

April 23, 2021

Submitted by: Spring/Fall Academic Planning Committee

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Teaching and Learning Environment Subcommittee

Co-Chairs: **Joe Lanzafame and Ian Webber**

Spring/Fall Planning Committee:

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- **André Hudson**, School Head, Thomas H. Gosnell School of Life Sciences, COS
- **Chris Jackson**, Sr. Associate Dean, CAD
- **Joe Loffredo**, Registrar
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- **Jim Myers**, Associate Provost for International Education and Global Programs
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- **Tomicka Wagstaff**, Assistant Vice President for Academic Access Success, Division of Diversity and Inclusion
- **Anne Wahl**, Assistant Provost
- **Ian Webber**, Interim Director of ILI

- Staff Council Representative
 - **Cathy Clarke**, Chair, Staff Council, Web Developer-Programmer, NTID

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- Graduate Student Representative
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- Academic Senate Representatives
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 - **Clyde Hull**, Professor, Management, SCB, (Returning)
 - **Elizabeth Kronfield**, Professor, School of Art, CAD
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 - **Kristen Waterstram-Rich**, Professor, CHST

RIT Teaching and Learning Environment Recommendations

- **Michael Yacci**, Professor and Associate Dean, GCCIS
- Council of Chairs Representative
 - **James Lee**, Department Chair Electrical, Computer, and Telecommunications Engineering Technology, CET
- Faculty Nominees from Deans
 - **Peter Boyd**, Lecturer, SOIS
 - **Carlos Diaz-Acosta**, Associate Professor, Packaging Science, CET
 - **Kim Kurz**, Associate Professor, ASLIE, NTID
 - **Todd Pagano**, Associate Dean for Teaching and Scholarship, NTID
 - **Thomas Trabold**, Professor and Department Head, Golisano Institute for Sustainability
 - **Tracy Worrell**, Professor, School of Communication, COLA
- Administrative Support: **Karel Shapiro**, Administrative Assistant, Office of Vice Provost

***Note:** A subcommittee drawn from the Spring/Fall Academic Planning Committee prepared the initial recommendations and report on proposed recommendations for the teaching and learning environment post COVID which were then reviewed, discussed and modified based on consultation with the full spring/fall planning group.

Subcommittee Co-Chairs: **Joe Lanzafame and Ian Webber**

- Subcommittee Members:
 - **Peter Boyd**, Lecturer, SOIS
 - **Carlos Diaz-Acosta**, Associate Professor, Packaging Science, CET
 - **Jim Myers**, Associate Provost for International Education and Global Programs
 - **Todd Pagano**, Associate Dean for Teaching and Scholarship, NTID
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RIT Teaching and Learning Environment Recommendations

Charge

The Teaching and Learning Subcommittee was charged to examine the teaching and learning environment during the pandemic and offer recommendations for ways RIT can emerge and offer an educational experience informed by the best instructional strategies and academic classroom environment practices implemented in AY2020-21.

This subcommittee focused on the specific teaching and learning innovations, ideas, or initiatives.

Overview

The pandemic and associated health and safety measures forced faculty to adapt courses initially to a fully remote environment, followed by two semesters of an environment which required additional variations on course modalities and additional flexibility. The workload on faculty to accomplish this was enormous. Some of the course adaptations that have emerged have the potential for expanding and enhancing the educational options for students at RIT. At the same time, it should not be assumed that just because faculty pivoted as needed that the same level of online, blended, and flex options should be the next normal. Course modalities need to be carefully analyzed and strategically determined.

The adaptive innovations that helped RIT manage these difficult times have not been fully analyzed to determine their effectiveness, efficacy, and sustainability. The potential for enhancing the educational experience exists, but further work is needed to better understand what teaching/learning innovative strategies might best be recommended for continuance and what the scale and scope of this might look like in the longer term for RIT.

The campus community has seen an evolution of student expectations related to course delivery and campus support which must be entered into the equation. Faculty need to be the driver of course delivery change and are critical partners in determining what the next normal for RIT should include.

This committee is recommending three areas that are worth further consideration. The goals within each area are to explore future possibilities, understand the impact on faculty, and align with the needs of learners. Consideration must be given to current and future learners and faculty. The costs and benefits must be examined where data are available. The proposed areas include:

1. Course Flexibility
2. Student Success and Community Building
3. RIT Learning Spaces

1. Course Flexibility

During the pandemic, faculty determined if they wished to offer a course in different modalities. It is fair to say that this was accomplished with little planning time and with little opportunity to redesign a particular course with the help of an instructional designer. This type of course design is labor intensive and other institutions utilize it strategically for specific courses and/or specific student cohorts.

Under the current climate, it is challenging to fully understand the experiences of faculty and students who are teaching and learning using flexible options because COVID protocols have required that course adaptations be created that might be quite different were faculty and students operating within a more traditional setting. There are best practices in the field that need to be studied in conjunction with any recommendations for future approaches. The body of knowledge related to flexible course delivery includes using online materials, in-person/virtual instruction, or a combination of all. Flexibility also includes providing options of methods and materials for students to complete learning outcomes and course requirements. This may include a variety of techniques and instructional approaches. Faculty are responsible for the curriculum and provide disciplinary expertise and teaching experience that inform pedagogical practices to support student learning.

To further explore the scale and scope of flexible course delivery in the future, we recommend the following:

Recommendation 1: In close partnership with the appropriate stakeholders, create a task force to fully explore the future of course flexibility at RIT.

The group should consider providing faculty and students, who have experience with course flexibility, an opportunity to share their experiences and suggest possible options for RIT to consider in the future. This might entail conducting surveys and focus groups when faculty and students have more time to creatively imagine the future and reflect on their past experiences with different course flexibility characteristics. In addition, benchmarking institutions that utilize flexible options and inventorying best practices can provide a foundation for future recommendations.

Care should be taken by the task force to analyze accompanying support that may be needed when and if flexible delivery models are adopted. This includes faculty workload, technology etc.

It is also suggested that consideration be given by the task force to the following additional five factors:

Consideration 1: Strategic Approaches

There appears to be a need to adopt a strategic approach in determining when to add online options which can provide students with additional flexibility. This type of strategic thinking is best accomplished as a partnership with faculty and the RIT community considering all aspects of the online environment. This includes faculty workload, availability of instructional design resources, and courses where such flexibility may have the greatest impact; for example, large course sections; global, non-traditional and campus-based students.

Consideration 2: New strategies and resources for development and use of blended courses.

Examining where online, blended, and flexible course designs can have the greatest educational value is important. During the pandemic, these options were driven by necessity and often viewed as temporary measures. Employing the options effectively will require some re-thinking and re-imagining.

Consideration 3: Investigate and propose a system that would provide students with an overview of course delivery options at the time of registration.

This information should focus on helping students select courses that best suit their individual situations and be easily understood by everyone involved in scheduling courses. This organization of information should also provide faculty with flexibility to include additional course delivery information, as appropriate.

Consideration 4: Utilize data to inform recommendations related to the future mix of course modalities.

As the task force assesses the future course modality mix, it should include internal university data and external data from schools with experience in flexible course delivery and modalities.

This data could include:

1. Faculty experience and preference.
2. Information on the preferences of potential and current students.
3. Admissions and recruitment data including demographic changes.
4. Benchmarking to schools with experience in alternative modalities such as Hyflex, online programs and others.

Consideration 5: Continue to provide resources to help faculty design courses.

The ILI will continue to develop and offer programming to help faculty design and deliver courses that are resilient to continuity disruptions.

2. Student Success and Community Building

Recommendation 2: Provide support to faculty on additional ways to build student engagement into the teaching/learning space. Student engagement has been a traditional high point for RIT and demonstrated in positive student feedback on courses.

The ILI should develop programming to promote community engagement and partner with other units to create an event series that includes discussions and case studies on how RIT faculty are promoting community and wellbeing with their courses. For example, many students appreciated the shift to online office hours over the past academic year. Finding ways to continue virtual office hours and investigating other options to create genuine feedback loops can contribute to helping students succeed and can promote a sense of community,

Recommendation 3: Review the support/culture that will help incoming students be successful in managing flexible and online course options. Look at the use of technology, time management, and cultural issues related to campus life and learning in a pandemic.

Recommendation 4: Continue to invest in supporting faculty research into teaching and learning strategies. The ILI should help create faculty learning communities around teaching and learning scholarship and could partner with faculty to advance teaching and learning scholarship at RIT.

3. RIT Learnings Spaces

During the pandemic stop-gap technology solutions were put into place to help faculty teach remotely from their classrooms and homes. RIT will need robust technology to support this type of teaching into the future. Academic Affairs will need to plan and partner with ITS to determine the right mix of technologies across the campus to ensure and support effective teaching and learning.

Recommendation 5: Continue to invest in improvements in university classrooms to enable faculty to more easily implement flexible course options.

RIT Teaching and Learning Environment Recommendations

Add a process to determine how many web conferencing enabled classrooms will be needed in the future and create a roadmap and funding plan to help upgrade older spaces that are not impacted by the addition of new SHED classrooms.

In addition to web conferencing spaces, a new review into the use of lecture capture technology should be conducted. Processes to help colleges outfit their classroom spaces with web conferencing technology should be considered.

Recommendation 6: Provide more details on classroom capabilities to help schedule classes. Have the ILI and the Registrar's Office create a set of descriptions and codes to describe university learning spaces. This would enhance the FEAT/TYPE field in SIS, adding more types than P&G. Review other fields that could help provide more clarity for scheduling officers on the type of and technology within classrooms.

Recommendation 7: Revise and run the traditional Academic Technology survey conducted by the ILI. Use survey results to enhance the academic technology footprint to meet the demands of existing and emerging teaching modes.

The ILI paused the biennial Academic Technology survey during the pandemic. The ILI should begin running this survey again in AY2021-22. The ILI Advisory Council will assist the ILI in incorporating new questions based on what was discovered during the pandemic. The council will also aid the ILI in reviewing the results and conducting focus groups (if deemed necessary). The ILI Advisory Council will report out to the Academic Senate at the end of AY2021-22.