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According to John Swales, author of “Concepts of a Discourse Community” and a professor of linguistics at the University of Michigan, a discourse community is a group of individuals with six qualities that separate it from other communities. The first quality is that any discourse community has a set of common public goals. These goals are set throughout the entire community and lay the foundation for the general purpose of the community. Swales also argues that discourse communities have specific tools in order for the members to communicate with each other. Some forms of intercommunication include, but are not limited to, emails, newsletters, and meetings. Discourse communities, according to Swales, allow members to provide information and feedback to other members based on goals and information of the community. Since the members provide feedback, they have substantial knowledge in the required field of the community, which is another aspect of a discourse community, according to Swales. The last two aspects Swales identifies are that a discourse community contains a lexis (vocabulary related to the community) and at least one specific genre (Swales, John). If every aspect of a discourse community is put together, the Rochester Institute of Technology, or RIT, is an excellent example of a discourse community and displays each concept that makes the community what it is.

RIT possesses a large set of goals to achieve both on and off campus, which is Swales’ first aspect of a discourse community, and the most common are to gain an education as a student, teach others as a professor and help the university as other staff members. The university provides so many majors and minors that lead into even more career options and occupations. Students can explore different fields to find their own interest and learn more about that interest. Every student attends RIT for this reason, which creates a sense of unity because although each individual is unique, they are all learning new things together and stressing over assignments and exams together. The professors and other staff are there to help students when they need it and to interact with activities occurring on the campus. Learning and communicating with professors and advisors is something all students have in common at RIT and that is an important part of what makes RIT a discourse community.

With advancing technology, RIT has so many ways of communicating amongst students and staff, which is another concept Swales uses to describe a discourse community. Each RIT student is given an email from which they can communicate strictly within the university. This is an excellent way for students to communicate with their peers on projects or assignments, and also to contact professors or advisors for help and guidance. Another form of communication within the community is through the MyCourses webpage. I’m sure every student will agree that MyCourses is used daily as a way to hand in homework and papers and also to receive homework and reminders from professors and advisors. The Webpage also connects to the Google accounts which eases access to emails and Google Drive, which makes it easier and faster for students to access their school work.

The staff at RIT all have a vast amount of knowledge about their specified fields, which leads into the next aspect of discourse communities: threshold for members. If professors and advisors didn’t know much about specific topics, they certainly would not have been hired to teach and help students. Likewise, if students aren’t willing to learn, they eliminate any purpose for the professor to teach in the first place. The RIT campus is filled with highly knowledgeable professors who can help motivated students learn and understand concepts they need to know in their future. As a math major, I know I can receive help from my professors anytime in their office hours, as well as from assistants and other students. Each student is willing to help another with any work or misunderstanding, which shows the motivation in each student at RIT. Applications are given each year but the university pick students who are willing to learn and are determined to be successful with the help of the staff and friends. Since RIT is a technology based university, most students here share common hobbies and majors, which helps with receiving help and creating new friendships along the way.

Academic advisors are also a huge aid to students as they help them stay on track with classes and other activities according to their majors, which ties into Swales idea of the threshold for members. Students can receive important information on specific courses to take and extracurricular activities to try out that can potentially help their major and put them on a better path. Academic advisors are knowledgeable in their designated areas and are able to correctly guide a student through their years at the university. Being a mathematics major, I admire the help provided because it’s easier to understand what needs to be done in order to graduate. In addition, if a student is struggling either academically or socially, they are able to schedule an appointment with their advisor to help them back up on their feet and continue with their education. This helps create a better relationship between students and staff because it forces communication amongst the members. A better relationship is a great way to provide unity and further emphasizes the discourse community at RIT.

Since most students attending RIT are around the same age, RIT has multiple genres and lexes. The emails, lectures and conversations are simple genres and are ways to achieve the common goal at RIT. In order to gain an education, students need to focus on the information they’ve been taught and understand it thoroughly, and lectures provide the essential foundation for this. Emailing other students or staff can make it easier to contact others and provide feedback or schedule appointments. The language and lexis used at RIT differs from subject to subject, but students communicate to each other the same way. Since my major at RIT is Applied Mathematics, my use of a lexis might differ than an English major. Despite this, we would still understand each other and that’s what makes the entire university one whole community: everyone can understand each other and each lexis. Holding students’ majors aside, almost every student knows the various restaurants on RIT campus, especially Java’s, Ritz and Brick City, and it’s common to say “Let’s meet up at Java’s” to other students on a daily basis. This is a common lexis and is used all the time. Additionally, hockey is extremely important to RIT and whenever there is a game coming up, students are celebrating and promoting the game and the team. Every student knows the team mascot, as it’s pictured all over the school and over T-shirts, water bottles, and keychains, but shouting “Go Tigers” shows the immense support given by the entire college community. This further describes Swales ideas of a specific lexis in a discourse community and RIT has many different lexes.

RIT is a huge community that holds every aspect of a discourse community. Although discourse communities contain many aspects and definitions, they are found everywhere and many people are members. According to John Swales’ definition of a discourse community, RIT is a great example and continues to maintain a unique form of unity both on and off campus.

Works Cited

*Rochester Institute of Technology.* Overview of RIT. Rochester Institute of Technology. 2015. Web. 22 September 2015.

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