



Memorandum

To: Members of the Rensselaer Union Executive Board
From: Michael Cuzzo, Human Resources Interview Committee Interim Chairman
Date: October 5, 2017
Re: Director of the Union Hiring Process

The Human Resources Interview Committee is tasked with the important role of vetting candidates for the position of Director of the Union and providing a comprehensive and cohesive recommendation to the Rensselaer Union Executive Board.

On November 30, 2016, members of the student body discovered the original job posting online for the position of Director of the Union. At this time, student leaders were neither made aware that the posting would be released nor initially consulted about the accompanying job description. The description and responsibilities of the November 2016 posting differed greatly from the posting made on February 24, 2011, the last time the position was vacant. The 2016 posting included language indicating that the Student Senate and Executive Board were subsidiary to the director. Most notably, language outlining the director's role of "advising" the bodies of student government was changed to "directing" these groups. Only after a period of student unrest decrying these controversial discoveries were the Grand Marshal (GM) and President of the Union (PU) permitted to suggest job description edits to the Division of Human Resources (HR). While HR made some changes to the posting, the language specifying "direction" of student government remained.

Several thousand individuals were nominated and applied to William Spelman Executive Search, which subsequently provided the RPI administration with the resumes of fifty Director of the Union candidates. The GM and PU collected feedback from the student body quantifying desirable qualities in a Director of the Union. These attributes were forwarded to HR to ensure candidates satisfied the needs and expectations of the Union's members, but to the committee's knowledge these specifications were never factored into HR's scoring rubric. Assistant Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students Travis Apgar and Interim Vice President for Student Life LeNorman Strong reviewed the fifty resumes using HR's scoring rubric and narrowed the candidate pool to five individuals. Then, Apgar and Strong conducted video interviews with these five candidates and made the decision to invite two for on-campus interviews. At this point, students had not yet been included in any aspect of the formal hiring process.

In early September, two candidates were presented by HR for the committee's consideration, and students on the committee had the opportunity to speak with each during separate, one-hour lunch sessions. No information was provided to elucidate how HR arrived at these two particular candidates and the fate of the remaining candidates who had made it to the video interview round; specifically, no explanation for why those candidates were not invited for an

on-site interview. Regardless, the committee took issue with the interview sessions for a number of reasons, detailed below.

Shortly before interviews, members of the committee were given access to HR's Performance Management Tool (PMT), a document used by the Director of the Union's Division of Student Life supervisor to measure adherence to the stated job responsibilities. Members had significant reservations about the details of the job description along with the duties and responsibilities listed therein. Particularly alarming was the director's newfound budgeting authority and control in the direction of student government. Among other things, the only reference to the Union's "student governed" nature was found in quotations, which members believed showed the general attitude of the administration toward the student-run Union; that they wanted the Rensselaer Union to be student-run in appearance only. Through a variety of methods, included but not limited to speaking to the HR representatives and leaving feedback in the surveys, the committee attempted to make clear the fact that the Director of the Union position reports to the Executive Board.

Questions for the candidates were not initially generated by the committee; rather, the members were provided with a list of pre-approved questions from HR and told they could be modified. The committee's membership insisted that developing the committee's own questions would be more appropriate, given that the committee had specific interests to ascertain from the candidates and were prepared since members had completed the effective interview training. Only after this were members given the opportunity to create and submit questions.

At these interviews, representatives from HR remained present for the duration, which made it difficult, if not impossible, to comfortably speak with the candidates. Often, during the interviews, committee members felt as though they were being observed, which hindered their ability to be open and honest in questioning the candidates. Additionally, the HR representatives were at times disruptive, interrupting questions and intentionally controlling the topics of discussion. Members of the committee believed HR's presence to be standard practice for student interview committees, and therefore did not feel comfortable asking the representatives to leave. As a result of these factors, the committee was dissatisfied with the experience, even more so after learning Institute representatives were not present in search interviews involving students in the past, indicating there was neither precedent nor reason for the sudden administrative oversight. Most importantly, the committee concluded more time was necessary to interview both candidates and requested that conference calls be conducted to this end, but this request was denied by Vice President for Human Resources, Curtis Powell.

Following the denial of additional interview time and as the committee still had questions for the candidates, GM Justin Etzine emailed further questions developed by the committee to Powell. The committee currently has no evidence that Powell forwarded the questions to the candidates; consequently, the questions remain unanswered. As the aforementioned events unfolded, it became clear that the RPI administration expected the committee to recommend both candidates and intended for individual committee members to submit feedback quickly

and anonymously using an online form. The intent behind the latter seemed geared toward preventing intellectual discourse, thereby removing the formality of the committee by negating the necessity of group discussion and a vote. The committee has not been made privy to the results of this survey, preventing members from gaining insight into the opinions formed by other campus constituencies.

Considering all of these issues, many committee members feel that their time and participation in this endeavor failed to matter in any real, positive way with one committee member going so far as to say members are just “props”—a means to an end to allow HR to tout student involvement was included in the process.

Aside from the process itself, the committee also has reservations about both candidates that were put forward, including some answers those candidates provided and whether or not there was an underlying administrative agenda due to so few candidates being presented and a stark contrast in terms of experience and qualifications between the two. These feelings originally prompted further questioning of the candidates and, depending on the answers, the committee may be in a better position to continue forward with the process.

Therefore, at this time the Human Resources Interview Committee is unable to provide a recommendation to the Rensselaer Union Executive Board. That said, the committee strongly recommends that appropriate action be taken to amend the job description as well as the duties and responsibilities outlined in the PMT. Once these issues are resolved and additional information is obtained from the two candidates, the committee will deliver a detailed report of its findings and recommendations.

Approved 13-0-1