

Staff Spotlight: Ryan Miller, Associate Vice Provost for Campus Life

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Currently the Associate Vice Provost for Campus Life, Ryan Miller, has been with Illinois Tech for over five years now. He began his career at this university coordinating the parent programs, and he is now the overseer of all the student organizations on campus, of the first year experience programs, and of leadership and service learning. He basically is the supervisor of most things involving the Office of Campus Life (OCL.) Ryan Miller stressed that campus life would not be where it is today without the hard work and support of the rest of the OCL staff. He is “just here to help people work together; they are kind of the backbone of campus life.” Although he was recommended to apply for his first position at Illinois Tech by just happening to know someone in Residence and Greek Life, Ryan has been loving his positions at this university. When asked what he enjoys most about his current position, Ryan simply commented that he really likes “how different it is every day.” All the different student organizations with all their different programs, “it keeps my attention.” In general, Ryan loves being a part of the Illinois Tech community. He always gets excited for the Taste of IIT event, during which he thoroughly enjoys learning about other cultures, connecting with the huge population of international students here, and being among such free and open people—clearly, he



Photo by Khaleela Zaman

loves “how different everybody is here.” Ryan, being a very positive and happy person, struggled to figure out what he likes least about his position or about Illinois Tech. He simply stated that he had “never really thought about that, to be honest.” Eventually, he did realize that he has experienced some “frustrations” or struggles with his current position. Basically, he would like student organizations to know that they do not all have to be their own thing. Many times, multiple student organizations will plan similar events separately, rather than working together to make one great event. Other times, there are student organizations that exist, and then new student organizations feel the need to form rather than just helping existing student organizations grow in new ways. Always going back to the positive, Ryan also really likes just “how green [our campus] is. Just thirty blocks from downtown,” and there is a completely different space, a real campus, with “so many trees!” There is no easy way to get Ryan Miller to have an issue with anything related to Illinois Tech. Even if Ryan was offered a position outside of Illinois Tech, he would want to stay at this university due to the all the relationships he has made with staff, faculty, and students throughout his time here. For Ryan, it is “nice to go places and say hi to people,” especially when the “people are just so nice and outgoing.” These simple gestures are all it takes to make Ryan smile.

Illinois Tech Robotics wins third Midwestern Robotics Design Competition title

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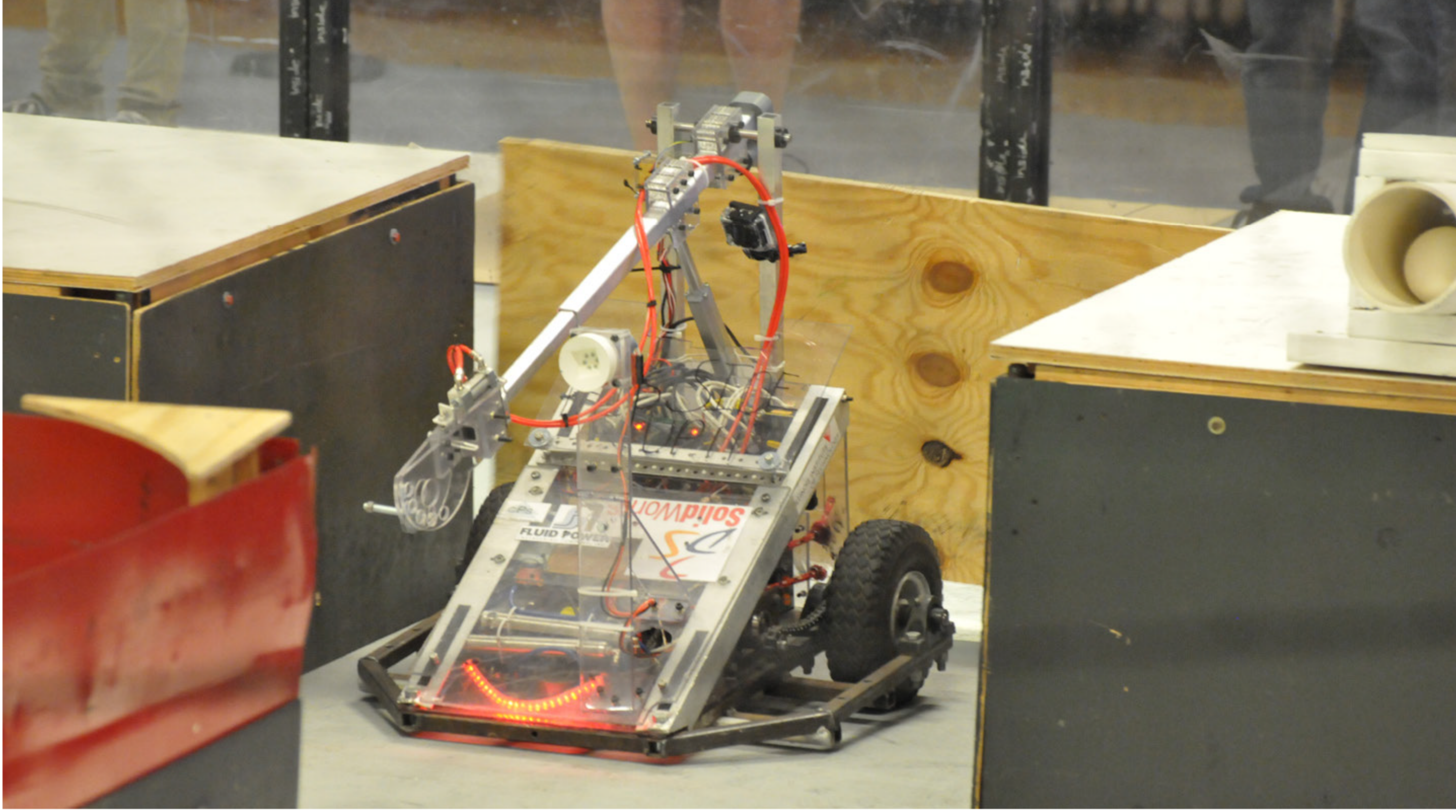
Illinois Tech Robotics (ITR), IIT’s extracurricular robotics team, won their third first-place title in the club’s 10-year history competing at the Midwestern Robotics Design Competition (formerly known as the Jerry Sanders Creative Design Competition). The competition is annually held at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and took place March 11 and 12. The Midwestern Robotics Design Competition is open to any group of college students. Teams at the competition consist of up to 6 student members, one of which is designated as the team captain. Competitors for this year’s competition featured nearly two dozen teams from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Illinois at Chicago, Northern Illinois University, College of DuPage, Valparaiso University, Southern Illinois University, and Illinois Institute of Technology. Every year, the committee that runs the Midwestern Robotics Design Competition creates a different game that the competing robots must play. Each game has various goals that robots can complete which award them points, and the robot with the most points at the end of the 6-minute match is declared the winner. Point multiplies are also offered to flying entries as well as purely autonomous entries that don’t use input from a human operator. Robots must be able to fit within a three-foot cube and weigh no more than 140 pounds. This year’s game was played on a 44-foot square field. For each match, one robot would start in each corner of the field and was designated a specific color that matched game pieces on the field. The primary method of scoring for the teams was by manipulating

two different game pieces—golf balls and foam balls that were softball-sized. In order to score golf balls, teams had to navigate their way to a dispenser and turn a screw mechanism to release the golf balls. Each time the screw was turned, a randomly-colored golf ball would be released. Robots then had to be able to differentiate between the colors of golf balls in order to determine which ones matched their color for that match (some robots accomplished this automatically with sensors, other robots relied on a clear view from their operators). Teams would then drive their robot to a bin in a corner of the field where they could drop off golf balls, where each one matching their color would earn them 10 points. In order to score foam balls, robots had to make their way up a ramp onto an elevated portion of the course, then lift a pin mechanism in order to launch balls from a slingshot device. Robots would then retrieve the balls and launch or drop them into a spinning target in order to score 30 points. During the match, the four robots on the field were allowed to contact and hinder each other at all times with the exception of being in their golf ball retrieval zone. Robots also received points for navigating certain obstacles on the field or completing certain tasks, such as opening a swinging door, dropping a drop wall, or launching the foam balls. Illinois Tech Robotics brought four robots from their repertoire to the Midwestern Robotics Design Competition this year. Each robot on the Illinois Tech Robotics team has a core group of team members that work primarily on the robot in addition to receiving general assistance from the entire club population. Goliath, the robot that went on to win the competition, is a wedge-shaped robot with an arm capable of retrieving and

launching foam balls. Roslund, ITR’s oldest competitive robot, made it to the quarterfinal rounds of the competition with a strategy of quickly navigating field obstacles. Fenrir, a two-wheeled gravity drive robot from ITR, focused on retrieving golf balls. ITR’s flying quadcopter robot, Icarus, aimed to navigate the field as well as distract other robots by blowing game pieces out of their reach. After practice matches on Thursday, March 11, ITR’s robots took the field for the elimination matches. During these matches, four robots from various teams were on the field for one match, and the top two robots who scored highest in the 6-minute match time moved on to the next level of competition. Icarus and Fenrir were unfortunately defeated after their first match, but Roslund and Goliath both won their first matches with a commanding lead. After Roslund was knocked out in the quarterfinal rounds of competition, Goliath continued to move on until finally advancing to the final round of the competition, where Illinois Tech Robotics faced off against teams from Southern Illinois University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Valparaiso University. After six minutes of heated competition, and being cheered on by spectators, Goliath was declared the victor, coming out on top with 150 points compared to SIU’s 110, Valpo’s 90, and U of I’s 0. Illinois Tech Robotics has a long history of winning different honors at the competition. This is the third time an ITR robot has won the main competition; the previous victories were secured by Roslund in 2010 and 2011. Goliath also won the Midwestern Robotics Design Competition demolition match in 2014 and 2015. Student members of ITR are also very proud of their recent victory. Fourth-year computer engineering major Nash Kaminski, who was

on the drive team for Goliath, said, “This was truly an accomplishment for ITR and goes to show that it takes the dedication of a large group of interdisciplinary individuals to successfully overcome the formidable engineering challenges present in such a competition.” Other students on the Illinois Tech Robotics team were also happy to share their thoughts on their participation at the competition. Michelle Goo, President of Illinois Tech Robotics and third-year architectural engineering major, says that her favorite part of the competition was “cheering for Goliath during the final round and seeing him win first place.” She added that she was proud her team’s robot and the work that she and her fellow club members contributed to make it a success. Kevin Zheng, a fifth-year information technology and management major who competed with ITR on the Roslund team, said, “I enjoyed the different challenges in the game. It was my first year going, so it was a fun and exciting experience for me.” Goo adds, “My favorite thing about ITR is working with great people on projects with all different majors and learning things outside of what you would in the classroom. I would have never worked with a flying anything in my major and working on a quadcopter has really taught me different things outside my box.” Students who are interested in learning more about Illinois Tech Robotics can visit their website at illinoistechrobotics.org, join the organization on HawkLink, or attend any general body meeting held weekly on Friday nights at 7 p.m. in their lab in Tech South.

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Photos by Kevin Zheng (left), Kori Bowns (right)