

Save the Union



Much has transpired both on and off RPI's campus since the Fall Town Meeting, so we wanted to summarize the facts along with recent news. We selected some of the most important updates. However, this list is not exhaustive.

Director of the Union search stalled.

Administration gives a candidate the interview questions – then denies doing so.

In an email to the Student Senate, the chairman of the Director of the Union student search committee informed Senators that the administration gave interview questions that students had prepared to one of the candidates before the interview took place. To make matters worse, VP for Human Resources Curtis Powell denied this despite there being multiple witnesses. He even fabricated several different narratives, which the student committee knew to be false, in an attempt to explain away the situation.

RPI claims “eminent domain” – on a public sidewalk.

During a hockey game, Save the Union supporters distributed buttons emblazoned with the simple message “Renew.” Public Safety officers approached them, ordered them to stop, and demanded they leave the area, citing RPI's “eminent domain” during hockey games. When VP for Strategic Communications and External Relations Richie Hunter was questioned by a reporter about the incident, she cited an inapplicable Institute policy about reserving facilities on campus. Yet, even she did not dispute the fact that the students were removed from a public sidewalk.

Jackson Administration forwards an insulting email to all alumni.

Dr. Jackson appears to have endorsed the email.

RPI Professor Chris Bystroff authored an email insinuating alumni donations are down due to bigotry rather than dissatisfaction. This email was eventually forwarded to all alumni by VP for Institute Advancement Graig Eastin. Shocked and enraged alumni quickly voiced their unhappiness at receiving the email. Shortly afterward, the details of its origin and its path soon emerged, including the possibility that Dr. Jackson, herself, authorized its sending.

Here is a timeline of events:

- January 22nd**
 - Professor Bystroff sends his email to all faculty members
 - Dr. Jackson responds to Bystroff via email to let him know that she deeply appreciated his email and thought he did “a very brave thing” by speaking up on her behalf
 - Eastin forwards Bystroff's email to the Rensselaer Alumni Association (RAA) Board with the subject “Important to get the truth out there”
- January 29th**
 - Eastin and Hunter call RAA President Kareem Muhammad and ask Muhammad to forward Bystroff's email to all alumni; Muhammad refuses
 - Moments later, Eastin forwards the email to all alumni
- January 31st**
 - *The Polytechnic* quotes Hunter saying “emails to alumni have varying approval requirements,” but “all official emails to alumni are ultimately approved by Institute Advancement.”

Jackson Administration claims student-to-faculty ratio improved from 18:1 to 13:1.

Not true.

According to the RPI administration, as referenced in an *MIT Technology Review* article, the student-to-faculty ratio has improved from 18:1 to 13:1 during Dr. Jackson's tenure as president. This is misleading. Traditionally, the ratio was calculated by dividing the total number of undergraduate and graduate students by the total number of faculty members. However, last year, RPI started calculating the ratio using only the number of undergraduate students, which has artificially improved the metric. The undergraduate student-to-faculty ratio was 14:1 in 1998, improved, and returned to 14:1 last year.

Jackson Administration claims 360 new faculty members.

RPI's own data shows otherwise.

The *Rensselaer Plan 2024* set a goal to increase the population of tenured and tenure-track faculty to 500 members. The Jackson Administration claims to be well on its way toward accomplishing that goal and cites having hired more than 360 faculty members since 1999. Yet, annual statistics published by RPI do not support this. There were 328 tenured and tenure-track faculty members in 1999 and 329 in 2016. That is a net gain of only one professor in 17 years – hardly worth boasting about.

RPI claims \$400 million raised thus far in the capital campaign.

Not so fast.

Based on RPI's financial records, in order to account for \$400 million to have been raised as part of the Transformative campaign, all gifts since 2008 would have to be counted toward that total. At last semester's town meeting, a student asked Dr. Jackson when accounting began for the campaign. Dr. Jackson replied that she did not have the answer on-hand, but confirmed students' suspicions that there were "reach backs." Dr. Jackson asked the student to email her office and promised to respond with the exact date. When the student followed-up and requested the information, he was told Dr. Jackson was advised to renege on her commitment to answer the question.

The administration withholds 10 percent from donations to student organizations.

With a capital campaign well underway, RPI is aggressively seeking donations. Many in the RPI community are unaware that the administration appropriates 10 percent of every donation received as a "surcharge," even if the donation was earmarked for a student organization or sports team. In the past, the administration has attributed the surcharge to overhead costs, but even credit card transaction fees typically only range from 1 - 3.5 percent.

Dr. Jackson claims nothing has changed with regards to the Rensselaer Union.

Not true. There are many noticeable changes. And not for the better.

- The Student Senate lost its ability to approve changes to the Student Handbook;
- The Executive Board lost its power over the Activity Fee;
- The Archer Center was removed from the Union and placed under "Student Success";
- The hiring of administrative personnel is now largely controlled by the administration;
- Class Councils are no longer able to email their class lists;
- Students no longer have representatives on certain Trustee committees; and
- The student body no longer meets Dr. Jackson with the same frequency as they once did

To say nothing has changed is a gross understatement. Everything has changed.