



October 29, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

As we start the last phase of in person instruction this semester, I continue to be impressed with how well RIT is doing controlling the spread of COVID 19. Thank you as always for the part you play each day in this success. At the same time, I am also concerned about how we are all handling these disruptions in our lives. I have heard from faculty, staff, and students about the deep fatigue many of us are feeling. Work-life balance is especially challenging right now, as is the cumulative impact of a compressed semester without a fall break, the range of new teaching modalities required to maintain instruction, and the increased staff workload supporting students and faculty under these circumstances. I am writing today to encourage you to identify ways you can lessen the load you are feeling and to do the same for our students.

The pressure of classes is one of the main contributors to both student and faculty stress. I looked at whether it would be possible to declare a recharge day for the campus as a whole but, at this late date, it would have caused significant disruption for many classes. Instead, during the final four weeks of instruction, I encourage faculty to identify opportunities to reduce your own workload and that of your students. Some faculty members are already taking this step by eliminating material they consider optional, reducing the number of assignments, or scheduling recharge days for their classes. Any of these options can provide both faculty and students with an opportunity to catch up and restore some energy.

Pressures on staff and administration are different but I am sensing similar concerns. Here, as well, I encourage staff and supervisors to collaborate and identify ways to lighten the load and reduce levels of stress. Some groups have cancelled regular meetings, created practices such as “no email Fridays”, or delayed work on projects unrelated to direct engagement with students or faculty. Staff and administrators also have the option to use vacation time to schedule a day or two of rest. I typically find that my own energy and productivity rebounds if I allow myself a break.

The Spring Semester Academic Planning Committee has developed two thoughtful guidance documents, Faculty and Staff Workload Considerations and Student Workload Considerations (<https://www.rit.edu/provost/communications>), aimed at helping all of us cope with the stress associated with this semester and to plan for a less stressful spring. I support the ideas in these documents and hope you find them useful.

The mental and physical health of our community is of paramount importance and this pandemic puts us at risk in both areas. To support student success, I invite you to assess the student experience with an eye towards looking for ways to lighten the student workload. To support faculty and staff success, I invite you to think of ways that can lighten your own load and to make work-life balance a priority. I especially encourage supervisors to initiate these discussions with employees and to work together to identify ways to reduce stress and workload.

My thanks and very best wishes to all of you as we move towards the close of this semester.

Sincerely,

Ellen Granberg, Ph.D.
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs