

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE: RENSSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

The report of the investigating committee concerns the action taken in summer 2007 by the governing board and administration of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute to suspend the faculty senate after senate leaders declined to obey a board directive that they amend the senate constitution to exclude all faculty outside the tenure system from the senate's constituency and membership. The board had issued its directive in response to a senate proposal to add full-time non-tenure-track teaching faculty to the senate's voting membership, which already included not only the tenured faculty and those probationary for tenure but also research faculty, librarians, archivists, and retired faculty. In place of the senate and its representative faculty bodies, the administration imposed a "transitional" structure of faculty governance.

Prior to the suspension of the faculty senate, the faculty had participated in academic governance primarily through elected senate representatives who carried out the faculty's primary responsibilities in the areas of educational policy, curriculum, research, and faculty personnel matters. Faculty members reported that after the suspension of the senate and the administratively imposed transitional governance scheme, an effective faculty committee system no longer existed, faculty representatives were selected by the administration rather than by the faculty, and there was no agency for presenting the faculty's views to the administration and the governing board.

Following the board's action, a committee was created to attempt to resolve the impasse by formulating a modified senate constitution that would receive the approval of the faculty, the administration, and the board of trustees. This committee turned out to be the first of three such bodies, the last of which completed its work in April 2011. In May, this committee, which consisted of elected faculty representatives working closely with the provost, submitted yet

another proposed senate constitution to the faculty, expecting that if the faculty voted its approval, the board would act upon the proposal at its May meeting. The faculty did vote in favor of the proposed constitution and so informed the administration. According to the administration, however, the faculty-approved constitution continues to be “under review.”

The investigating committee found that the RPI board of trustees and administration failed to provide a compelling reason for their action to suspend the faculty senate, that the administratively imposed transitional governance structure lacked the essential elements of an effective system of shared governance, that the board and administration disregarded principles of shared academic governance when it declined to accept the faculty’s recommendation to broaden the senate’s voting membership, and that the actions of the administration raised questions about its commitment to principles of academic freedom. The investigating committee concluded that in rejecting out of hand the faculty senate’s proposal to grant voting rights to non-tenure-line faculty and in suspending the faculty senate and replacing it with a transitional form of academic government, the administration of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute contravened basic principles of academic governance as set forth in the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*. In reaching this conclusion, the committee noted that the “unilateral suspension of a duly constituted faculty senate,” absent a legitimate basis, was “a prima facie violation” of normative governance standards and that the current transitional governance structure failed “in multiple ways to meet AAUP-recommended governance standards and has left RPI without a legitimate faculty governance structure.”

In view of these actions and of the continuing failure of the administration and governing board to act upon faculty-approved changes to the senate constitution, the Committee on College and University Governance recommends to the Ninety-seventh Annual Meeting that Rensselaer

Polytechnic Institute be placed on the Association's list of institutions sanctioned for substantial non-compliance with generally accepted standards of academic government.