

MEMORANDUM

TO: RIT Strategic Plan Steering Committee
FR: James J. Winebrake, Ph.D., Dean, College of Liberal Arts
RE: Input for the Strategic Planning Process from the College of Liberal Arts
DT: March 3, 2014

1 Purpose

The *RIT Strategic Plan 2025* (herein, *SP2025*) provides an opportunity for RIT to continue to evolve into one of the top institutions of higher education in the country. The purpose of this memo is to articulate ways in which the College of Liberal Arts (COLA) can play an important role in this evolution.

More and more studies are emerging that demonstrate the value of a liberal arts education.¹ The liberal arts encourage critical thinking, communication, problem solving, ethical decision-making, creativity, and an appreciation for the global and social context in which we live – all elements that employers have identified as especially important in the workplace.² The liberal arts empower students to manage complexity, diversity, and change. Perhaps most importantly, the liberal arts develop a student's sense of personal, civic, and social responsibility – that is, the development of the “whole student.” In the dynamic world in which we live, we believe it is these characteristics of an RIT education, combined with excellent technical training, which will enable RIT students to achieve success in their personal and professional lives.

This memo provides input related to the mission, values, and strategic dimensions that the Strategic Plan Steering Committee (SPSC) is considering for *SP2025*. This input emerges primarily from COLA's most recent strategic plan, but also reflects new thinking about the changing nature of higher education and career-development in modern society. We hope the ideas presented herein resonate with the SPSC and the entire RIT community, and that the SPSC will find these ideas useful for their own planning process.

¹Humphreys, D., & Kelly, P. (2014). *How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment: A Report on Earnings and Long-Term Career Paths*, Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

² Hart Research Associates. (2013). It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success, *Liberal Education*, 99(2), Spring.

2 Mission and Core Values

COLA's mission statement is as follows:

The College of Liberal Arts encourages the creation, development, dissemination, and application of human knowledge in the arts, humanities and social sciences by promoting innovative teaching, scholarship and research, thus providing a comprehensive education for all RIT students both in its general education and professional/career-oriented undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

The College further strives to prepare students for a lifetime of personal growth and responsible citizenship in an increasingly technological and rapidly changing society by maintaining and promoting the intellectual climate on campus, contributing to students' awareness and understanding of diversity, and enhancing students' abilities to reason critically and communicate effectively.

This mission statement identifies elements that are critical for every student's RIT experience: an innovative and comprehensive education; skills for a lifetime of personal growth; responsible citizenship; an intellectually stimulating campus climate; awareness and understanding of diversity; critical thinking; and effective communication skills.

The SPSC should explicitly consider these essential elements of a comprehensive, career-oriented, 21st century education. The notion of a "career" is not the same today as it was even ten years ago – and we expect its meaning will undergo even further transformation in the coming decades. In fact, the SPSC recognizes in its vision statement the "shifting career landscape of the 21st century" and states the need to develop "leaders, innovators, boundary-crossers, and collaborators." The strategic planning process must identify the skills that are needed to create these "leaders, innovators, boundary-crossers, and collaborators." These outcomes are central to the liberal arts mission and are key goals of the General Education curriculum through which COLA engages every single RIT student.

Lastly, the mission statement proposed by the SPSC can benefit from recognizing the important non-technological degree programs across the campus that may be "technology-infused," but are not solely "technology degrees." Without this recognition, the mission statement does not take full advantage of the evolving and deepening nature of RIT's educational mission.

In addition to its mission statement, the SPSC should also consider the development of a set of values as part of SP2025. I thought it would be worthwhile to share our college's core values, which are stated as follows:

- *The College of Liberal Arts values a rigorous liberal arts education that encourages innovative experiential learning and active scholarship, through investments in the arts, humanities and social sciences.*
- *The College of Liberal Arts fosters the highest ethical standards in all of its work.*
- *The College of Liberal Arts values the educational and social benefits of diversity and global awareness. The College recruits students, faculty, and staff from a wide range of experiences, viewpoints, cultures, and backgrounds and all members of the College community are valued contributors to campus life.*

- *The College of Liberal Arts promotes an interdisciplinary and collaborative environment of openness and academic freedom.*
- *The College of Liberal Arts cultivates a working environment in which all staff and faculty are supported in their work, can develop and use their talents, and enjoy respect and recognition.*
- *The College of Liberal Arts values the active and meaningful participation of all members of the College community, assuring significant input in decisions that shape its destiny.*

3 Goals from Existing COLA Strategic Plan Areas

The SPSC has proposed a set of strategic “dimensions,” some of which overlap with our own COLA “goal areas”. Below I share a description of each of our goal areas, and provide some thoughts on how these goals may be integrated into SP2025.

3.1 Student Success

The preamble of our *Student Success* goal area reads:

The College of Liberal Arts values student success as a measure of the salience of its curriculum and the effectiveness of its teaching. Its outstanding faculty and support services will foster the best possible environment for student success. Student success will embody and excite community spirit among the colleges of the Institute. Through the rigorous scholarship of our student body the College will bring prestige to Rochester Institute of Technology.

The SPSC needs to be attentive to the varied ways in which we should define “student success.” Certainly, student success can be defined by measures such as job placement or salary metrics for recent graduates. Although quite important, we believe that reliance on these metrics alone is too limited. Student success needs to be measured more holistically: Has the student grown into a responsible adult who is cognizant of the meaning of citizenship and its responsibilities in a democratic society? Has the student obtained a certain level of agility in terms of career choices because of both the high quality technical training they received, as well as the ability to communicate, think critically, solve problems, and understand issues in their social and humanistic contexts? Has the student developed an appreciation for their role in the larger world with an understanding of diverse perspectives, cultures, and ethical norms? We encourage the SPSC to consider “student success” in this more broadly construed manner.

3.2 Curriculum

The SPSC identifies “curricular innovation and creativity” as another strategic dimension. COLA also has *Curriculum* as a central goal area in our strategic plan. Our preamble to that section reads:

The College of Liberal Arts at RIT is a unique asset that has the potential to contribute significantly to the future of the Institute. The foundation of this potential is curricular offerings that reflect the philosophy that a Liberal Arts education allows students to gain an understanding of human, social, cultural and environmental relationships, and encourages them to develop a critical and inquiring attitude, an appreciation for complexity and ambiguity, a respect for persons of different cultures, and a better

understanding of their self and their role in a complex world. This philosophy is found in both general education courses and professional degree programs of the College.

We encourage the SPSC to consider the development of the “whole student” in its discussions around curricular innovation and creativity. We would be particularly interested in seeing how new interdisciplinary degrees, double majors that combine technical and non-technical degrees, and minors in non-technical disciplines can be supported and encouraged under SP2025. A comprehensive set of degrees across all disciplines can help diversify our student body, thereby enhancing student success for all RIT students.

Moreover, as a college that engages with every RIT student through our delivery of the General Education curriculum, we urge the SPSC to acknowledge the role of liberal education in providing a context for students’ acquisition of technical expertise. The current draft of the mission for SP2025 emphasizes “career-enriching curricula,” and “applications” towards the goal of secure and successful “careers.” We believe that these career and applied goals must be undergirded by attention to the broader intellectual growth of the student. This foundational intellectual breadth is not captured in the current SPSC draft of the mission and vision.

3.3 Scholarship and Teaching

The SPSC identifies *Research Agenda* as another strategic dimension. In COLA, our related goal area is called “Scholarship and Teaching,” and we encourage the SPSC to explicitly address teaching in the strategic plan, as well as research and scholarship. The COLA preamble to this section reads:

Scholarship and teaching are integral to the development of the College because these are its two primary activities. Institute policy states, “While teaching is the foremost activity of the RIT faculty, faculty are expected to engage in significant scholarship as measured by external disciplinary and professional standards as acknowledged by department and program practices of faculty review.” It is important to keep in mind that our commitment to excellence in each of these areas affects the other; and, while they often operate in tandem it is necessary here to separate some of the issues by category; other issues are clearly intertwined. If the College is to be successful in continuing its excellence in teaching and scholarship, there needs to be a higher level of Institute support and financial resources.

The SPSC has identified the term “research agenda” to head this strategic dimension. It is not clear whether the SPSC intends to identify an agenda for the institute; but if so, how will that agenda be selected and to what end? We encourage the SPSC to keep in mind the value of a diversity of scholarship on campus. Any emphasis on research should be balanced with recognition of other forms of scholarly exploration and inquiry, including achievement in performing and visual arts, literary production, creativity, digital production, and other nontraditional forms of research and scholarship. The SPSC should consider the role of research- and scholarship-engaged faculty in the classroom as a way to integrate teaching into this strategic dimension.

3.4 Community

COLA includes *Community* as one goal area of its strategic plan. The SPSC has not addressed this category explicitly in the six strategic dimensions. We define our *Community* goal area as follows:

Community represents the overall shared identity and cohesiveness of the faculty, staff, and students in the College of Liberal Arts. This includes the areas of collaboration, socialization, support, and communication. A strong sense of community encourages respect among its members, and promotes higher morale, greater unity, and a more productive learning and work environment. As stated in the RIT Strategic Plan, a stronger sense of community will foster “improved student retention; loyal and committed alumni; increased productivity; increased scholarship; and improved teaching and increased diversity.”

The SPSC should consider the integration of community aspects into some of the other dimensions it is considering, or to identify *Community* as a strategic dimension unto itself. The current emphasis on “long-standing connections to industry” misses the broader impact that our graduates have had on national and international society; focusing exclusively on industry without recognition of community sells our institution short. Programs such as the *RIT University-Community Partnership Program* and the *Center for Public Safety Initiatives* represent two examples where RIT is closely engaged with external stakeholders who are not industry focused, and countless other examples exist. *SP2025* should also consider ways to build and reinforce a strong internal “community” of faculty, students, and staff through shared governance, social functions, and facilities that create opportunities for community building.

3.5 Facilities

One of the most pressing problems at RIT is the availability of space for research, teaching, performances, community gatherings, etc. We all know space is a precious commodity at RIT. Yet, a lack of adequate space may pose the greatest threat to achieving all that we want to achieve. In our COLA Strategic Plan, we discuss our facilities goals as follows:

In order for the College of Liberal Arts to play the significant role contemplated in the Institute Strategic Plan, resources must be allocated to the College to enhance facilities conducive to teaching, learning, scholarship, and student success...For the College, growth of scholarship among faculty and students is contingent upon appropriate facilities (including laboratories, a performing arts center, appropriately configured dedicated classrooms with appropriate technology, and meeting spaces for faculty and students).

We believe the SPSC needs to place facilities and space issues front and center in *SP2025*. In many areas across campus, technology is outdated; classrooms need upgrading; faculty offices and furniture need to be replaced; and teaching and research labs needs to be constructed. If our “advanced educational technology” (as identified in the vision) is a true characteristic of the RIT brand, then investment in and accessibility to this technology is needed for all faculty, staff and students.

3.6 Shared Governance

COLA identifies explicitly the important role for shared governance in its strategic plan. It is not clear whether this characteristic will emerge in *SP2025*, but shared governance has been a hallmark of the current administration and is important for the ultimate success of the new plan’s implementation. In COLA we define shared governance as follows:

Shared governance refers to shared responsibility and cooperative action among faculty, staff, administration and students. It fosters regular exchanges of information and opinion, consultation, reflection, mediation, and compromise. It is thus imperative that

shared governance be structured in such a way that it incorporates the views of faculty, staff, administration and students at all levels of decision-making.

If not included already, we would urge the SPSC to include the role of shared governance in the implementation of *SP2025*.

4 Additional Goals: RIT Strategic Plan Dimensions

In addition to the goals mentioned above, over the past three years COLA has focused on three additional initiatives that were implemented after our strategic plan was put into place. These initiatives focus on: interdisciplinary curricula and research; international education; and diversity and inclusiveness.

4.1 Interdisciplinary Curricula and Research

COLA believes strongly in supporting innovative interdisciplinary curricula and research. Over the past two years, COLA has initiated “research mixers” with other colleges; proposed interdisciplinary concept papers for new degrees in collaboration with departments outside our college; worked with the Office of the Vice President of Research to provide seed funding for faculty engaged in collaborative research proposal development; initiated flexible policies for team-taught courses; and formulated policies and procedures to allow for a sustainable model of faculty affiliations across academic units in the institute. Most recently, COLA has established a *Task Force on Interdisciplinary Programming* that is identifying administrative structures to support interdisciplinary research and teaching. Among its ongoing tasks, this Task Force has reached out to academic units across the institute, finding areas of existing collaboration as well as identifying obstacles. This broad outreach and cultivation of synergy ought to characterize *SP2025* as well.

4.2 Expanding International Education (Global Engagement)

Over the past few years, COLA has placed increasing emphasis on international education, and we believe that international education must be a central theme in *SP2025*. In COLA, we established an *International Education Committee* that is charged with supporting a variety of faculty led international education activities. This committee has provided valuable services including developing our international education mission statement (available upon request), formulating guidelines for faculty led education abroad (FLEA) programs, and managing a proposal process whereby faculty can request funds to help develop international education courses. We also have initiated partnerships with universities in Germany, Japan, and Sweden; and we are looking to expand those partnerships to other countries over the next few years.

COLA is also home to dozens of faculty with extensive regional expertise and active overseas research agendas. These faculty bring this expertise to bear on curriculum development, and it is from this curriculum that RIT international programming should emerge. For example, built on this strong foundation of faculty expertise, COLA offers a B.S. degree in *International and Global Studies* – the only program at RIT that *requires* every student to complete an international experience and to undergo intensive language training in at least one foreign language.

Lastly, we believe that every RIT student who would like to have an international education experience should have one. This requires resources to help students who are unable to afford

the additional costs that come with these international experiences. We encourage the SPSC to consider strongly the role of resources in the *Global Engagement* strategic dimension.

4.3 Diversity and Inclusiveness

Enhancing diversity and inclusiveness has become an explicit and intentional goal of our college. We achieve this goal not only by diversifying our faculty and student body, but also by offering curricula and conducting scholarship in areas that expose students to important issues of diversity and inclusiveness. Our research and coursework cover a wide span of activities ranging from disability studies, to a minor in *Women's and Gender Studies*, to specific courses on race, religion, and politics. We encourage the SPSC to think broadly about diversity and to recognize the role that the integration of curricula, scholarship, and personnel can play in enhancing diversity on campus.

5 Conclusion

COLA is prepared to work hard to support the development and implementation of *SP2025*. We believe COLA has an important role to play in RIT's future, and we look forward to working with the SPSC, the Task Force groups, and other governance bodies to provide input throughout the planning process.

We hope that the SPSC will have further discussions around some of the key ideas and topics discussed in this memo, including: the meaning of a career-oriented education in the 21st century; the role of curriculum, teaching, and scholarship as central elements of the strategic plan; the importance of interdisciplinary and international education; the commitment to diversity and inclusiveness; and the importance of faculty and staff support and appropriate facilities to support all *SP2025* areas.

If the SPSC has any questions about this memo or our vision of the larger role that liberal arts can play in RIT's continuing evolution, please let me know.