

RPI CLEARS PEACEFUL STUDENT PROTESTERS OF ALL JUDICIAL CHARGES

Students present at peaceful demonstration receive finding of “no responsibility”

TROY, NY — Facing mounting pressure and condemnation from the national press and civil liberty organizations, as well as student leaders, faculty, and alumni, the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute administration dropped judicial charges pending against student dissenters.

The most serious charges were levied at students who participated in a peaceful protest against poor governance and mismanagement on campus. These charges were quietly dismissed by Travis Apgar, RPI’s Dean of Students, with Apgar stating “the preponderance of the evidence does not support a finding of responsibility.” These judicial charges, along with others that were levied upon students who supposedly distributed dissenting materials, were widely seen as retaliation against protests that have embarrassed the Institute’s embattled president.

“These judicial charges were nothing more than a potent tool designed to chill unwanted speech about the school’s precarious financial status and inept governance,” said Michael Gardner, a graduate student who faced judicial charges.

Letters from organizations such as the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education repeatedly reminded Institute officials of their contractual obligations to honor the guarantees the Institute’s Trustees had previously outlined in written policies. These include expansive rights of free expression, assembly, and the general sharing of ideas.

However, as students have protested the Trustees’ actions to commandeer the funds and functions of the formerly student-run Rensselaer Union, these guarantees have increasingly been discarded. Students no longer have substantive input into the rules that govern them, front-line judicial functions are primarily implemented by the staff bringing the charges, and appeals are routinely stymied through procedural stalling and strong-arm tactics.

“While I am grateful to see the charges dismissed, they never should have been levied in the first place. By bringing these charges against students, RPI has clearly demonstrated its contempt for student free speech and constructive criticism,” said Bryan Johns, another student who faced judicial charges. “Dismissing them is simply too little, too late.”