

Find the Latest Sales & Deals at
Your Favorite Local Stores!



This is a printer friendly version of "RIT urges blue chip talent to join team" from the **Democrat and Chronicle**

[Back](#)

RIT urges blue chip talent to join team

University goes extra mile to attract minority faculty members.

Matthew Daneman

Staff writer

HENRIETTA — Like an ardent suitor, Rochester Institute of Technology is trying to woo William Richards.

It flew the Ohio State University doctoral student in for the weekend, put him up in a hotel, and aggressively courted the Hawaiian native in hopes that when he finishes his schooling and looks for jobs, he looks at RIT.

And being wanted like that has left Richards, 39, a little interested in return. "I'm always attracted to organizations that do things different than others," he said over an early morning continental breakfast on campus Friday. And, he added with a smile, "I've never gotten bagels and breakfast before."

A dozen doctoral students from around the country — all of them people of color — spent Halloween weekend being wined and dined by RIT, in hopes that they like the school enough to seek a job there when they graduate.

It's commonplace for colleges in the Rochester region to bus and fly in loads of prospective minority students, usually from the New York City region, to show them the campus and try to get them interested.

But doing likewise for prospective minority faculty is a fairly unusual approach in a push by the nation's colleges to add some color to their largely white faculty ranks, said Cathy Trower, one of the principal investigators at Harvard University's Study of New Scholars. The Harvard project is researching ways of recruiting and retaining new scholars in higher education, with a particular focus on women and minorities.

A small peppering of schools around the nation, such as Massachusetts' Wheaton College and Arizona State University, have taken steps such as hiring blocks of minority faculty members to try to alleviate the feelings of isolation that new faculty members of color often feel, Trower said.

"Nationally, the biggest problem is retention," she said. "Higher education's been called a revolving door. We can get them in, but we can't keep them." However, she added, "recruiting is still difficult because of smaller numbers."

Of the 44,000 doctoral degrees awarded in the 2001-02 school year, the last year for which U.S. Education Department figures were available, 27,000 went to white people, while 4,000 went to African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans, who together are generally considered underrepresented in American higher education.

At RIT, that group of underrepresented minorities accounted for about 6 percent of RIT's 900 faculty members in the fall of 2002, the last year for which statistics were available.

For the Future Faculty Career Exploration Program weekend, RIT dipped into the database it's constantly building of names of doctoral students of color around the country — names it picks up at conferences, through professional organizations, and from other colleges, said Renee Baker, RIT's manager of faculty recruitment.

"The pipeline is small," Baker said. "We're trying to get them early in the pipeline, get them here. Half the battle is getting them on campus." Once here, the candidates get a weekend of meetings with deans and department heads, tours of campus and the Rochester area, a reception at the president's house, and introductions to local political and business bigwigs. They are put up at the RIT Inn and Conference Center.

For the first Future Faculty weekend, held last year, RIT invited 17 people and 15 came, said President Albert Simone.

This year, RIT invited 150 and 100 applied, prompting the university to do two Future Faculty sessions of a dozen-plus people each — one Halloween weekend and a second in April.

Last year's Future Faculty session netted two hires, Baker said — one a recent Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University and one who had spent several years with Hewlett-Packard Co.

This year's prospective crop came from such schools as Georgia Institute of Technology, Virginia's James Madison University and Michigan State University.

Most of the hiring colleges are doing now is for the 2005-06 school year. Some of the Future Faculty candidates might be ready for positions then, but some might be two or three years away from finishing their degrees, Baker said. "We're kind of grooming them and mentoring them, and we do hope when they step off with that degree, they will consider RIT," she said.

And by meeting now with deans and department heads, she said, those prospective hires can begin networking and finding someone who could put in an extra word for them when hiring is done. The Future Faculty participants are not guaranteed spots at RIT, Simone said. But the weekend increases the probability that a prospective hire might accept if RIT does offer a job, he said.

"It's a courtship," Simone said. "But when the time comes to pop the question, it has to be right on both sides."

Richards expects to earn his doctorate in sport and exercise science by August; he currently is doing research on how aging and exercise affect particular key proteins in muscle. Looking in the thick classified ads section of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* a few days ago, Richards saw plenty of schools hiring in his field. But, he said, RIT is the only school to take this approach with him.

And, he added, the university is at least being upfront, which scores it bonus points.

"I like the honesty — 'we want you because you're smart, but that's not the only reason.'"

MDANEMAN@DemocratandChronicle.com

 <p>Audi HONDA ACURA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6-year, 100,000-mile limited powertrain warranty• 24-hour roadside assistance• 2-year, 25,000-mile maintenance
--	--

Copyright 2004 Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.
Use of this site signifies your agreement to the [Terms of Service](#) (updated 12/18/2002).