

20 August 2021

Dear Academic Affairs Colleagues,

It is a pleasure to welcome you back to campus. I hope you had a great summer and found time to rest and recharge. It's hard to believe how quickly this fall has arrived with students moving into housing and classes about to commence.

Many of us have been working differently since March of 2020. I am incredibly proud of how we rallied to support our students and each other during a challenging time. We weathered a storm like no other and came back strong. My thanks and appreciation to the faculty and staff who continued to work on campus throughout the past year as well as those who created new places and ways to work. I am looking forward to a fall semester that more closely resembles our typical campus environment, particularly as we welcome the largest first year class in RIT's history. Below is information about COVID -19 and academic affairs that will help us all start the semester strong.

### COVID-19 Updates

- I am very encouraged by the high rates of vaccination among faculty, staff and students as vaccination remains the best way to protect the health and safety of our community. Currently, the student vaccination rate is about 95% and the faculty/staff rate is nearly 92%. With the uptick of the Delta variant, however, the university is taking the added precaution of requiring all faculty, staff, and students, regardless of vaccination status, to wear masks when indoors in the presence of others. **Vaccinated faculty, however, may remove their masks while teaching if they remain behind a plastic barrier.** Guided by community health, we will reconsider this mandate as more people become vaccinated and the rates of infection drop. For details, [click here](#).
- Physical distancing is no longer required and classrooms are back to nearly 100% occupancy. Most classes have been scheduled to allow some space for those who wish to physically distance.
- COVID-19 has taught us all some important lessons. Among those, if you don't feel well, please stay home. Faculty and staff should notify their supervisors that they will be absent and consult with their physicians as needed. Please refer to the [RIT Safety Plan](#) for guidance if you have or you think you have been exposed to COVID-19.

- Unvaccinated individuals will be tested weekly throughout the semester and will need to quarantine after any high risk exposure. Student testing will be managed by the Student Health Center. Human Resources will share details about testing with impacted employees.
- Student accommodation requests for remote access due to COVID-19 quarantine and isolation (Q/I) are expected to be much lower than last academic year but all faculty and staff should be prepared to work with students placed in either of these statuses. Below is additional detail about this process:
  - Individuals testing positive will need to isolate based on CDC guidance.
  - Faculty are asked to work with students in Q/I to allow them to maintain progress in their courses. Options may include allowing a student to participate via Zoom, recording lectures, uploading content to myCourses or other form of electronic distribution (i.e. dropbox, email presentations or notes, etc.) or alternative assessment methods, among others. Each faculty member should determine the most appropriate method for her/his/their courses. Other disability-related accommodations will be managed by the [Disability Services Office](#).
  - Faculty will be notified by email when students in their classes are placed in quarantine or isolation as well as when they are released from quarantine or isolation. Please be alert to these notifications which will come from the Office of the Registrar.
- Faculty may request confirmation of a student's Q/I status. Students receive a message through the myLife portal advising them of their need to isolate or quarantine. Students will also receive a message when they are released from quarantine or isolation. Faculty may ask to see these messages but may not request additional information about the student's medical situation.
- If a student requests support for Q/I but does not have the myLife status letter, please direct them to the Student Health Center for a review of their COVID positivity or exposure. While faculty do not need to accommodate Q/I status from other sources, all members of the RIT community are asked to stay home in the event of illness. The RIT Student Health Center can evaluate illness but does not provide excuse notes.

For up-to-date information, please visit the [RIT Ready website](#), and the [RIT Safety Plan](#). Common FAQs can be found here.

### **Academic Affairs Updates**

- Last year the Faculty Senate passed and President Munson and I approved two important policy revisions. Both the course withdrawal policy, [D05.0 – Grades](#), and the academic probation and suspension policy, [D05.1 – Academic Actions and](#)

[Recognitions](#), have been revised. The revisions are effective with the start of the 2021-2022 academic year.

- The course withdrawal policy, D05.0, section IV, applies only to undergraduate students and requires students, including part-time students, who wish to withdraw below 12 credit hours to request approval from academic department leadership in their major. Situations will vary, and decisions will be based on each student's circumstances. It is possible that some requests may not be granted, and faculty are encouraged to advise students who are experiencing difficulty to talk with them, access support resources, and check in with their advisors before suggesting course withdraw.
- The revisions to the academic action/probation policy, D05.1, section II, also apply only to undergraduate students. Academic probations will be limited to two over the course of a student's degree program, and the minimum academic suspension will be one term rather than a full year. Students on academic probation or deferred suspension will work with their department to create an academic success plan.
- Some personnel updates:
  - On September 1, [Dr. Anna Stenport](#) will join RIT as the next dean of the College of Liberal Arts. I look forward to working with her and to her leadership within the college. I also thank Dr. LaVerne McQuiller Williams for her service as interim dean over the past year. The college is well-positioned for its next chapter due to her efforts.
  - A search is wrapping up for the next associate provost for Faculty Affairs. I anticipate an announcement about this position in very soon. Many thanks to Dr. Christine Licata, who has been serving as interim associate provost for the past few months and to the search committee for their excellent work.
  - Dr. Anne Haake, dean of GCCIS, [announced that she will step down as dean](#) at the end of this academic year. The search for the next dean of GCCIS will begin soon. Special thank you to Anne for her leadership of GCCIS.
- It is hard to miss the progress that has been made on the SHED. Construction remains on track for a Fall 2023 open.
  - The SHED project includes a significant renovation to the Wallace Center. This work is well underway and most of the building (except Java Wally's, which remains open) is closed to non-library employees. Many library services have been relocated to the Ritter Ice Arena for the duration of the construction. For further information and updates, please [click here](#).
  - Under the leadership of Chris Licata, multiple teams of faculty, staff, and administrators have begun comprehensive planning for the SHED. Work

includes planning for the use of the 27 new active learning classrooms, creation of pedagogical resources to support faculty working in these new spaces, identification of current classrooms that can be returned to colleges to use for research, and planning for the use of thematic SHED spaces such as the new Construct, vehicle team spaces, and performing arts facilities. More information about this planning process, including opportunities to provide input, will be coming soon.

- After thorough review of its mission and goals, the faculty approved changes to the [Charter of Academic Governance](#). Among the changes – the Academic Senate is transitioning to a Faculty Senate to better reflect its focus on academic governance and create parity with the other governance groups. The School for Individualized Study has also been designated as a college for governance purposes.
- Provost' Office (Half) Hours have resumed. Upcoming sessions are scheduled as noted below and all are welcome. Please [REGISTER HERE](#).
  - August 24, 2021 12:00 PM
  - September 2, 2021 11:30 AM
  - September 7, 2021 12:00 PM

Notes and presentations from each session will be added to the [Office of the Provost website](#). Future sessions will be scheduled as needed.

It has been a busy summer. As always, I welcome your questions or comments. Feel free to contact me at [provost@rit.edu](mailto:provost@rit.edu). Best wishes for a rewarding fall semester!

Sincerely,

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