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Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) was founded in 1829. But a visit to its red brick campus will make prospective student believe that they are visiting a much newer place. RIT's 1,300 acre campus is located in Henrietta, a suburb of Rochester, New York, is about the same size as SUNY-University at Buffalo, a modern campus designed and built around the same time, about 90 minutes west. But SUNY-University at Buffalo accommodates nearly 19,000 full-time undergraduates versus nearly 11,300 at RIT.

RIT's major advantage over most large public or private universities, including SUNY-University at Buffalo, is its emphasis on cooperative education, aka 'co-op' in virtually every major. Many other schools that have over 10,000 undergraduates offer co-op, but limit it to few majors, usually engineering, sometimes Accounting, Computer Science or other science/technology programs. Unlike internships, which are either part-time or full time over a summer or a single semester, co-ops can run as long as seven or eight months. Also, unlike internships, co-ops are almost always paid, and rarely for credit. Depending on the major and the school, co-op can often extend a degree program for an additional year.

RIT is one of only four large schools that places a strong emphasis on co-op within its educational model. The others are Drexel University, Northeastern University and University of Cincinnati. While RIT is more likely to be considered against SUNY-University at Buffalo and other larger and mid-sized New York private schools such as Cornell, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Syracuse, it is fairer to compare the school with others that are similarly committed to co-op.

RIT attracts a student who is very similar to one who would attend one of the more selective SUNY campuses, Rutgers-New Brunswick or Penn State-University Park as well as Drexel or Syracuse. RIT's SAT scores average 1230 (out of 1600) for entering first-year students; the ACT Composite averages 29. In 2016, RIT accepted 55 percent of its applicants, about the same as the aftermentioned state schools, though it is more selective than Drexel and slightly less selective than Syracuse. Nearly half of RIT students come from outside New York State.

RIT retained 87 percent of the freshmen who entered in 2016, the same as Cincinnati and slightly better than Drexel (86 percent). The flagship state schools in New Jersey (Rutgers-New Brunswick), New York (SUNY-University at Buffalo) and Pennsylvania (Penn State-University Park) all do slightly better, as does Syracuse.

It's hard to pinpoint a major reason why retention at RIT is not as high as it is at these other schools. RIT has many [very specific majors](#) and [minors](#) that even the larger state universities do not offer, including several such as Imaging Science, Motion Picture



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Science, Integrated Electronics, Packaging Sciences and Photographic Sciences that are not likely to be familiar to a high school senior.

But RIT also has a [University Exploration](#) program as well as Exploration majors within its individual colleges. The best course of action for most prospective students might be to enter RIT through one of the Exploration paths, and work with an advisor to plan a personalized path that will help to declare a major in the sophomore year, complete [General Education Requirements](#), be ready to move into co-op in the third year, and be finished after the fifth.

RIT graduated less than 60 percent of the students who entered in 2010 within five years, though the six-year graduation rate was 68 percent. This shows that many students do change their major at least once before they graduate, and might have experienced some “backtracking” into introductory courses to move into a new major.

More seriously, these numbers showed that 32 percent of the students who began their undergraduate education at RIT did not finish there. By comparison, SUNY-University at Buffalo lost 26 percent of the students who entered in the same year (14 percent transferred out), Rutgers-New Brunswick lost 20 percent (10 percent transferred out). When compared versus state schools that charge less, that also offer the option to pass on co-op, the losses are understandable. However, Syracuse University, a more expensive school of similar size with similar majors that attracts a similar student, lost only 18 percent of its 2010 freshman class. The University of Cincinnati, a less expensive co-op school, achieved about the same results as RIT, graduating 67 percent of their 2010 freshman class (19 percent transferred out).

Costs

RIT’s direct charges (tuition and fees, room and board) for 2017-18 are approximately \$52,800. That’s only \$1,000 more than Drexel charges for *tuition and fees alone*. RIT’s direct charges are only \$3,000 more than the tuition and fees charged by Northeastern, a more selective school. The non-resident direct charges at the University of Cincinnati will be around \$39,000, about the same that RIT charges in tuition and fees. But [Presidential Scholarships](#), which range between \$10,000 and \$16,000 per year, help to make RIT a very good value for an excellent student.

There is another major difference between RIT and the other three co-op schools. While all co-op schools promise that students will pay no more than four years tuition, only RIT charges *no student fees* while the student is working on co-op. [Drexel’s University Fees, for example, are just over \\$2,400 for the current academic year](#). A co-op student there would pay half of those fees while not taking classes, though they may take one online or after work, if possible. The [University of Cincinnati charges just under \\$500](#) for each co-op term, which still makes that school less expensive than RIT.



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Co-op can help reduce costs, provided that the co-op salary meets or exceeds costs for room and board during the school year. Room and board charges at RIT [average less than \\$13,000 for students](#) who live on campus, while living costs in the Rochester area are lower than they would be in many college towns that host a large state university as well as cities such as Boston or Philadelphia. It is quite possible for students in the more quantitative business majors as well as the more technical academic programs to earn more than \$13,000 to cover housing costs.

Those who enter RIT with AP credits could actually graduate after five years with co-op experience and many credits towards a master's degree. However, students who choose a less technical program, or one where internships (instead of co-ops) pay little or no salary, might find RIT to be a more costly proposition than a large public university, and possibly many private alternatives. In addition, students who are considering state schools such as SUNY-University at Buffalo, Rutgers-New Brunswick or Penn State University Park for engineering have the option of co-op or no co-op at a lower cost to residents or non-residents.

RIT graduates in 2016 who took out loans averaged just over \$38,000 in debt; the maximum that a college student may borrow over five years from the Federal Direct Loan Program is \$31,000. A fifth of the class that borrowed took out private loans. To its credit, RIT was the only one of the three private co-op schools that reported student loan debt information to the Project on Student Debt. The University of Cincinnati, a public co-op university, reported an average of just under \$29,000 for its 2016 graduates who needed to take out loans; ten percent needed to take out private loans.

Curriculum

Aside from co-op opportunities that might pay well, the best academic reasons to choose RIT are the selection of [majors](#) and [minors](#) that even the larger state universities do not offer, including several such as Imaging Science, Motion Picture Science, Integrated Electronics, Packaging Sciences and Photographic Sciences, as well as the [University Exploration](#) program, for those who are undecided between majors at different schools. RIT also allows for [Immersion](#)s, a three-course sequence of classes outside of a major or minor, usually in a liberal arts subject. It is common for Immersions to become minors. There is also an option to develop a plan of study towards a unique major through RIT's [School of Individualized Study](#).

It is quite easy for any student in any major, including liberal arts and visual arts, to graduate from RIT with a very impressive skill set that will be attractive to prospective employers for co-ops and full-time jobs. For example, RIT has several well-developed visual arts and communications programs that could be combined with a minor in Computer Science, Marketing or Entrepreneurship. Those interested programs that require hands-on use of technology will find a very good home at RIT.



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Students won't see as high a percentage of large-lecture classes at RIT as they would at a state university. At SUNY-University at Buffalo, 23 percent of undergraduate courses in 2015-16 had over 50 students versus less than five percent at RIT. However, the percentage of courses that had between 20 and 49 students was about the same. Its possible that the choice of sections of an upper-division required course in an area such as business or engineering might be fewer than they would be at a larger school, so the class sizes in those courses are about the same. However, RIT also has several majors that are not offered at the larger state school which are likely to have small (less than 20 students) in the major coursework.

RIT students gave their faculty a rating of 3.64 (out of a possible 5) on RateMyProfessors.com, holding them in higher regard than Drexel (3.59) and Northeastern (3.58) students, though Cincinnati students rated their faculty higher (3.71). So did students at The Ohio State University (3.83), Penn State-University Park (3.68), SUNY-University at Buffalo (3.72) and Rutgers-New Brunswick (3.74).

Community

If you visit RIT and SUNY-University at Buffalo, about 90 minutes west, you might believe that both campuses were designed by the same people. Both are red brick and concrete (with hard-to-find signage on the buildings), have man-made fountains, operate clearly labeled campus bus systems and were built around a similar campus layout with academic buildings at the center ring, residences and athletic facilities in the next ring, then parking in the outer ring with many eating and drinking places throughout. Both schools placed their bookstores outside the academic center on campus, though RIT has it further away to better serve the public through one of the larger Barnes and Noble stores in New York State.

RIT has built several new academic buildings and renovated others to upgrade around advances in the degree programs and technology. When it comes to this aspect of a college campus, RIT is probably the more responsive school when compared to a state university. Parking also appears to be more than adequate to support the student body, though its best to leave the car at the residence hall or apartment parking lot and ride the campus buses to class. RIT charges a reasonable \$100 for a parking permit and allows all students to have cars.

The RIT campus is less urban than those of the other three co-op schools; it is located outside of the major city, but within easy driving distance for dining and entertainment. The third-largest city in New York with approximately 210,000 residents, Rochester has its college-oriented dining and entertainment establishments on the city's East End. The city also hosts minor league baseball at the highest (AAA) level as well as minor league hockey. Students will not be at a loss to find affordable entertainment or recreational



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opportunities in this metro area, unless they are seeking high-profile college or professional sports.

RIT's campus, while fairly large, is relatively easy for the school's police force to secure, in part because it borders a suburban community, but also because of the campus layout and street network. But there have reported incidents of sexually related crimes on campus over the past three years as well as three arrests for weapons possession on campus in 2016, according to [RIT's Clery Report](#). The better news is that reported incidents for arrests and disciplinary referrals for possession of alcoholic beverages or drugs on campus are relatively low for a community that has just over 7,000 student residents.

One downside with any school that relies strongly on co-op is that nearly half of a junior or middle junior (fourth year) class will not be on campus attending classes; they will be working full-time off campus. With the exception of the University of Cincinnati, which has nearly 22,000 full-time undergraduates and has experienced success in football and basketball, co-op schools are likely to be less "spirit and sports" oriented than schools where juniors and seniors, the classes with student leaders, are taking classes all year long. Greek life is not exceptionally popular, attracting five percent of the men and six percent of the women.

RIT competes at the NCAA Division I (scholarship) level in Men's Ice Hockey, but it is a Division III (non-scholarship) school in the other varsity sports. Interestingly, RIT makes extensive use of its Tigers identity throughout the campus, even using orange and black (like the Princeton Tigers) soap dispensers.

Comforts

RIT is able to house approximately 7,100 students on campus, more than half of the undergraduate student body, with a variety of [living options](#). RIT has [seven special interest houses](#), conventional residence halls (corridor and suite style), the Global Village at the center of campus and apartments. RIT does not have "freshman only" halls as other schools do, though it allows freshmen to become part of special interest or living-learning communities. Freshmen are most likely to be assigned to double rooms or quad (four-person) rooms. Also, while most schools default to the most expensive, often an "unlimited" meal plan, RIT defaults to the least expensive option.

Since RIT students are more likely to spend their third and fourth years on co-op, quite possibly outside of Rochester, on-campus housing is a better option than living off campus. The school asks students to pay a \$300 deposit to hold space in a residence hall or apartment if they are on co-op during the fall, but returning to school in the spring. The deposit is later credited towards room and board charges. Those who attend classes in the fall, but go on co-op in the spring may either live on campus if their co-op



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is in the Rochester area, or cancel their contract with no penalty if their co-op is elsewhere.

Local ordinances in Henrietta, where the campus is located, [prohibit more than three unrelated people from living together in an apartment or a single family home](#), though RIT-owned properties are exempt. It is possible to pay less to rent off campus. But it makes little sense to be bound to a 12-month lease if the 12 months are broken up by co-op or graduation.

Connections

Rochester was once the headquarters city for Bausch and Lomb and Xerox which, along with Eastman Kodak, were larger employers of RIT graduates, as well as those from the University of Rochester, than they are today. Since students are less likely to do co-op in Rochester, or remain in the area after graduation, RIT has built up its [career development](#) staff around a team of employment specialists by academic program who work with students, faculty and employers to coordinate internships (in majors where co-op is not practical), co-ops and full-time positions. RIT runs not only an extensive on-campus recruitment program, but also two of the largest fall and spring job fairs in the country, attracting nearly 300 employers to campus to recruit students and [alumni](#). There are other more specialized job fairs during the school year.

RIT is also more open about publishing [outcomes information](#) than many schools, including those with larger business, science or engineering programs. An astonishing [80 percent of RIT's 2016 graduates](#) were employed full-time within six months after graduation. Another 15 percent were continuing their education.

RIT's academic programs that require co-op [will specify a minimum of one or two semesters as well as the summers](#). The nice feature of these options is that a student has four semesters to settle into a major, then begins the co-op the summer afterwards. If the student is fortunate to live around a major city, s/he could do co-op close to home over the summer and pay no housing costs. Although a school year is considered to be 12 months, RIT students pay no charges while they are on co-op, unless they live on campus. Another advantage to RIT's scheduling, is that the student can plan co-ops around the availability of the classes s/he needs to complete their degree. RIT offers several majors that do not have large enrollments. It cannot guarantee that upper-level courses in every major will be available in every semester.

Among the more than 113,000 RIT alumni registered on [LinkedIn.com](#), around 33,000 live and work around the Rochester area while nearly 11,000 are based in or near New York City. The Boston, Washington DC, San Francisco, Buffalo, Syracuse and Philadelphia areas are home to at least 2,300 alumni while there are also communities of more than 1,000 in Los Angeles, Atlanta, Raleigh-Durham, Chicago and Denver.



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The [alumni chapter network](#) is quite extensive, even without a major college sports program to help bond the community. However, only six percent of the alumni base made a contribution to the school over the past two years, according to data reported to *US News*. RIT alumni were actually less loyal than SUNY-University at Buffalo (9 percent) and University of Cincinnati (12 percent) alumni who paid much less for their education.

Conclusions

Students and parents who are sold on the advantages of cooperative education will find RIT a better value than either Drexel or Northeastern, as will those who are interested in one or more of the unique majors this school offers. RIT's curriculum is also better designed for an undecided student than those of the other two private co-op schools. The career development services are among the best available at a private university. The downside is that Rochester is not as strong a business center for co-op students as Boston, Philadelphia, or even Cincinnati, though the school is quite aware of that.

The best buy among the four co-op schools is the University of Cincinnati, which is a state university, although 85 percent of their students come from Ohio. The best buy when geography diversity among the student body is an important consideration is RIT.

Report Card: Rochester Institute of Technology

Four-Year/Six Year Graduation Rates: Not Applicable/B

Freshman Retention: B+

Costs: B

Curriculum: A

Community: B

Comforts: A

Connections: A