

# RIT

MAGIC Center  
**Traver Creative Technologist  
Founders Program**



**A funded entrepreneurship residency and student business accelerator focused on technology solutions for creative industries**

<https://www.rit.edu/magic/programs>

## **The Mission**

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The Traver Creative Technologist Founders Program integrates problem-solving, customer discovery, business model exploration, technology development (including prototyping), business acceleration, and learning frameworks for creative technologists at RIT.

An emphasis of the program is making multidisciplinary connections between technology and business students, working also with experienced creative students, to advance product concepts across the entrepreneurship lifecycle, while simultaneously leveraging support and mentorship. The Traver Creative Technologist Founders Program focuses on building a creative technologist culture at RIT that includes:

- Learning environments with goals of educating students about creative technologists and entrepreneurial approaches and opportunities.
- Support structures and programs that empower aspiring creative technologists to pursue ideas, build business models, and refine prototypes.
- Coaching and mentorship as well as opportunities to pair aspiring creative technologists with investment in their ideas or products.

## Program Structure

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The official opening event of each year's Traver program is a fall semester Hack-a-Jam-a-thon that focuses on matching problems that creative industries face with software and technology solutions. This ideation weekend merges the best parts of an immersive design jam and a development hackathon to exploit the strengths of the RIT creative and technical communities in an intensive focus on new product ideas. The event is open to software developers, technical artists, technical directors, media and games engineers, designers, artists, and any other student passionate about the intersection of art and technology.

Following the hack-a-jam-a-thon, students and teams with viable concepts are invited to continue at MAGIC with funded ideation and prototyping through the fall and spring semesters (participation in fall and spring is part-time with each student maintaining a normal class load). The program then culminates in a full-time Traver program co-op administered by MAGIC Spell Studios during the summer semester, where product ideas are pushed to minimum viable products and where students will forge a path to further fundraising and commercialization.

## Schedule

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The following describes the schedule and detailed framework of the program which includes a multi-phased, year-long approach.

**Phase 0: Application.** Interested students can submit proposals or simply express their interest in the Traver program **throughout the year**. MAGIC mentors work with potential applicants to refine and enhance their idea or to direct them to explore more during each year's kickoff hack-a-jam-thon (early fall semester). The goal is to welcome and support students with strong entrepreneurial ambition, **even if they don't yet have a refined product idea or prototype**. The intent is to establish culture by recruiting students with high potential for entrepreneurial success under the mentorship of RIT experts and coaches.

**Phase I (Early Fall): Traver Hack-a-Jam-a-thon.** The formal program begins with the weekend hackathon/jam mashup where creative industry problems/challenges are provided as design prompts. The teams work over a structured period to develop innovative potential solutions. Students can join the event as a pre-formed team with the seed of a great idea to be further refined or show up as single participants eager to be teamed with others and to find a great idea live during the event. The Hack-a-Jam-a-thon is moderated by entrepreneurship experts from MAGIC and the Simone Center.

**Phase II (Fall): Early Stage Customer Discovery—Business Model Development.** Accepted teams spend the first semester exploring customer discovery and business model development. The program provides experienced mentors and coaching. Some students may also choose to enroll in **MGMT-470, Applied Entrepreneurship** to further support early stage development.

**Phase III (Fall/Spring): Technology Development and Prototyping.** The most promising concepts enter an Agile software prototyping process, modeled after the MAGIC Maker program. Production support and mentors/coaches are provided and outside advisors are invited to participate in product design reviews and give valuable feedback. MAGIC resources (lab space, hardware, etc.) are provided to each team and serve as a digital sandbox for ideation and refinement. Student team leaders may also actively recruit additional talent and membership as necessary to ensure product success.

**Phase IV (Summer): Incubation/Acceleration.** Projects that complete the fall/spring discovery and prototyping semesters and **show solid viability** enter a full-time summer Traver program co-op. A critical design review process, with judges recruited from inside and outside RIT and to include John Traver, identifies the specific product ideas that warrant this final phase of programming. Additionally, co-programming from the Simone Student Accelerator augments product development with business development focus. During this term, product concepts are pushed to full commercialization, building upon the rigorous experience earned during the first two part-time semesters. The goal of this phase is to deliver a viable product while also pursuing additional business structure (incorporation, legal and IP assignments, etc.). Teams successfully graduating from the full year program are supported in forming their functional business entities and connecting with the greater RIT venture capital ecosystem.

## Commitment and Funding

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Students accepted into the program are supported in a **part-time effort while maintaining a full course load for both the fall and spring semester**. A small customer discovery and research fund is afforded to each team during these terms (up to \$2500 per semester). **Projects that progress to full acceleration in the summer term receive \$10,000 stipends and students are expected to contribute full-time** to their work while also registering for Traver program entrepreneurial co-ops. The summer residency is a convenient option for students in programs both with and without required co-op.

And while the program is structured to support student business and prototype development across a full year, **we also understand not every concept operates on the same timeline or will begin the program in the same phase of development**. Students and teams who feel their projects are a perfect fit for the Traver program but who are concerned about the exact commitments outlined should always feel welcome to sit down with the MAGIC team and discuss alternative models for support. The ultimate goal is providing entrepreneurial students in the creative technology sector exactly what they need to accelerate their idea to success.

## Coaching and Mentorship

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A key component of the year-long Traver Creative Technologist Entrepreneurism Program is attachment of experienced mentors to each project team. The MAGIC Maker program has a strong precedent with external professional reviewers providing feedback and guidance to our traditional Maker students, developing game and film titles for commercial release.

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**Want to Know More?** Please direct any questions about the Traver program to Aaron Nieboer, Production Associate for MAGIC Spell Studios: [amnigm@rit.edu](mailto:amnigm@rit.edu)

