de-registers students who do not meet course prerequisites. MIT offers a Summer Bridge Program which has improved retention. A similar program is offered to 2nd and 3rd year students.

Summary

Visits with professional colleagues at peer institutions demonstrate shared retention challenges among our peer institutions. Strategic approaches and philosophies differ by institution   Syracuse University maintains a "one student at a time" retention philosophy with each Associate Dean at the college or school responsible for its retention efforts and graduation rates. Their implementation of a "beyond academics" model, a joint partnership with Enrollment Management and Institutional Research, holds promise in the identification of attrition factors with at-risk populations. Retention initiatives vary with corresponding responsibility lying within various administrative units (Assistant Vice President for Student Experience) and programs (Freshman Intervention, Summer Bridge, and 2nd and 3rd Year programs). Most institutions have not implemented data collection and analysis practices to assess and measure the effectiveness of their advising system. MIT, which has an impressive 98% first-year cohort retention rate, includes advising as part of annual faculty review and "requires" meetings between the advisor and advisee with required sign-off for registration.

VI. AALANA Student Success Tiger Team Recommendations

Recommendation 1:   Coordination, Communication and Collaboration
Create a system to eliminate the lack of coordination and communication among academic support services and service providers. Centrally coordinate and assess academic support services across the Institute. A common, centralized approach would improve communication and collaboration among service units but more importantly offer students including those at –risk, a comprehensive approach in meeting their academic needs.

Recommendation 1a: Identify who is specifically responsible for AALANA retention. Create a culture of "Retention Responsibility" and accountability among Institute partners and promote congruency between core teaching mission, scholarship and research.

Recommendation 1b: Standardize data requirements with policies and set criteria to ensure reporting consistency across the Institute. Require quarterly data collection processes with routine sharing of information and best practices. Collection and analysis efforts should emphasize cohort comparisons, particularly AALANA/Non-AALANA student factors, and benchmark transfer populations in recognition of their increasing enrollment and growth potential. This would afford us the opportunity to identify current activities within the system at any given point in time with focused, collaborative efforts in the collection, analysis, and dissemination of data across and within colleges.

Recommendation 2: Academic Advising
Thoroughly review RIT's Academic Advising System including consistency and standardization of professional advisors. Standardization of advisor training, job descriptions, and qualifications *is required* to work effectively with students and should be supported at the highest levels. Sensitivity and support of AALANA students, specific support services as well as alternatives should exist on a continuum. The identification of barriers to a particular student's success is critical followed by appropriate action items.

Recommendation 2a: Support an intentional model of academic support for all students (e.g., holds on registration, AIM program, financial support and counseling). Implement an intrusive *Just-in-Time* model for at-risk students across the Institute including the identification of appropriate professional (s) to facilitate timely interventions, with special attention to academic challenges and drop-out factors related to class rank, with particular emphasis on sophomore through graduation. Intrusive advising involves intentional contact with students with the goal of developing a caring and beneficial relationship that leads to increased academic motivation and persistence. The goal is to help students feel cared for by the institution. Students who perceive that someone cares about them and that they belong to a community are more likely to be academically successful than those who do not feel any sense of care by the institution (National Academic Advising Association; http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/AAT/NW30_3.htm#10).

Recommendation 2b: Review and update institutional policies specific to academic actions, standardization, and consistency by College. This recommendation supports the Tiger Team's Recommendation #2, Institute Advising and Advising Information Center.

Recommendation 3: Technology
Technology can support our retention efforts, which presents challenges among various units. Greater utilization and maximization of existing RIT technologies (i.e. My Courses and Early Alerts) will promote communication and support student success. Greater access across the Institute would engage partners in the identification of and service to at-risk students. It is important to include professionals focused on AALANA student success in the development of our internal infrastructure and supporting systems as well as subsequent implementation.

Recommendation 3a: Require all faculty to utilize My Courses as a means of posting current grades, course syllabi and requirements.

Recommendation 3b: Development of a Student Contact Management System would facilitate and streamline the advising process and allow access to a student's points of contact and interaction with on-campus professionals. This recommendation supports the Tiger Team's Recommendation #20.

Recommendation 4: Students
Attendance in the first year is critical. Intrusive attention to this can result in an increase toward our 93% first year retention goal. Three or more absences need to be flagged by faculty and a three-prong response by advisor, FYE instructor, and RA gets the best results (Education Advisory Board, *Improving Student Retention Through Early Intervention*, 2008).

Recommendation 4a: Resilient students persist through challenges. Enhance our identification and training of students to operate with a mastery-oriented coping style instead of a helpless pattern. (Dweck, C. & L. Sorich, Mastery-Oriented Thinking [in Snyder, C. R., *Coping: The Psychology of What Works*, Oxford Univ. Press: 1999]).

Recommendation 5: Academic
Complex issues infused within a culture of "Retention Responsibility" include lecturer and contingent faculty group skills and quality of teaching, salaries and benefits, workloads, work conditions, and integration into the RIT community.

RIT may be able to address the issue of instruction for difficult courses by creating a faculty-based committee to provide suggestions for helping students' master difficult content or by providing other incentives to faculty that demonstrate the capacity to successfully teach students in identified challenging areas. What is important to emphasize is that more students succeeding in gateway courses does not require a decrease in academic or intellectual rigor for students. However, it may require deep reflection on paradigms that we employ to teach and assess students and eliminate the need for the proliferation of supplemental services.

Recommendation 5a: Develop a vehicle to explore innovative pedagogies and instructional methods designed to deliver "difficult" curriculum and assess student learning. The core recommendations presume that keys to closing the graduation and retention gap reside in supplementing existing instruction. Remediation is only an effective strategy when content has been taught well initially. Remediation cannot span the chasms that exist when the core content is missing.

Recommendation 5b: High risk courses (most math and physics) need intrusive academic support. Continue to provide supplemental instruction for many of the high D, W, F courses and learning assistance through the Academic Intervention and Mentoring (AIM) Program for designated and at-risk cohorts as a positive support strategy. Conduct collaborative efforts with AIM, a pilot initiative focusing on retention through collaboration across the Institute, and other academic support services, assess effectiveness of current strategies for possible expansion.

Recommendation 6: Social Environment
Create a process by which faculty, staff, and students jointly consider ways to improve the social environment within RIT for AALANA students. This will use constituencies from Student Government, the ALANA Collegiate Association, and other racial / ethnic clubs and organizations. It will consider student social needs, calendaring, funding sources, communication, advertising, and membership. Emphasis will be placed upon enhancing opportunities for collaboration, improving meaningful programming, and developing more systematic (on-going) assessment for student organizations.