Strategic Decisions 2020

FY 2014 marked the fourth year of NTID’s implementation of Strategic Decisions 2020, the strategic plan for the next six years.

Strategic Decisions 2020, or SD 2020, is rooted in NTID’s founding mission statement. This statement establishes our institutional responsibility for working with students to develop their academic, career and life-long learning skills as future contributors in a rapidly changing global society. It also recognizes our role as a special resource for preparing individuals for conducting applied research in areas critical to the advancement of individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, and for disseminating our cumulative expertise.

SD 2020 established key initiatives that respond to future challenges and shape future opportunities. The initiatives are organized around six central themes: Students; Program and Curriculum Development; Communication; Access; Faculty/Staff; and Innovation, Scholarship and Research. Further details are available at www.ntid.rit.edu/president/sd2020.

SD 2020 implementation began in earnest during the 2010-2011 academic year with the establishment of various committees comprised of administrators, faculty and staff from throughout NTID. These committees were charged with recommending specific steps that NTID should take in order to achieve the overarching goals set forth in SD 2020.

In November 2014, the RIT Board of Trustees approved “Greatness Through Difference,” the university’s Strategic Plan for 2015-2025. In December 2014, NTID President Gerry Buckley charged Dr. Denise Kavin, special assistant to the NTID president for SD 2020 Implementation, and Dr. Marianne Gustafson, associate dean for Curriculum and Special Projects, with convening and co-chairing the SD 2020 Mid-Term Review Committee, which will assess the current state of SD 2020 implementation and consider adjustments that will align it with the university’s new strategic plan.

A current and ongoing example of SD 2020 initiatives is the establishment of NTID as a National Resource Center of Excellence in the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing students in senior high school and at the postsecondary level. A component of this effort includes DeafTEC, a program led by three NTID faculty members (Donna Lange, Gary Long and Myra Pelz) that provides training to educators on how to teach and employ deaf and hard-of-hearing people in STEM fields. DeafTEC has been funded by a $4.5 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

An envisioned example of SD 2020 initiatives is improving services to underprepared students by working with regional partners to implement intensive summer academic programs in selected, high-growth, ethnically diverse areas of the country. Through this initiative, NTID plans to identify students who demonstrate promise for success in career-focused associate degree-level programs and beyond, and provide consultation regarding postsecondary educational alternatives for students who may not meet this threshold.

The study and implementation of this envisioned example, as with various other items included in SD 2020, slowed between 2012 and 2014, as NTID grappled with budgetary challenges resulting from sequestration. Upon the restoration of NTID’s sequestered funding in January 2014, attention returned to ways in which NTID could invest in future growth.

The following are examples of SD 2020 goals that NTID actively is addressing at this time:

Providing Space for Innovation, Scholarship and Research

Three emerging forces within the larger university continue to shape the landscape of scholarship, research and innovation at NTID: 1) the strategic objective of RIT to become a leader in innovation in higher education, which was reaffirmed in the university’s new strategic plan; 2) the expectation that all tenured and tenure-track faculty at RIT will conduct ongoing programs of scholarship and research; and 3) the expectation that faculty will collaborate with undergraduate and graduate students as active
participants in these programs of scholarship and research. It therefore became imperative for NTID to create and provide space for activities that would further these objectives and expectations.

2014 marked the first full year of operation of Sebastian and Lenore Rosica Hall, a 23,000-square-foot facility devoted to fostering student-faculty collaboration on innovation, scholarship and research. This facility, which was completed on schedule and under budget, was financed entirely by private contributions. Rosica Hall provides new flexible research and innovation incubator space dedicated to housing NTID’s strategic research centers as well as selected discipline-based research and innovation projects. Research centers and labs active in the new building include:

- DeafTEC, formed in 2011 with a National Science Foundation grant to create a National Center of Excellence as a resource for schools around the country that educate deaf and hard-of-hearing students in STEM disciplines.

- The Research Center for Teaching and Learning, which includes an experimental classroom where diverse teams of faculty and students conduct research that improves deaf education, expose students to research practice and prepare future generations of RIT/NTID educational researchers and scholars.

- The REACH (Research on Employment and Adapting to Change) Center for Studies on Career Success, which studies employment and career success for deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

- The Deaf Studies Laboratory, which studies the cognitive, language and psychosocial aspects of the deaf experience and provides structured mentoring experiences for future deaf scientists through the Rochester Bridges to the Doctorate Program, in partnership with the University of Rochester Medical Center via a grant funded by the National Institutes of Health.

The second floor of the building houses the Hearst Foundations Imaginarium, where faculty and students gather to develop creative and innovative ideas.

During the past year, Dr. Gary Long has served as interim associate dean for Research, leading the effort to position NTID as the preeminent national and international center for research regarding evidence-based educational practice, employment and full inclusion of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals in society. Part of Dr. Long’s portfolio includes directing the research and scholarship efforts conducted by the strategic research centers within and outside of Rosica Hall, in addition to coordinating all of NTID’s grant-related efforts across its academic departments. A national search for a permanent associate dean for Research is expected to commence early in 2015.

Supporting Discipline-Based Research

Discipline-based scholarship and research is expected to be conducted by tenured and tenure-track faculty within the academic departments. As new tenure-track faculty join the NTID community, they are generally provided with access to funds that will “kick-start” their programs of discipline-based research, provide them with a platform from which to apply for external funds to support ongoing research, and hopefully set them further down the road to eventual tenure.

Enhancing Faculty/Staff Professional Development

Nearly 40 percent of NTID’s current employees are eligible for retirement, which means that even as we have reduced the size of our workforce by almost 10 percent since January 2011, an increasing percentage of current employees are new to NTID. Therefore, we must take immediate steps to ensure a smooth transition to the well-trained and productive NTID leaders of tomorrow. A committee was organized to review and make recommendations to enhance the professional development options available to both new and veteran faculty and staff.
The committee addressed five critical areas of professional development: (1) communication skills; (2) teaching effectiveness; (3) scholarship and research; (4) discipline-based content expertise; and (5) leadership. The committee developed recommendations within these five areas, including but not limited to: new faculty and staff orientation programs; discipline-based mentoring by senior faculty members; supporting tenure-track faculty members’ completion of terminal degrees in light of university-wide guidelines and standards; and enhancing communication effectiveness for both new and veteran faculty.

The committee recommended the establishment of a centralized office for offering faculty and staff professional development focused on the “NTID-related” aspects of the five central areas described above, while advocating greater coordination with university-wide professional development programs in order to enhance integration of our faculty and staff within the greater university community and achieve efficiencies and cost savings. To implement these critical goals despite financially austere circumstances, a former employee of the now-closed Department of Educational Design Resources was transferred to a new Professional Development coordinator position, where she reports to Dr. Kathryn Schmitz ’95, associate dean for Academic Administration, and coordinates all internal and external professional development activities within the college. NTID intends to augment this effort as additional resources become available.

NTID recognizes that its population of lecturers – who already are proficient in teaching and fluent in American Sign Language – represents one of the most promising pipelines for filling vacant tenure-track slots. As a result, NTID in 2014 began piloting a new tuition assistance program designed to encourage talented and motivated lecturers to obtain terminal degrees and develop the academic credentials necessary to qualify for these positions.

**Communication Expectations for Faculty and Staff**

NTID continues to examine and discuss ways to encourage all faculty and staff to improve their sign language skills, and reaffirms its commitment to 100 percent signing in public spaces by all faculty and staff. Pursuing these twin goals will help maintain open, respectful communication at NTID and maximize student learning on a number of levels. To better serve the communication development needs of our faculty and staff, NTID has created the Office of American Sign Language Training and Evaluation (ASLTE) to administer Sign Language Proficiency Interviews (SLPI) and to enhance sign language proficiency among both faculty and staff.

**Promoting Technology in Support of Access and Learning**

In 2014, President Buckley formed the ad hoc Captioning Study Committee, which evaluated the cost and utility of various real-time captioning alternatives for the Department of Access Services. The committee’s report resulted in a decision to retain C-Print®, a technology first developed at NTID, as the sole method of delivering real-time in-class captioning services to NTID-supported students.