

Department of Physics
4211 John S. Toll Physics Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742-4111
April 10, 2007

President Albert J. Simone
George Eastman Building
2 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623-5604

Dear President Simone:

Enclosed is the final report of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education Visiting Team which visited your institution on March 20-23, 2007. It is my understanding that you will distribute this report in any manner you deem appropriate.

I believe I speak for all the members of the Team in commending you and all your colleagues on your management of the long effort that has led to this penultimate point in RIT's reaccreditation process. Every member of the Team has communicated to me their pleasure in our visit and the opportunity it gave them to become acquainted with a remarkable institution that has clearly prospered under your leadership over the past decade and a half. We all wish you the best of good fortune in the next phase of your academic career.

With best wishes,

Donald N. Langenberg
Chair, MSCHE Visiting Team

Cc: Ms. Vivian Ellis
MSCHE

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and Students
of the
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Rochester, New York

by

An Evaluation Team representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Prepared after study of the institution's Self-Study Report
and a visit to the campus on March 20-23, 2007

The Team:

Marjory Blumenthal, Associate Provost, Georgetown University
Susan Boswell, Dean of Student Life, Johns Hopkins University
Yvonne Captain, Associate Professor of Spanish & International Affairs, George Washington University
David X. Cheng, Assistant Dean for Research & Planning, Columbia University
Roger A. Grice, Clinical Associate Professor of Technical Communication, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Donald N. Langenberg (CHAIR), Chancellor Emeritus, University System of Maryland
Margaret F. Plympton, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Lehigh University
Donna Sundre, Executive Director of the Center for Assessment & Research Studies, James Madison University

Working with the Team as Evaluation Team Associate:

Carole Wells, Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

This report represents the view of the evaluation team as interpreted by the Chair; it goes directly to the institution before being considered by the Commission. It is a confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution. All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist the Rochester Institute of Technology. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and of the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.

[please see next page]

AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

President/CEO: Dr. Albert J. Simone

Chief Academic Officer: Dr. Stanley McKenzie, Provost

Chair of the Board of Trustees: Mr. Michael Morley
Chief Administrative Officer and Executive Vice President (ret.), Eastman Kodak Company

I. Context and Nature of the Visit

The Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) was founded in 1829 and is focused on the professional and career-oriented education of its almost sixteen thousand students. Its physical facilities are located on a 1300 acre campus south of the center of Rochester, the third largest city in the state of New York. Its Carnegie classification is “Master’s L,” “Master’s Colleges and Universities (larger programs).” RIT offers Associate’s, Baccalaureate, Certificate, Master’s, and Doctoral programs. It has no branch campuses, but offers programs at the following additional locations:

University in Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo;
Center for Advanced Defense Studies, Washington, DC;
Dominican Republic (This additional location was visited by a member of the Visiting Team.);
American College of Management and Technology, Dubrovnik, Croatia.

RIT was initially accredited in 1958 and its accreditation was last reaffirmed in 2002. Our Team’s current visit was a part of the University’s regular decennial reaccreditation process. The Self Study design/model was “Comprehensive.” The self-study process and report involved broad participation of the campus community.

Since its last reaccreditation in 1997, RIT has continued its development under the leadership of President Albert J. Simone. By all indications, President Simone’s fifteen-year tenure has been a period of great progress and achievement by RIT. He will leave office at the end of June, bequeathing to his successor a very healthy institution with a widely-accepted strategic vision for its future, as well as several important challenges which will be discussed below in this Team Report. (Several weeks before our Team visit, the RIT Board of Trustees announced the appointment as its next president of William W. Destler, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, University of Maryland, College Park.)

RIT is thus in the midst of a period of change marked by a presidential transition, the completion of the current decennial Middle States reaccreditation process, and the early stages of its implementation of its recently completed Strategic Plan 2005-2015. One other transitional factor deserves mention. RIT’s city, Rochester, is itself in transition. Rochester’s historic “Big Three” industries (Eastman Kodak, Xerox, and Bausch & Lomb) are experiencing effects of rapid technological change and competitive challenges. RIT’s present academic character partly reflects a kind of co-dependence with these industries, e.g., its College of Imaging Arts and Sciences. As Rochester undertakes the redevelopment of its technological and economic base, RIT is potentially well positioned to play a key role in that process.

The Visiting Team hopes that its observations presented in this report will add to President Simone’s satisfaction at a job well done, and provide President Destler with useful information and guidance as he “takes RIT to the next level,” to use a phrase in common use on the campus.

II. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Eligibility Requirements

Based on review of the Self Study, interviews, the certification statement supplied by the institution and/or other institutional documents, the Team affirms that the institution continues to meet the eligibility requirements in *Characteristics of Excellence*.

III. Compliance with Federal Requirements; Issues Relative to State Regulatory or Other Accrediting Agency Requirements

Based on review of the Self Study, certification by the institution, other institutional documents, and/or interviews, the Team affirms that the institution's Title IV cohort default rate is within federal limits.

IV. Evaluation Overview

RIT's Strategic Plan 2005-2015 states as its institutional vision, "RIT will lead higher education in preparing students for successful careers in a global society." The Plan is built around five dimensions---Career Focus, Student Success, Scholarship, Global Society, and Community. In preparing the Self Study, the Steering Committee chose to emphasize two of them, Student Success and Global Society. They wove these two dimensions into their responses to each of the fourteen Middle States accreditation standards.

The Team applauds and concurs in this organization of the Self Study. Although two dimensions are emphasized, in fact all five appeared regularly in our discussions with members of the campus community. We believe the five dimensions provide an excellent framework for characterizing the broad objectives of RIT and for guiding its planning and actions during the next eight years. For the purposes of this Team report, however, we have chosen to organize our observations in the conventional standard-by-standard format.

Our Visiting Team found the Rochester Institute of Technology to be a vibrant community of scholars and learners, an institution which has accomplished much during the fifteen-year tenure of President Albert Simone. All of the sectors of that community, from students to trustees, exhibited a strong commitment to institutional excellence in the service of students and their career success. It is a unique institution, one that is already a "category-of-one university." Like all higher education institutions, it faces many challenges in a rapidly changing environment, but it is remarkably well positioned to move itself "to the next level" over the next decade.

V. Compliance with Accreditation Standards

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

As noted above, RIT's Strategic Plan 2005-2015 is built around five strategic dimensions---Career Focus, Student Success, Scholarship, Global Society, and Community, with two of them (Student Success and Global Society) emphasized in the Self Study. Also frequently stated is the institutional goal of becoming a "category-of-one university."

One would not be surprised to find most institutions espousing such strategic dimensions and goal. But the Team was surprised and impressed by the extent to which they are integral parts of the institutional vision shared by all sectors of the RIT community,

including students, faculty, administration, staff, trustees, and alumni. We met with individuals and groups from each of these sectors and found a remarkable degree of understanding, acceptance, concurrence, and unanimity about RIT's mission and goals. Though each sector understandably had its own views and concerns, those representatives of each sector with whom the Team met voluntarily raised and described the importance of RIT's commitment to student success and of their own responsibilities for supporting students and helping them succeed. It appears that most members of the RIT community not only "talk the talk" but also "walk the talk." That in itself goes a long way toward making RIT a "category-of-one university."

Another indicator of RIT's success in moving toward that goal were ubiquitous manifestations of an institutional culture of mutual respect, civility, and caring. RIT is a welcoming and nurturing environment in which the word "community" is important and very real.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Built on its historical commitment to student learning and career success, RIT has made the Strategic Plan 2005-2015 a guiding roadmap for on-going planning activities and resource allocation. At both institutional and college levels, RIT clearly demonstrates the positive outcomes of this kind of strategic thinking and planning.

Given its heavy dependence on tuition for financial well being, RIT has carefully allocated resources to programs and initiatives aimed at reducing impediments to retention and graduation. The Office of Institutional Research and Policy Analysis (IR) has provided the administration with a large amount of data and analyses on enrollment patterns, retention, and graduation rates. The IR office has over the years developed expertise in enrollment modeling, and its accuracy has certainly provided a useful tool for the institution-wide enrollment management efforts. The IR office has also played an important role in supplying data on the consumption of credit hours to support the cost model in RIT's budgetary process. This level of research support is critical to the successful implementation of many ambitious strategic goals and objectives with limited resources.

At the college level, the Team was particularly impressed by the breadth and depth of institutional research studies completed by the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). In the 2006 Annual Report, NTID has outlined its strategic vision, along with clearly articulated goals and objectives, supported by a very comprehensive presentation of data and information ranging from student enrollment, services, academic programs, faculty and staff support, to outcome measures such as graduation rates and student employment. In interviews with NTID administrators, the Team learned about NTID's nation-wide tracking of its graduates' employment and salary history over a 30-plus-year time span. We want to commend this exemplary research effort to measure the level of success of NTID's graduates.

It is interesting to note that, because NTID receives substantial funding from the federal government as one of two national institutions serving the deaf and hard-of-hearing (Gallaudet University is the other), it is subject to certain federal requirements to demonstrate its performance. Those requirements are similar to those at the center of the

current vigorous national debate about education data systems, requirements that are being opposed by some in the higher education world on the grounds that such systems would violate privacy and cannot be made secure. NTID's success suggests that there are ways to address those very real concerns without abandoning the effort to develop better data systems to support improved assessment and accountability. As the headline of a recent NTID news release proclaims, "Been There, Done That!" NTID appears to be in a good position to show others the way on this important issue.

There is a noticeable absence of statistical evidence across most of the areas covered in the Self Study report. As the Team went on to interview faculty and administrators in different areas of the institution, we could feel a certain degree of imbalance existing among different offices in collecting and using data for planning and resource allocation. We applaud vice presidents and deans for their consistent demonstration of careful allocation of resources to activities that advance the goals of the RIT Strategic Plan. However, we note that, on occasion, inadequate attention has been paid to the large amount of quantitative information compiled by the IR office. Therefore, we believe that conscious efforts need to be made by all RIT administrative and academic leaders to use research to effect meaningful changes and program improvement in different areas of the institution. Whenever possible, IR staff should be directly involved in institutional planning processes so that their expertise can be used to provide solid statistical support for decision making.

Given RIT's decentralized administrative system, it is quite understandable that many planning and research activities take place in individual colleges/offices. For instance, Student Affairs conducts studies on student engagement, college experience, and satisfaction with programs and services, and the Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services conducts surveys of employers and alumni to assess graduates' career success after graduation. While these division-wide research activities are important in successful implementation of strategic goals in their own areas, coordination of research efforts across campus and sharing of research findings among colleges/offices should be encouraged.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

RIT is to be commended that its strategic planning process is so well integrated into its resource allocation processes, with goals in the plan driving resource allocation decisions, even though explicit funding sources are not identified in the plan itself. Obviously, as with any plan, there will be changes and adjustments necessary, but the effective institutional allocation of resources toward highest priority areas is made far easier by having an institution-wide view of where the future lies, and a healthy shared governance structure within which to set priorities.

RIT faces some challenges on the revenue side of the picture, given its historical dependence on tuition revenue. Currently 79% of the annual revenues are from tuition, which requires a very sophisticated management of the net revenue picture, including not only the overall spending on financial aid, but being assured that it is being directed to the most 'desirable' students, on whatever dimension is appropriate. The Enrollment Management team appears to have this challenge well in hand, and the projections and planning that are being done have continued to support the necessary net revenue flows. An ongoing focus for the team will be to ensure that retention rates are moving up, so that the pressure on the recruitment

of each entering class could be slightly reduced. Wisely, in the annual budget process, a reserve is set aside to cushion the budget against enrollment shortfalls, so that immediate operations won't be impacted from a negative enrollment experience.

The development of alternative revenue sources is a focus of significant effort for RIT, and will need to have continued attention into the future. Current plans include moving sponsored research funding from \$30 million to \$100 million in the next 10 years, as part of the growing focus on scholarship for all faculty. This represents an ambitious goal, in this era of constrained federal research funding, and will require particular attention to other sources of funding for sponsored projects.

Endowment earnings, another revenue stream which is planned for growth, will require significant management attention. The complexity of the endowment's current investment management has recently increased with the hiring of Hammond Associates, and the bringing on of a multiplicity of different managers for the endowment fund. Of course, another strategy for growing the endowment is through additional gifts, which will certainly need to be a long term strategy.

However, the more immediate picture for fundraising is quite challenging, with so few of RIT alumni having reached a stage in life which makes major gifts a possibility. (Half of the alumni have graduated since 1986.) Fundraising for both endowment and annual funds will require significantly enhanced staffing in order to be successful, with a short term focus on parents and reaching out to corporate supporters beyond the Rochester region, while building up through alumni and current student activities support from alumni in the future.

Federal, state, and local government support continues to be strong, with no anticipated significant downturn in the level of funding for projects or financial aid programs. This positive situation appears to be due in significant part to the very healthy relationships that the Institute has been able to build and maintain with local, state and federal government leaders. The apparent success of NTID with its major federal patrons is particularly notable.

The cost structure of the Institute appears to be well-managed, with some pressures that have been addressed (such as the recent work in Human Resources to manage the skyrocketing cost of employee health insurance and the benefits provided to retirees), and others that will require continued attention. (An example is the tension between the increased focus on faculty scholarship and the need to adjust faculty teaching loads to allow them time to pursue scholarship and research.) Deferred maintenance of existing spaces has been addressed in recent years, and the major building projects now on the horizon are planned to be funded primarily with debt, the servicing of which is already included in the operating budget planning.

As new academic programs are considered, whether as part of the global initiatives, or in the newly enhanced graduate area, their impact on the expense, and importantly, revenue, picture of the Institute will have to be a major consideration. And finally, the financial impact of the University's diversity initiative is an evolving one—success in recruitment and retention of highly prized faculty and staff will add to the value of the Institute experience for students, but will require continued attention and care, and in some cases could require additional resources.

The Team is convinced that RIT is appropriately focused on increasing the variety of revenue streams on which its budget depends, while also being cost conscious. The use of the well-articulated Strategic Plan will continue to be a key tool in making sure that resources are directed toward high priority goals.

- *Suggestion*

Particularly in order to insure the continued growth of the fundraising programs, appropriate levels of staffing (and related program expenses) for the development office will be key. Use of benchmarking data to ensure competitive levels of staffing will be a valuable tool. The employment of a wide variety of programs in order to reach out to all constituencies, such as an enhanced Web-based communication strategy with alumni, given the relative youth of the overall alumni population, will be valuable.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

RIT's Board of Trustees comprises fifty-two "active" members (including the President of the Institute and representatives of the Alumni Network Board, the Women's Council of RIT, and NTID), each of whom serves four-year terms renewable indefinitely up to the age of seventy, at which point s/he may be elected to emeritus status. There are thirty-two emeritus or honorary trustees, some of whom remain quite active. Twenty-four trustees are RIT alumni. Fifty-four reside in the Rochester area and thirty reside elsewhere all across the U.S.

The Board has a well-crafted set of bylaws and written statements of Board Vision, Board Responsibilities as a Corporate Body, and Responsibilities of Individual Trustees. The full Board meets three times a year and its Executive Committee meets monthly. There are numerous committees which meet throughout the year.

In remarkable examples of institutional assessment, each trustee prepares a self-evaluation at the end of each four-year term, and all trustees attending a full Board meeting make a written evaluation of that meeting and its agenda.

The Team met with nine trustees. Five participated in person, and four participated via conference call. We were impressed by the trustees' knowledge of and engagement with all the major RIT issues we discussed. For example, during a discussion of diversity the Vice-Chair of the Board referred to a statistic about minority enrollment at the Team Chair's home institution, the University of Maryland, College Park. She knew it better than the Chair. Like all other RIT groups with which the Team met, the trustees communicated very clearly their primary concern for student success. The Team was left with the impression that RIT is fortunate in having an active, well-informed, and effective governing board.

More generally, RIT appears to have an active and effective system of shared governance in which all of the institution's constituent groups take part. The Team heard no significant complaints about lack of shared governance. In the experience of most Team members, this is unusual.

Standard 5: Administration

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

RIT's administrative structure and support guides its journey toward becoming a category-of-one university. Administrators at all levels of the university help foster a climate of innovation, support for students, and adaptation to changes in society and technology. There is strong administrative support for student success and globalization.

As we talked with groups of administrators, faculty, staff, and students, it was clear that President Simone has had a major impact on RIT, guiding the university along its growth path while, at the same time, encouraging a very supportive and collegial environment. A very clear air of civility is apparent on campus. We observed many instances of this during our visit, and members of the campus community noted with pride the atmosphere in which they worked.

Although there was mention of “academic silos” during our discussions with members of the campus community, we were often struck by the “low walls” and opportunities for collaboration among departments and between schools. Faculty members are free to explore new academic programs and to develop them. The support for such innovation is such that new programs can go from inception to approval by the New York State Department of Education in a relatively short time—sometimes as short as one year. Notable examples were presented to us of programs in the Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences and the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences, as well as in the areas of science, technology, and engineering. RIT is rightly proud of having quite a few “first-in-the-nation” programs.

Some examples that we considered particularly noteworthy are:

- We were very pleased to see that the Board of Trustees is heavily involved in RIT's activities. It appears that members of the Board participate actively in strategic planning as well as various aspects of campus life, while avoiding micromanagement. They appear to be an integral part of the campus community, not a remote and isolated group.
- Industrial advisory boards seem to be a part of various schools and departments. These boards offer strength and perspective, and we were pleased to see them integrated into RIT's operations.
- RIT has worked to develop a good working relationship with the New York State Department of Education so that the amount of red tape involved in getting approval for new programs approved is minimized.
- Members of the campus community—faculty, administration, and staff— all seem pleased that RIT is moving toward becoming more of a research university. It is recognized that the accompanying increases in time and resource demands will stretch some people thin. The Team encountered some concern about this, especially among faculty. The Team would observe that RIT already has a faculty whose functions are unusually diverse, with many adjunct faculty coming from the “real world.” The movement toward increased scholarship and research may be accompanied by even greater functional diversity, with individual faculty focusing in different degrees on teaching, the various forms of scholarship, and engagement with the external professional environment. That would call for careful attention to—and possible adjustment of—the faculty reward structure.

We were pleased to note that we heard essentially the same version of stories from the various campus groups with whom we met—people seem to be generally aligned toward achieving university goals and growth. People generally seem quite happy to be at RIT in

whatever their capacity is. Many discussed with us the atmosphere of civility at RIT. They feel that this makes being part of RIT enjoyable and productive. They look forward to personal and professional growth, and to continued connection with RIT. The Team was particularly struck by the many staff members who are also students.

Standard 6: Integrity

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on review of RIT's Self Study, the Faculty Handbook, the Student Guide, the Organizational Chart, the Web site, and the Team's meetings with faculty, students, and staff, we find that:

- Faculty, students, and staff have strong organizations that advocate on their behalf—as manifested in the practice of shared governance.
- There is a grievance-complaint mechanism in place, and a recently established position of ombudsperson, through which faculty, students, and staff may voice any concerns.
- During our Team visit a controversy erupted over a speaker who had been invited by a student programming group. We observed the institution respond, led by the President, with seriousness, yet enthusiasm, evidencing a high level of organizational ability to address responsibly and objectively such problems.
- Responses to the Team and its members were overwhelmingly candid and positive—even with interviewees of RIT people not chosen by the institution.
- RIT appears to be well respected outside of the educational setting and in the larger business and, to some degree, general Rochester community.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

RIT has invested considerable faculty, staff, and administrator time toward developing goals and objectives in the academic and student affairs divisions of the institute. It has a variety of assessment strategies in place for different units, relying on metrics that are either reflected in the Strategic Plan, were set during the development of the last Periodic Review Report, or have been identified through other planning conversations. The data that underlie these assessments are varied and not centrally stored or reported, which makes comparisons across units a challenge and inhibits the possibility of gaining a shared understanding of effective assessment strategies and metrics. The offices that one would expect to support such institutional efforts (Institutional Research and Information and Technology Resources) may not be well enough equipped to provide this support on a consistent basis for all who need it. In general, there does not appear to be a well developed infrastructure for the review of institutional assessment that regularly reports the findings of evaluation, use of results for program planning, and linkages of planning and results to resources allocation processes..

- *Suggestion*

The Team suggests that RIT develop and use explicit goals and objectives at the institutional and unit level that link to the mission. Assessment processes need to be identified that follow the guidelines of Standard 7, which means that they are useful, cost-effective, reasonably accurate and truthful, planned, organized, systematized, and sustained.

- *Recommendation*

We recommend that RIT significantly enhance its institutional assessment infrastructure in order to support existing assessment work within the colleges and other institutional units, as well as whatever additional programs are needed. We recommend that a central office responsible for all institutional assessment be created, with leadership that is well-versed in the development and use of assessment tools.

Standard 8: Student Admissions

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

RIT seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students' educational goals.

RIT has a well-developed enrollment management plan and a cadre of exceptional professionals in place to implement it. Data provided by Enrollment Management and Career Services indicates that enrollment increased steadily between 1994 (8641 FTE) and 2002 (12,322 FTE), remained stable through 2005 and jumped slightly in 2006 (12,694 FTE). At the same time selectivity has increased, and so has retention, particularly for first-year students, which is currently at 88 percent. The graduation rate is moving toward the stated goal of 75 percent by 2012 (currently 64 percent). Freshmen account for 38 percent of the new students each year, with transfers and graduate students accounting for 18 percent and 22 percent respectively. The remainder of new students is distributed among non-degree students (11 percent), NTID (6 percent), and Eastern Europe (5 percent).

RIT has always enjoyed strong regional recognition and is increasingly becoming a more national institution. It is currently drawing more than half of its incoming freshmen class from outside of New York State.

The institution boasts one of the oldest and largest cooperative education programs in the country. This is consistently given as a key factor in student decisions to attend RIT. Depending on their choice of major, co-op students spend two to five quarters in some kind of work or research setting, providing them with ample opportunities to explore a variety of vocations while at the same time developing essential contacts for future employment.

A snapshot of current enrollment reveals that the typical RIT freshman is male (73 percent), Caucasian (78 percent), and from less than 500 miles away (78 percent). RIT was his first choice for college (81 percent) and his high school average was likely in the A- range. He received a score of approximately 1200 on the SAT (combined math and verbal). His primary reason for attending college is to gain skills to help him get a good job. Career preparation appears to be the most important element of the RIT brand.

While the enrollment division established a diversity plan in 1998, prior to the university adopting one, numbers of African-American, Latino, Native-American and Asian students still lag behind. It is also important to increase the number of women at RIT, particularly in the science, technology, engineering and math programs where numbers are especially low. As the *Optimal Size Plan* calls for an enrollment cap of 13,750 FTE by 2010, it is especially important to increase recruitment efforts in these areas. An increase in endowed scholarship funding is a factor that will be critical to success.

By all measures, RIT appears to be well-positioned to achieve its stated goal of being a “category-of-one” institution.

- *Suggestion*

While the value and benefits of the current quarter system have been periodically reviewed it may be helpful to do this again in the context of all that RIT is working hard to achieve.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

As stated in the Self Study, “ensuring student success at an institution as complex and fast-paced as RIT requires a broad and well-organized range of student support services.” The theme of student-centeredness is at the core mission of every service offered at this institution. While this is a value that all would agree should be central to any institution of higher learning, RIT truly lives it. It is woven into everything that is done at RIT and echoed at all levels. This focus is clearly valued by the students and appears to be the cornerstone of this community, where respect and civility are natural consequences rather than values that must be constantly reinforced.

A strong network of student support services exists at RIT. From the Counseling Center to student programming and leadership development to athletics and crisis intervention, the central focus is the students being served. Student support service professionals exhibit a distinct pride in being part of this institution. There seems to be a strong bias against outsourcing services such as dining, health and counseling services and housing. RIT knows its students and what their needs are, and believes the institution is best suited to meet them.

Participation in the First Year Enrichment Program (FYE), which is administered through student affairs, is required of all first-year students and provides opportunities for freshmen to interact closely with a faculty member, student affairs professionals, and upper-class students. Established in 2000 and granted academic credit in 2005, this program is designed to enhance personal, academic, and professional success. Coupled with the expanded learning communities, these efforts have had a very positive impact on the retention of first-year students and provided many opportunities for ongoing partnerships between student affairs professionals and the faculty. It is one example of many RIT efforts to ensure that the student is viewed holistically and that whatever resources may be required for them to succeed are in place.

Policies and Procedures are clearly outlined in the *Students Rights and Responsibilities Handbook*, which also includes a section outlining expectations for community behavior.

While the language included in this handbook is fairly typical it is again impressive to note that civility and respect are a given rather than values to be aspired to.

RIT offers a full range of services that support and enhance the experience of their students

- *Suggestions*

Continued support for athletics is crucial to school spirit and community building.

The FYE Program shows great promise in student retention. It is important that it be fully funded.

Addition of a full-time psychiatrist to the current counseling center staff would greatly enhance the center's ability to meet the ever increasing complexity of current student mental health issues.

Standard 10: Faculty

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

RIT has a highly qualified and appropriate faculty that is evolving in a variety of ways. Given the career-oriented, practical character of its programs, it appears (based on limited data received during our Team visit) to have a wider dispersion of backgrounds and credentials than more academic/research-oriented institutions. Inputs received during the visit suggest that significant career experience in industry is both common and valued at RIT, in contrast to more academic institutions that place higher priority on the PhD as the credential of choice.

Faculty diversity remains an area for improvement, as acknowledged in the Self Study. With strong leadership from the administration, significant gains have been made in faculty diversity since the last Periodic Review Report. [RIT's current number of faculty (including visiting) stands at 936. Within this group, 16.1 percent are minority (Asian 7.2 percent, Latino 3.1 percent, African American 4.8 percent, and Native American 1.1 percent). During the 2003–2007 period, minority faculty hires made up 30.4 percent of total faculty hires (237), including 11.8 percent Asian faculty.] The evaluation team heard that new procedures, while effective, have also slowed hiring enough to raise some administrator concerns. The evaluation team supports the Self Study recommendation to continue to be aggressive in recruiting a diverse faculty both for its own value and to reinforce needed efforts to recruit more diverse students.

Teaching has been the historic emphasis for faculty at RIT. It is a point of pride and an attractor for current faculty, it is a factor for recruiting and retaining students, and it is an asset for growing closer ties to alumni. The relatively new increase in emphasis on scholarship has produced some concerns among faculty. The evaluation team heard, in particular, that both workload and performance evaluation and rewards have not always shifted smoothly to accommodate more scholarship—the reward system may still privilege teaching. The Team encourages the administration to examine expectations and rewards carefully to assure that there is a credible balance in teaching and scholarship expectations, and that those expectations are supported (for example through adjustments in workload and through resources that support scholarship) and rewarded consistently across colleges.

At the same time, the evaluation team appreciates the breadth with which scholarship expectations have been framed, noting, in particular, that the inclusion of the scholarship of teaching and learning is particularly appropriate for RIT.

While the evaluation team heard from the Board of Trustees a concern about faculty keeping current in the face of changes in technology, it heard from faculty a recognition of the need to keep pace with change in their respective domains and the observation that their students promote such adaptability. One gets the impression that typically course content and curricula should and do evolve more quickly at RIT than elsewhere. This intellectual or substantive pace is encouraged by the quarter system, which requires faculty to package content in 10-week modules. Faculty acknowledged support provided by the institution for developing teaching efficacy through the Teaching and Learning Center. The Team agrees with the recommendations to continue to invest in faculty support and professional development, because of the intrinsic value and to support expanded attention to assessment. It also agrees with the Self Study's ideas for assuring the efficacy of adjuncts as teachers.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

RIT's Strategic Plan states that "The foremost activity of the RIT faculty is to facilitate, enable, and support student learning." The Team was totally convinced that this vision of leading higher education in the preparation of students for successful careers is indeed embraced by deans, faculty, and staff of the entire institution. This commitment to student career success is clearly demonstrated in various educational offerings, as outlined in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*.

RIT has shown concerted effort toward identifying appropriate student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational major programs. The careful review and mapping of course learning objectives to courses and their associated syllabi represents strong progress in this area. The evidence reviewed by the visiting team seemed to focus on general education and undergraduate programs. There was not much evidence associated with graduate programs. This is an area that will need attention.

There appears to be a strong approval process for new academic programs that flows from programs to Colleges and to an institutional review panel, and finally to the state Department of Education. RIT has demonstrated persuasive documentation and process that has resulted in rapid approval of innovative programs through the State Department of Education. Other institutions have not obtained such approval with the efficiency of RIT. This speaks to strong processes both within and outside the institution.

The Team took note of some very good initiatives and programs designed to promote a student-centered, career-centered approach to RIT's educational offerings. These include:

- *First in Class* initiatives continue the RIT tradition of adapting its programs or creating new programs to meet the challenges of new technology and the needs of industry for graduates who are prepared to use and apply the latest technologies.

- Faculty with industry and academic experience are hired as instructors as well as role models for students aspiring to the careers related to their programs of study at RIT.
- Faculty and administration are actively seeking opportunities to incorporate more international perspectives and content within the framework of its program study areas, and developing new initiatives and programs supporting the strategic goal of Global Society.
- The Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services not only assists students in finding jobs related to their fields of study, but also conducts surveys of employers and alumni to track student learning outcomes and success.
- The College of Computing and Information Sciences has mobilized its faculty in keeping abreast of new technological development in the industry, and designed degree programs to meet the needs of the job market in a very timely manner.
- *Suggestions*

A clearer distinction between undergraduate and graduate programs and their associated student learning outcomes and assessment processes should be developed.

Over the past decade there has arisen considerable national interest in the development of terminal professional master's degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The Sloan Foundation has funded the development of Professional Science Master's (PSM) degree programs designed to add to a solid graduate-level foundation in STEM fields market-related skills in management, finance, law, etc. There are now more than 100 such programs in more than 50 institutions, and the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) has embarked on an initiative to make them a ubiquitous feature of American graduate education. Recently, the National Research Council (NRC) created a Committee on Enhancing the Master's Degree in the Natural Sciences. (N.B. The Team Chair is chairman of the CGS PSM Advisory Council and a member of the NRC Committee.) This type of master's program would appear to be a natural vehicle for the further development of graduate education in RIT. We suggest that RIT investigate this possibility. Further information is available on the CGS Web site and in the report, *Professionalizing Graduate Education: The Master's Degree in the Marketplace*, Judith Glazer-Raymo, ASHE Higher Education Report: Volume 31, No. 4, 2005.

Standard 12: General Education

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

The career-preparation emphasis of RIT programs underscores the complementary and cross-cutting importance of general education for students. This seems particularly evident for communications and analytical skills, both important for career preparation and developed through both majors and general education. The greater math and science requirements within general education for BS students makes sense and reinforces the general education-major linkage for those students.

Progress has been made on general education at RIT, although it remains a work in progress. Under the broad umbrella of the Provost's Directive for Undergraduate Curriculum Review and Revision and involving a General Education Course Review, changes in the college curricular parameters appear to provide greater breadth and flexibility of education, combining general education with open electives, facilitating the acquisition of

selected depth outside the major through concentrations and minors, and expanding the delivery of general education from the College of Science and the College of Liberal Arts to other Colleges from which additional courses can be and have been approved. Such expansion is important for creating Institute-wide ownership of general education and the kind of mutual reinforcement of general education and major curricula envisioned by Standard 12. Additional support for that mutual reinforcement and for Institute-wide involvement in general education comes via student learning communities, another recent innovation that appears to be well-received by faculty, staff, and students.

The nature of general education and how it meshes with the wide array of majors is clearly displayed in the undergraduate bulletin, which provides tables showing four-year patterns of coursework alongside textual descriptions. The general education requirements themselves are also described clearly in the bulletin. The Self Study recommendation for greater clarity in connecting general education and majors suggests a problem in communicating the relevance of general education to students, and progress in the assessment of general education should yield data and insights to alleviate such a concern.

The Team agrees with the Self Study recommendation to make consideration of ethics, values, and diversity more prominent in communication about and within general education courses. As discussed elsewhere, treatment of diversity needs to be grounded in a fuller consideration of what diversity means to and at RIT. The special presence of significant numbers of deaf and hearing-impaired students introduces a kind of diversity rare elsewhere. Curricular attention to diversity may succeed most easily when it is part of everyday life outside and inside the classroom.

The Team learned in its visit that one recent idea, a requirement for all students to be competent in two languages, will not advance. It notes, however, that language teaching and learning capability has been growing, and of course languages relate to the Global Society interests expressed by RIT. If study abroad increases, it may provide some new avenues by which students might satisfy general education requirements.

As is discussed in connection with Standard 14, work has been done and continues to be done at the conceptual level to articulate a broad set of learning outcomes that, with some overlap, comport with the general education goals outlined in Standard 12 as well as the requirements of New York State. These learning outcomes are being associated with approaches to assessment, largely (at this writing) at the course level. The Team agrees with the Self Study recommendation that a process for rigorous assessment and oversight of general education curricula is needed (see discussion of Standard 14).

RIT has dedicated considerable resources toward greater refinement of general education goals and objectives. This work has proceeded in the last two years and seems to be approaching some critical junctures that will be important for institution-wide understanding of general education goals and objectives. There are now several sources of viable general education goals and objectives that would benefit from healthy cross-comparisons and dialogue. It is clear that RIT is on an informed pathway, and the team recognized this, lauds it, and encourages continued progress.

- *Recommendation*

It is recommended that a mechanism to settle on explicit Institute-wide General Education goals and objectives be identified as soon as possible. Many committees, task forces, and other entities have been working hard toward this development for some time. These groups

need to communicate directly with one another to arrive at agreed upon student learning objectives upon which a coherent assessment process can be built.

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

The findings below are based on a site visit by Team member Yvonne Captain to RIT's facility at PUCMM in the Dominican Republic. There she observed a class in session, interviewed students in the program, including one graduate and one current student, and interviewed staff and administrators. In addition, she reviewed other overseas programs through documents provided, and visited the language laboratory and interviewed campus administrators during the Team visit.

- The various programs meet both the goals of RIT and the broader standards required for education in a global context.
- In most cases, the strategic planning was solid for related educational activities, including experiential learning, distance learning, and international programs.
- All those involved are very committed to the success of the individual programs.
- With regard to international programs, there remains some difficulty in getting a handle on the entire international "focus" of RIT, and its role within the institutional theme of Global Society. This is a concern that is evidenced in, among other places, the organization chart, which shows some programs under Academic Affairs, some under Enrollment Management and some that do not appear at all. There is not yet a clear institutional focus for these programs.
- *Suggestion*

As RIT continues to expand its international programs as well as the number of students involved, it should consider creating a new office that would serve as the umbrella office under which all international initiatives are based. This office need not compromise the individuality of each program. Instead, it could enhance and support existing entities and create greater synergies among those programs as well as future programs. For example, many educational institutions have a Chief International Officer who is usually housed in Academic Affairs. However, given the special nature of RIT, this position and office might be housed elsewhere.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2006) *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*, "Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher educational goals." (p.63).

RIT is on a quest to achieve demonstration of this most difficult standard. The institutional Self Study and many other documents demonstrate sustained attention over time to this effort. However, the progress to date, while marking important headway and considerable discussion, has resulted in uneven and halting progress. At this time, the most impressive assessment progress can be observed in specific majors, in NTID, and in some support services, such as the co-op and internship programs.

The assessment exemplars currently present can be attributed to specific characteristics of the programs and their external constituents. RIT has a unique portfolio of applied and technical academic programs with memberships in various external professional accrediting bodies. Through the structure and support provided through professional accreditation practices, RIT has several outstanding assessment programs that can be observed across the College of Business programs via AACSB accreditation and the engineering programs via ABET. The co-op and internship programs also provide outstanding assessment of the process and outcomes of student experiences working closely with external partners. All of these exemplar programs could serve as models for the rest of the campus where sustained effort and guidance has not been invested.

However, the presence and examples of these models alone will not be sufficient. RIT needs to invest in several important areas to generate an assessment program worthy of this unique institution. Several challenges need to be addressed for RIT to fully meet Standard 14.

The assessment model currently in place is largely departmentally based and relies largely on course-embedded data collection methods, for both General Education and academic majors. The Task Force has provided leadership and guidance, but the actual work is expected to be conducted and reported at the departmental level. Such a strategy places huge demands on departments, and this load is not evenly distributed across colleges and departments. The inevitable result is tremendous variability in assessment quality and engagement.

This may lead to several important resource problems as well as misconceptions about the nature of General Education. It may foster the belief that general education is granular in nature, rather than Institute-wide. There is already a widespread conception that General Education is the primary responsibility of only two of the Institute's eight colleges. The reporting responsibilities clearly reside with the Colleges of Science and Liberal Arts, but this perceived locus of responsibility does not provide the opportunity to truly view and appreciate the contributions that must be made by the entire campus community toward student development across the General Education goals that are under construction. The complexity of collegiate learning goals can become an isolated and departmental event that insulates the department conducting the analysis from their colleagues across a vibrant community.

There is evidence that RIT is working toward a more global conceptualization of what undergraduate education is and how the entire community contributes to student development. Indeed, it became apparent to the Team that RIT espouses a general education philosophy that spans all four years of the academic career. This philosophy speaks to a campus-wide general education initiative, not a decentralized and under-funded enterprise.

The Middle States standards require that all degrees, not departments, be clearly defined in regard to entry-level requirements and in terms of student achievement necessary for graduation. Institutional expectations for learning and attainment are developed and widely shared, embedded in the standards faculty use to evaluate student work, and applied to review of program quality. The institution is encouraged to carefully delineate each

academic program within departments for individual scrutiny and review. It is not uncommon for weaker programs to be ‘smuggled’ through a review process via the presence of a stronger departmental sister program. On a related note, each graduate program needs to receive the same attention that an undergraduate program would have mandated. The purpose of the program review is to provide diagnosis for academic program improvement and occasionally program elimination to reallocate resources where they can best be used. This concern also speaks to the larger infrastructure issue that would lead to student learning assessment and program review findings being directed to a decision making process that is linked to budget.

Finally, a decentralized department-based assessment system must presume a campus-wide professional level of assessment skills and interests. It is not surprising that the programs that have provided the most compelling assessment evidence come from programs with existing specialized professional accreditation demands. Many of these disciplines have faculty members with well developed methodological and inquiry based skills. Professional accrediting bodies also provide the structure, guidance, and other direct incentives for strong assessment programs. Thus, many accredited programs produce exemplary assessment models. Many other disciplines and programs are less known for these dispositions, abilities, and interests. They will need advice and counsel. Without access to professional consultation, the burden of providing assessment of general education and the academic program can become overwhelming and will likely result in resentment and hostility.

Two other related issues will provide continuing challenges to a departmentally-based assessment model. New faculty hires have and will continue to change each department. Thus, continuous communication about the role and importance of assessment at the hiring stage and beyond will be needed to nurture progress. Secondly, the presence of part-time and adjunct faculty members will render the development of a decentralized and truly engaged assessment culture more challenging.

- *Suggestions*

Consider a more centralized general education assessment program and reporting structure that emphasizes the campus community’s ownership of general education.

Provide greater support and consultation for academic programs with their assessment designs, implementation, analysis, and reporting.

Provide a means for communicating on a consistent basis the importance of student learning and its assessment for program quality. This should be an intellectually stimulating activity. If done with quality in mind, good assessment can be a scholarly opportunity. It also fosters the ‘Culture of Caring’ about students that RIT is already well known for.

- *Recommendations*

The Team recommends that an organizational infrastructure and sufficient resources be allocated to provide sustainable progress in the development of a student learning assessment model, a program review process, and the linkage of findings to decision making and budget allocation and reallocation. For example, a standing committee might be formed to guide and monitor general education assessment. A separate committee might guide and monitor assessment for undergraduate and graduate academic programs. These standing committees would have Institute-wide representation that would foster greater

understanding of assessment practice and identification of strong models. Once a credible assessment system is in place, assessment results and use of assessment findings could become an integral part of the academic program review process. The program review process could be used to help RIT make informed decisions about resource allocation and reallocation.

We further recommend that leadership and expertise in assessment be recruited, to coordinate the several assessment efforts into a more unified entity with one leader that is advised by a campus-wide council. This would centralize the assessment function and provide greater visibility and communication.

VI. Summary of Recommendations for Continuing Compliance and Requirements

The Team recommends that the Commission reaffirm the accreditation of the Rochester Institute of Technology.

The further recommendations stated in the previous pages can be distilled into one overarching recommendation. Accountability and performance assessment, both institutional assessment and student learning assessment, have become one of the central themes in American higher education. RIT has made substantial progress toward the goals expressed in Middle States' Standards 7 and 14, but much remains to be done. We recommend that RIT work assiduously and aggressively to reach those goals. Specifically, we recommend that RIT move rapidly to define explicit student learning outcomes for all its programs, including most particularly general education, and that it institutionalize assessment responsibility and expertise in an Institute-wide administrative organization that can and will support and encourage the development and application of assessment tools by all of RIT's colleges and administrative units. Just how this organization might link the functions of institutional research and assessment, and student learning assessment, we leave to the wisdom of RIT's leaders.

We further recommend that this effort be made the focus of RIT's next Periodic Review Report in 2012.

Finally, the Team generally supports and concurs in the recommendations contained in RIT's Self Study Report (pps. 74-79). There's a lot of work there. We wish the RIT community well.