

# RIT Strategic Plan 2025

## Organizational Agility Task Force Final Report

Respectfully submitted, May 22, 2014

### Task force Members:

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- Kathryn Schmitz, National Technical Institute for the Deaf
- Lauren Shields, Staff Council
- Kim Slusser, Office of Development
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Process:**

The diverse membership of the task force represented a cross-section of the Institute. In mid-February task force chairs were identified by the Strategic Planning Steering Committee. After accepting the charge, the co-chairs assembled their committees in collaboration with representatives of the Steering Committee. The 26-member task force began to meet in Mid-March, and continued to do so weekly for two hours through the end of the semester. In addition, the co-chairs met weekly to collate and coordinate activities. Prior to these meetings, the task force co-chairs met with both the Vice President of Finance and the Vice President of Academic Affairs to discuss their thoughts on the chief barriers to organizational agility. After submitting our Table A documents at the end of April, the committee divided into five research subgroups based on the key themes discussed in Table A: Identity, Collaboration, Flexibility, Transparency and Community. These subgroups undertook independent activities to gather information and materials from relevant sources to inform our final report. The Flexibility and Transparency Committee was able to call a meeting of several of the Deans in order to discuss the strengths and shortcomings of the existing budget process. After 2 ½ weeks, the task force resumed meeting as a whole, developing a draft of the final report and discussing revisions in person and online.

### **Goals:**

By 2025, we envision a university that is fundamentally reorganized and streamlined around our vision and mission. Our chief aim is to see half our students graduating with multidisciplinary, hybrid degrees. In addition, we expect that reorganization will reduce the total number of colleges by roughly half. Finally, we envision a budget process and costing model that reflects our vision by rewarding savings and incentivizing activities that cross disciplinary boundaries.

### **Plan of Action:**

In order to become an agile university, RIT will complete the following steps:

1. Adopt the following vision and mission statements

#### **Vision**

RIT will be the model for the modern university: An intersection of disciplines that advances globally relevant, pragmatic, socially responsible learning and scholarship.

#### **Mission**

A community of problem-seekers, RIT prepares students for future workforce demands and addresses global challenges in an environment that values

academic rigor, experiential learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation, and creativity.

2. With these statements as context, RIT will implement an on-going, comprehensive program and service review as well as a thorough review of policies and procedures in order to achieve and maximize our organizational agility.\*

- a. Academic programs will be continuously assessed for centrality to RIT's vision and mission, quality, marketability and demand (internal and external), and outcomes
- b. Services will be continuously assessed for their contribution to RIT's mission, vision (especially in the context of student success) and agility
- c. Programs and services will be
  - i. Maintained as-is or enhanced
  - ii. Combined or consolidated
  - iii. Deactivated or discontinued
  - iv. Added
- d. Policies and procedures will be assessed for their contribution to organizational agility

3. Based on the outcomes of the two assessments above, RIT will assess its organizational structure and policies and procedures for alignment to its vision and mission with particular focus on student success, interdisciplinarity, and organizational agility.

4. RIT will then

- a. develop a comprehensive space master plan and utilization assessment process
- b. develop an on-demand registration and course scheduling process
- c. develop a transparent budget allocation and cost model aligned with its strategic vision and mission especially in support of student success, interdisciplinarity, and organizational agility.

\* The following dimensions/elements would define organizational agility:

- 1. Effective, flexible resource utilization - financial, human, space - based on strategic demands and opportunities
- 2. Enabled and enhanced by technology
- 3. Effective, open 2-way communication
- 4. Prudent risk management and compliance

## REPORT

The Organizational Agility Task force has been charged with identifying elements that hamper the university's ability to anticipate and respond to the changing circumstances of higher education in a global economy. Factors such as shifting demographics, eroding public opinion about the value of higher education, rising costs and the potentials and pitfalls of technology require our organization to be able to identify strategic variables that allow us to respond in a manner that best maximizes our resources. The defining element of organizational agility is the ability to respond to external dynamics and opportunities without traumatic change to the organization. A review of the literature shows that the organizations best able to manage such changes develop a keen balance between hierarchical and non-hierarchical management and decision-making.

Our Task force was able to agree upon several key elements that need to change in order to maximize RIT's potential as one of the top student-oriented technological universities in the world. Areas of consensus included: a focused and well communicated identity; commitment to a culture of interdisciplinarity; minimal, streamlined bureaucracy; ability to take calculated risk; and allocation of space based on need. While there was a high degree of agreement, our diverse constituency respectfully disagreed on a few issues, chiefly the centrality of budget reform to the diminishment of silos and the necessity of reducing the number of colleges.

Our first priority for action is that RIT must immediately develop a clear, universally understood and embraced identity and strategic direction. During our recent rapid expansion, RIT's identity has become diffuse. The Strategic Planning Process is the ideal moment to focus and redefine our identity. This definition of identity must be viewed as a starting point for a sustained process that informs ALL strategic initiatives across the university. Institute leaders at all levels must continually reinforce our mission and strategy with clear and resolute focus.

We propose the following:

**Vision:** RIT will be the model for the modern university: An intersection of disciplines that advances globally relevant, pragmatic, socially responsible learning and scholarship.

**Mission:** A community of problem-seekers, RIT prepares students for future workforce demands and addresses global challenges in an environment that values academic rigor, experiential learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation, and creativity.

With this defined mission, RIT must then assess its current academic program portfolio, student and administrative services, and policies and procedures for alignment to the vision and mission. In particular, the university must dismantle the current barriers to holistic interdisciplinary curricula, research and culture. The future of knowledge work, particularly technological knowledge, will be fundamentally organized across disciplines. Specialized skill sets cannot continue to function in isolation, as cogs in a larger machine. RIT faculty and staff must strive to establish genuine interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary opportunities for our students at all levels of operation.

While we have established some inroads towards this goal through the implementation of a new General Education framework, the current college and degree-program centric orientation of RIT is hampering our ability to create an optimal environment for student, faculty, staff and alumni success.

The successful student of the modern university will have access to a host of college-level materials before they set foot on campus. We must create the capacity to offer individualized degrees that allow motivated students, in concert with guidance from faculty and staff, to design and implement personalized courses of study. Expanding beyond the work done in Multidisciplinary Studies, minors and dual degrees, we will allow our students to move across the disciplines in order to engage, motivate and maximize student innovation. We envision a bold goal of having half our students completing truly multidisciplinary, hybrid degrees by 2025.

The last decade has seen a series of major transformations at RIT. However, despite changes to the calendar, general education, advising structure and policies and procedures, the addition of new colleges and centers and the rising profile of our incoming students, RIT has not escaped the silos generated by programs and colleges. The presence of silos is embedded in the deep structure of the university, including budget, accounting, credit, tenure and promotion criteria, curriculum, internal procedures such as financial aid and management practices that shape the overall culture of the university. We need to revisit the budget and costing model so that it incentivizes savings while rewarding calculated risk through increased collaboration within and across colleges in terms of curriculum, teaching, research and projects; in short, truly supports a student /faculty/ staff culture of interdisciplinarity. Deans and department/program heads need to have more financial authority and accountability and they should be rewarded for undertaking initiatives that feed into the strategic goal of a university that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

To support such an agile approach we need to inculcate a culture of respect and trust for individuals across the campus, regardless of their role or job title, providing them the means to act on their initiative while holding them accountable

for their results. We need to have respect and trust for the roles people play. If the responsibilities of a particular role are not achieved, we must fix those shortcomings, not create multiple roles. RIT will promote and engage in more “crucial conversations” on campus in order to improve organizational effectiveness and agility. We will become an organization that embraces these types of exchanges in order to refine RIT as we move ahead. In our past we tended to “agree to disagree” and while sometimes appropriate it can lead to unresolved conflict. The crucial conversation is the solution to the problem of unresolved conflicts.

With a defined sense of identity and refined sense of mission, we can address some of the deep structural changes needed to achieve these ends. Towards this end, we propose a transparent budget process that takes into account both academic and other university costs and makes these processes accessible to the larger community. Not only does the budget process need to be more open and well communicated, but it should incentivize novel and successful interdisciplinary uses of resources to reflect the focused mission of the institute (savings, calculated risk, etc.). Proper assessment of space utilization and resultant allocation must be reflected in this model of transparency. *The university must undergo a thorough and complete budget and space audit and be willing to reassign/reallocate existing space to optimize and support interdisciplinarity.* We cannot overemphasize this final point.

Indeed, each new college or institute sets up its own culture and processes that further impede interdisciplinary collaborations and student opportunities. This leads us to recommend, for cost savings, for agility, and to enhance the holistic nature of our campus, that RIT consider reducing the total number of colleges and institutes it has through mergers by roughly half by the year 2020 through a collaborative process.

In concert with the diminishment of silos, we envision a demand-based course registration process. This would create genuine access to the broad range of courses we offer, as well as remove key barriers to on-time graduation. Demand-based registration would require agility on the part of faculty and staff with regard to course offerings and space. We feel such adaptation would contribute to the overall agility of RIT. In concert with these changes, we propose an across-the-board reduction in current course offerings by five to ten percent. These courses would be replaced by team-taught multidisciplinary capstone/project-based courses that would be open to any junior or senior across the university.

Additionally, our growing dependency on tuition reinforces RIT’s aversion to risk. This kind of modeling of budget and expectations leaves us with very narrow margins and emphasizes short term, reactionary behavior. An institution of technology, such as ours, is well positioned to embrace bold, transformative

ideas. Much of what will shape the future already exists at RIT and needs to be unleashed. This culture of risk aversion leads to incredibly tedious, duplicative procedures that are ill suited to our high tech aspirations. We need to diminish bureaucracy, efficiently share information and benchmark the interpretation of compliance requirements against those at peer institutions to ensure the implementation of best practices that safeguard the University against compliance risk. Our reflexive risk aversion may contribute to short term security, but encouraging rote conformity saps employee enthusiasm and institutional agility in direct contrast to our stated aspirations of creativity and innovation.

Finally, the campus is fatigued after a half decade of transformational change. The lack of focus in conjunction with these changes has led to a sense of weariness and wariness. We need to recapture the momentum and spirit that were ushered in during the first few years of the Destler administration. All of the pieces are here. We have already done much of the work for implementing these changes. We simply need to open up the campus in a manner that enables us to work together rather than solely within the narrow confines of disciplinarity and specialization.

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## Task Force Deliverable Goal #1: Part I

(Table A)

<b>Goal Area: Organizational Agility</b> <b>Dimension Statement:</b> RIT's curricula, administrative, and organizational structures will serve, not impede, discovery, border-crossing, and collaboration among students, faculty, and staff. We will develop an operational culture in which good ideas find and drive the processes necessary to support them efficiently.						
<b>Goal 1:</b> RIT will develop a clear and universally understood definition of our identity and strategic direction.						
Strategy	Associated Dimensions	Implementation Locus	Sequence	Cost Range <sup>1</sup>	In Place By	Funding Source
1a. Utilize Strategic Planning Process to inductively develop this focused definition	All	All divisions	#1	<\$	Summer 2014	All divisions
1b. Submit to faculty, staff, students and alumni for discussion and deliberation.	All	Town Hall Meetings, Online Forums, Discussion Groups, Social Media	#2	<\$	Fall 2014	All divisions
1c. Utilize this definition as a process that undergirds all university initiatives.	All	All divisions	#3	<\$	Summer 2015	All divisions

<sup>1</sup> \$\$\$ = ≥ \$5M  
 \$\$ = \$1M - \$5M  
 \$ = < \$1M

### Task Force Deliverable Goal #1: Part II (Table B)

<b>Goal 1:</b> RIT will develop a clear and universally understood definition of our identity and strategic direction.	
<b>Rationale and Fit with Vision</b>	<b>Anticipated Outcomes</b>
During our recent rapid expansion, RIT's identity has become diffuse. The Strategic Planning Process is the ideal moment to focus and redefine our identity. This definition of identity must be viewed as a starting point for a sustained process that informs ALL strategic initiatives across the university.	1. Focus our vision
	2. Shared identity across all sectors of the RIT community
	3. Identity is infused as a process into the daily activities and initiatives of the university

## Task Force Deliverable Goal #2: Part I

(Table A)

<b>Goal Area: Organizational Agility</b> <b>Dimension Statement:</b> RIT's curricula, administrative, and organizational structures will serve, not impede, discovery, border-crossing, and collaboration among students, faculty, and staff. We will develop an operational culture in which good ideas find and drive the processes necessary to support them efficiently.						
<b>Goal 2:</b> Based on a shared focus, RIT will create a real collaborative and interdisciplinary structure and culture for student/faculty/staff/alumni.						
Strategy	Associated Dimensions	Implementation Locus	Sequence	Cost Range <sup>2</sup>	In Place By	Funding Source
1a. Develop a budget model that incentivizes work across disciplines, programs, and colleges.	SS, CI, OA	F&A, Colleges, VPs	#1	\$	Spring 2015	Colleges; F&A; AA; Campaign
1b. Provide incentives to the academic units, colleges, faculty, staff and students to get involved in interdisciplinary projects.	SS, CI, OA	F&A, Colleges, VPs	#2	\$\$\$	FY2016	Colleges; F&A; AA; Campaign
1c. Develop process on how to introduce interdisciplinary joint programs	SS, OA, CI, D	Colleges, VPs, Faculty	#3	\$	AY 2015-16	Colleges; F&A; AA; Campaign

<sup>2</sup> \$\$\$ = ≥ \$5M  
 \$\$ = \$1M - \$5M

Task Force Deliverable Goal #2: Part II (Table B)

<b>Goal 2:</b> Based on a shared focus, RIT will create a real collaborative and interdisciplinary structure and culture for student/faculty/staff/alumni.	
Rationale and Fit with Vision	Anticipated Outcomes
Despite changes to calendar, general education framework, advising structure and policies and procedures, RIT has not escaped the silos generated by programs and colleges. The presence of silos is embedded in the deep structural mechanisms of the university. We need to change how we approach our annual budget, incentivizing savings and rewarding collaboration within and across colleges in terms of curriculum, teaching, research and student /faculty/ staff culture.	1. Demand-based scheduling.
	2. Utilize an enterprise view and management process that ensures effective space utilization. Develop and implement a master plan for current and future space needs and uses.
	3. Flexible model of accounting for students that recognizes credit hours consumed and generated.

### Task Force Deliverable Goal #3: Part I (Table A)

<b>Goal Area: Organizational Agility</b> <b>Dimension Statement:</b> RIT's curricula, administrative, and organizational structures will serve, not impede, discovery, border-crossing, and collaboration among students, faculty, and staff. We will develop an operational culture in which good ideas find and drive the processes necessary to support them efficiently.						
<b>Goal 3:</b> In order to actualize the first two Organizational Agility goals, the university must embrace an increased and responsive form of transparency, one that will allow community engaged resource allocation (budget, space, human resource).						
Strategy	Associated Dimensions	Implementation Locus	Sequence	Cost Range <sup>3</sup>	In Place By	Funding Source
1a. Academic cost model and other institutional cost models should be communicated through the entire budget process	OA	VP of F&A, VP of AA, President	#1	\$	Jan. 2016	AA, F&A
1b. We should reimagine the process whereby academic affairs and financial affairs engage in annual and long term planning. Our academic vision should determine our financial vision, not the other way around.	OA	VP of F&A, VP of AA, President	#2	\$	Summer 2015	AA, F&A
1c. Transparency must be enhanced through pedagogically-infused communication of the budget process and a thorough community-oriented accounting of how resources are allocated.	SS, OA, CI, D	VPs, Deans, President, Faculty	#3	\$	July 2015	AA, F&A

## Task Force Deliverable Goal #3: Part II

(Table B)

<b>Goal 3:</b> In order to actualize the first two Organizational Agility goals, the university must create increased transparency and responsive forms of communication, which will allow community engaged resource allocation (budget, space, human resource).	
<b>Rationale and Fit with Vision</b>	<b>Anticipated Outcomes</b>
A clear sense of how the budget is allocated and how our spending priorities align with our vision of interdisciplinarity and collaboration will strengthen trust, identity and morale across the university	1. Clear short term and long term community buy-in to university initiatives
	2. Fundamental understanding of university priorities

## Task Force Deliverable Goal #4: Part I

(Table A)

<b>Goal Area: Organizational Agility</b> <b>Dimension Statement:</b> RIT's curricula, administrative, and organizational structures will serve, not impede, discovery, border-crossing, and collaboration among students, faculty, and staff. We will develop an operational culture in which good ideas find and drive the processes necessary to support them efficiently.						
<b>Goal 4:</b> In order to maximize Curricular and Financial Flexibility, the university must be willing to take risks, stop running on margin, minimize bureaucracy, streamline compliance measures and empower local decision making responsibilities						
Strategy	Associated Dimensions	Implementation Locus	Sequence	Cost Range <sup>4</sup>	In Place By	Funding Source
1a. Use long term planning opportunities and financial transparency as opportunities to take risk	OA	AA, FA, VPs, Deans	#1	\$\$\$	Jan. 2016	F&A, AA, Campaign
1b. Examine best practices at comparable institutions to streamline compliance	OA	AA, FA	#2	<\$	Summer 2016	F&A, AA
1c. Empower local decision makers with ability to exercise authority, as well as bear responsibility for those decisions	OA	Institute-wide	#3	\$	FY2017	F&A, AA

Task Force Deliverable Goal #4: Part II (Table B)

<b>Goal 4:</b> In order to maximize Curricular and Financial Flexibility, the university must be willing to take risks, stop running on margin, minimize bureaucracy, streamline compliance measures and empower local decision making responsibilities	
Rationale and Fit with Vision	Anticipated Outcomes
RIT is hampered by short –term planning predicated on student enrollment. This limits the university’s Organizational Agility. We expect these steps will allow individuals and units within the university to take proactive measures when it comes to the dynamically changing circumstances of US higher education.	1. Anticipate changing conditions, become proactive instead of reactive
	2. Diminish bureaucracy. Institute compliance measures based on best practices at similar institutions
	3. Allow those most familiar with local conditions to make appropriate and agile decisions on behalf of their immediate constituents, and bear the responsibility for those decisions