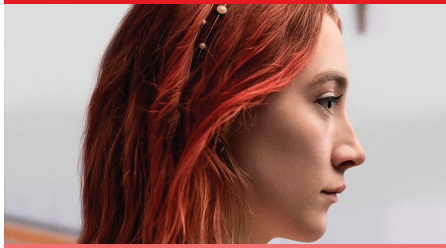


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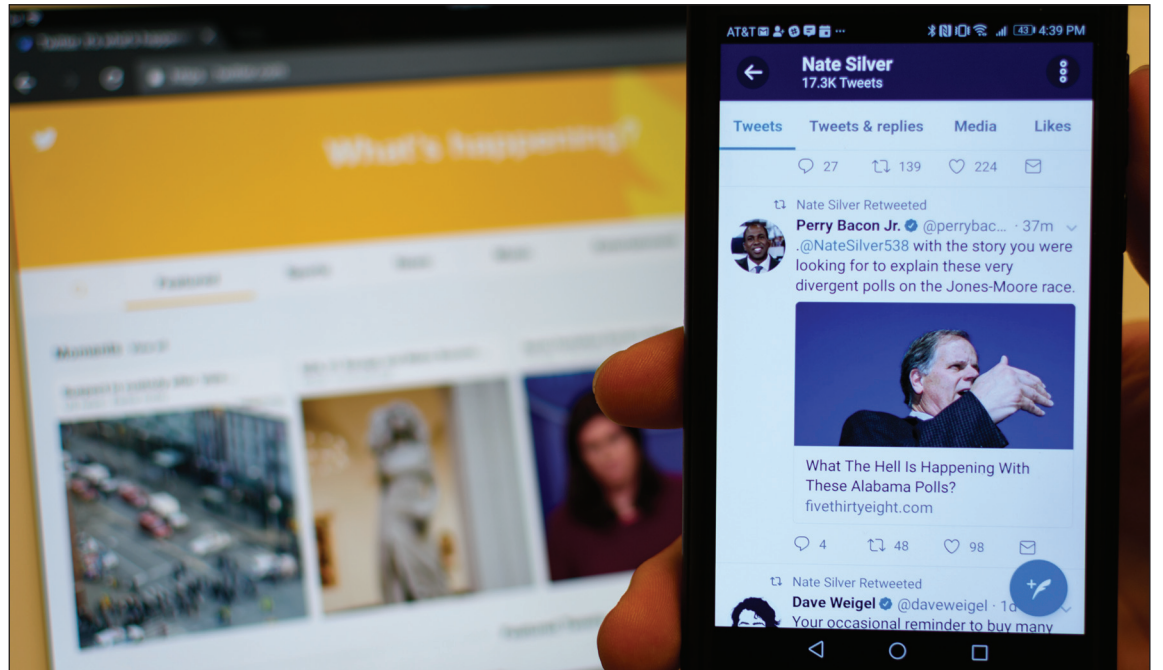
RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Investigating startup success

Anahit Hovhannisyan Senior Reviewer

AFTER SPENDING ALMOST 10 YEARS studying online markets and consumer use of electronic commerce, Academic Director of the Severino Center Jason Kuruzovich is now focused on utilizing unstructured data to understand the success of entrepreneurs and their startups.

Rensselaer Center for Open Source, or RCOS, is a community of open source developers at RPI. Specifically, Kuruzovich works on Kuberlytics—a project with the goal of developing cloud-based scalable analytics solutions based on Jupyterhub and Kubernetes—with a team of students in RCOS. Among various applications, one example includes easing the setting up of coding environments compatible with all devices. In other words, he plays a role in tool development. Another aspect of the project includes collecting data from startups. Initially exploring Twitter, a team including nine undergraduate students gathers unstructured data to observe trends in entrepreneurship behavior, with hopes to collect a pool of raw data relevant to the success of emerging businesses. Ultimately, this data could be organized in such a manner to determine the type of page most appropriate for the company. The Cognitive and Immersive



Sidney Kochman/The Polytechnic

JASON KURUZOVICH ANALYZES entrepreneur's social media behavior to understand key trends in success.

Systems Lab, better known as CISL, is a partnership between Rensselaer and IBM working toward advancing the way we think about group intelligence in real-life situations. The problem lies in tying the functionality of computers and data analytics algorithms with the knowledge and analysis capabilities of human beings. The project tackles this problem with a Situations Room—an immersive environment built in the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center to allow interactions among individuals and supercomputing services to

make decisions and complete a task. In particular, Kuruzovich is working on helping shape a narrative in which investors examine potential startup investments or acquisitions in an immersive environment. Kuruzovich works to make entrepreneurship into a team effort. The Severino Center is home to five Rensselaer competitions designed to encourage entrepreneurship and help translate ideas into business models. Recently, select members were given the opportunity to travel to Boston and understand current problems in

need of solutions—ones that could be turned into a business. Kuruzovich is involved in a multitude of projects regarding entrepreneurship. His research revolves around understanding what makes them successful and the tools that would aid in their progression, while his involvement in the Severino Center supports their growth and development. With our ever-growing online business culture, one can look to Kuruzovich for a fresh perspective. ♦

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Little Pecks offers quality coffee

Joseph Lyon Senior Reviewer

LITTLE PECKS, TOUTED AS AN ALL-DAY CAFE FROM the culinary team behind Peck's Arcade, really lives up to its reputation. It serves Tandem Coffee, as well as a collection of baked goods weekly, brunch on weekends, and sandwiches, salads, and snacks during the evenings.

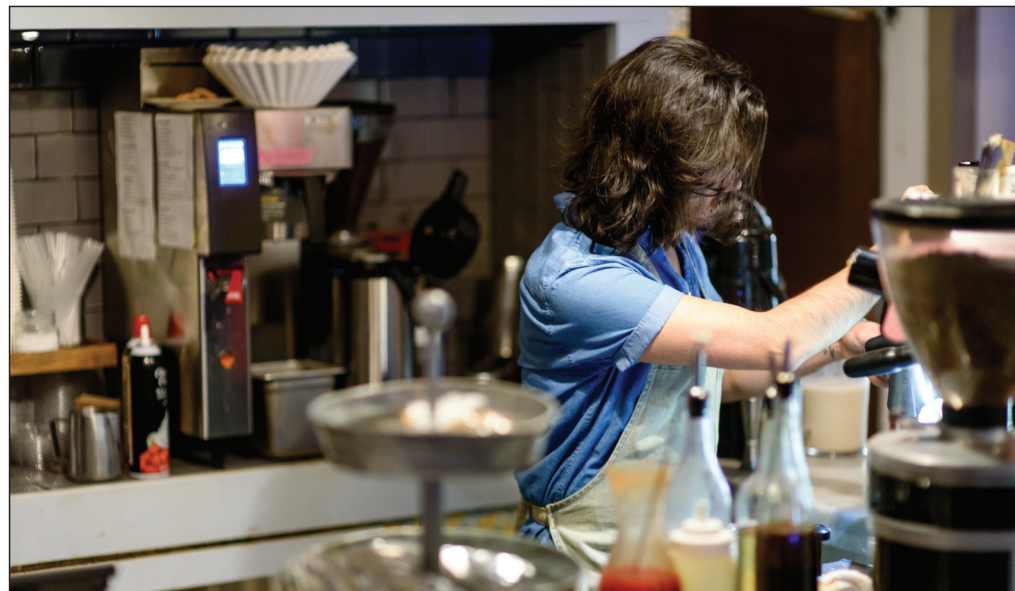
The coffee is exactly what you'd expect from a roaster out of Portland, Maine, with bold flavors and tasty, yet sweet, espresso. I ordered a pourover during my most recent visit, and was treated to a friendly conversation with the barista as he made my small cup of coffee. Ordering a pourover gives the option of several different roasts from Tandem. I have not tried every roast they provide, however,

the Burtukaana roast was quite good; I would highly recommend it if you are someone who doesn't usually order coffee due to its bitter taste. The barista described many of the pour overs as "tea-like," and I tend to agree with this analysis. I tasted fruity and sweet flavor notes, and sharp contrast from what many would consider a "normal" cup of coffee.

Little Pecks serves not just coffee, but also cocktails, tea, and many other things on its diverse menu. Although I have been several times—and ordered different things every time—I have yet to be disappointed by anything I've tried. The interior feels too nice to be a cafe. If you walk back into the hall behind the bar, there is seating which you could easily mistake for an extension of Peck's Arcade.

Little Pecks is unique in its position as a less expensive Peck's Arcade. You can get food made by the team behind an extremely high quality restaurant in Troy, for a lower price and fewer "nice restaurant" expectations. Although I have not had the food, I plan to go back and sample more solely based on the quality of the coffee and the friendly service.

Little Pecks is tucked away next to Peck's Arcade, and features a cozy interior which lends itself nicely to dates or just sitting around and absorbing a nice atmosphere. I highly recommend giving it a visit to take a break from the fast-approaching finals week. ♦



Nicholas Luczak/The Polytechnic

DOWNTOWN TROY COFFEE SHOP OFFERS a diverse set of offerings and a friendly staff.

Serving the Rensselaer community since 1885

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UPAC EVENT

Comedy show surprisingly interactive



Jonathan Caicedo/The Polytechnic

UPAC COMEDY HOSTED comedians Phil Hanley and Joe List in the Union's McNeil Room.

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

iGEM team earns bronze at competition

Douglas Meadow
A Special to The Poly

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR UNIVERSITY'S HISTORY, Rensselaer students joined 3,000 synthetic biologists at the international Genetically Engineered Machine Giant Jamboree in Boston on November 9–13. The 2017 iGEM competition featured an amazing array of 310 student teams from 44 countries. This unique event combined the spirit of the Olympics with the rigor of a genetic engineering science fair. The first successful Rensselaer iGEM team earned a bronze medal award for our manufacturing project demonstrating that selective modification of the yeast *Starmerella bombicola* MFE2 gene improves the efficiency of sophorolipid production.

Our iGEM mentors Professor Mattheos Koffas and Professor Richard Gross supported our team of 11 undergraduates who study biochemistry and biophysics, bioinformatics and molecular biology, business and management, chemical engineering, biology, and biomedical engineering. The 2017 RPI iGEM team launched with enthusiastic support and funding from professors who enabled our student team to officially register, unlocking 20,000 base pairs of free

DNA synthesis from our sponsor Integrated DNA Technologies. The 2018 RPI iGEM team is now recruiting interested students.

Our first donor, Department Head and Professor Joel Plawsky, said, "The iGEM team did a great job and were tremendous representatives for Rensselaer. We in the Howard P. Isermann Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering were happy to support them in any way we could. We thought this was a fantastic opportunity to get folks from different disciplines together and working on a creative idea with a common goal." Department Head and Professor Juergen Hahn, Vice President for Research Jonathan Dordick, Dean of the School of Science Curt Breneman, Department Head and Professor Susan Gilbert, Dean of the School of Engineering Shekhar Garde, and the Director of the Center for Biotechnology and Interdisciplinary Studies Deepak Vashishth also provided generous contributions. Our team benefited from having access to the equipment and laboratories of CBIS. In the words of Vashishth, "the success of the iGEM team follows directly from the hard work and dedication of the student and faculty team who crafted an

interdisciplinary approach at the crossroads of life sciences and engineering and worked tirelessly utilizing state of the art equipment and research cores."

Student leader Krystyna Farrell '18 directed the microbial genetics committee of four students who assembled the DNA constructs used to modify the yeast *Starmerella bombicola*. Cameron Kee '18 led the culturing and chemistry committee of five students who cultured both control and modified yeasts to compare sophorolipid yields. In his own words, "iGEM represented an entirely unparalleled opportunity to design and run an experiment entirely independently." Blossom Wong '19 worked with Megan Gupta '19 to create the iGEM wiki website for our project. Gupta said that "iGEM was an excellent learning opportunity for me to learn new skills such as HTML coding and work with such a great team to accomplish exciting feats in the laboratory. I'm truly grateful that I had the chance to participate."

The key contributions of Farrell to our InterLab Study helped our team earn the bronze medal. According to Farrell, "The iGEM experience was very rewarding for me. Having never led a research project start to finish, I learned much more about the process of experimental

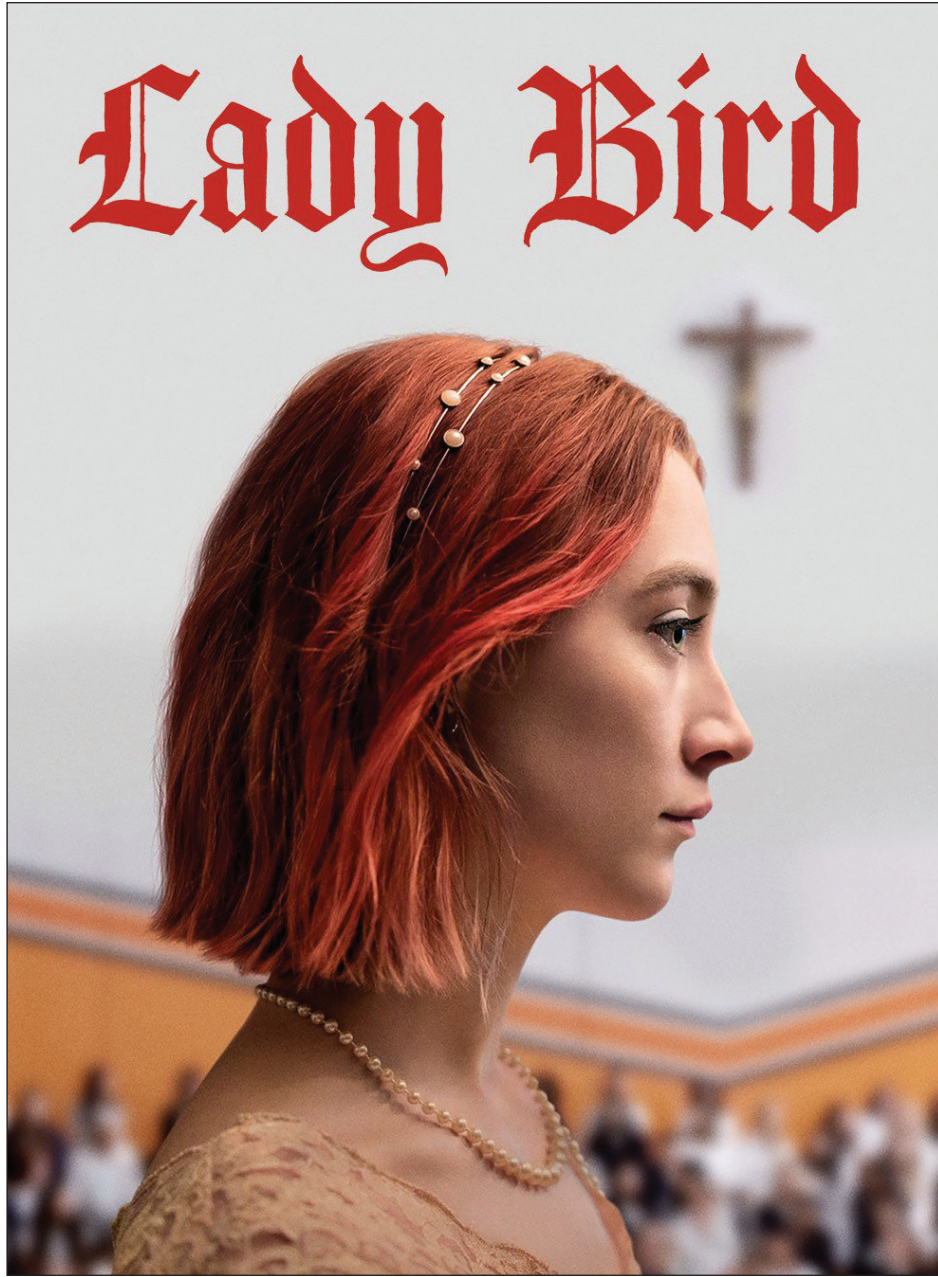
design and enjoyed seeing the project come to life." With the help of Stephanie Lee '18 and Farrell, we shared our sophorolipid research with judges at our presentation and poster sessions. Our project gained from the hands-on laboratory work of our additional team members Leah Henegar '18, Helen Merricks '18, Genesis Moran '19, and Maily Nguyen '19. We also thank our advisors graduate student Fei Liu, Dr. Jian Zha, and Dr. Shekar Mekala, who said that "the most fascinating thing about my participation in the 2017 iGEM project is to work with bright students and to see their 'curiosity' to execute the project successfully."

With the help of our finance committee member Ian Fralen '18, we produced writing and graphic designs for our online crowdfunding campaign, brochure, informational postcard, banner, and team wiki. We also thank the 12 additional donors to our crowdfunding campaign who enabled our experiments and Giant Jamboree participation. Whatever your major or skill set, the 2018 RPI iGEM team could use your talents if you'd like to learn synthetic biology, perform undergraduate research, make friends, build your resume, and benefit the world. Please contact rpiigem@gmail.com to learn more about how to get involved for next year. ♦

Our next issue will be published on January 24. Feel free to change our lights at poly.rpi.edu/lights in the meantime!

MOVIE REVIEW

New drama stuns



Courtesy of A24

LADY BIRD ENTERTAINS with a compelling story line and developed characters.

Tanner Vargas

A Special to The Poly

WITH A CUNNING SENSE OF DIRECTION AND extraordinary acting all around, Greta Gerwig's first solo directorial effort transcends the genre in a vivid portrayal of adolescence, independence, and the messy relationships between prevailing aspiration and unconventional family.

It effectively rises above the tropes it could have so easily fallen into. Each and every second of dialogue is believable, so much so that you'll likely recall specific personal memories that indirectly connect to the questions each character is fumbling to answer. Its refreshing inclusion of and focus on strong, dynamic, and genuine women was deftly executed. "There's not gonna be one guy, there's gonna be two, and they're both wrong," says Gerwig on her approach, in a reversal of common character tropes. Such a premise leads to Gerwig's heartfelt encapsulation of the strengths and struggles during a rambunctious teen's metamorphoses of inner dialogue and self-belief.

Each character's inherent realness demands your attention, and—rather quickly—your adoration and care. Not all vignettes call for a character's love, but their genuine portrayals lead to a genuine care about how they interact with each other and end up.

Saoirse Ronan pulls off, arguably, the performance of her career as an inherently flawed, inconsistent, introspective, and yet irreconcilably endearing lead. "Lady Bird," as she calls herself—not the Christine her parents gave her at birth—is often at ends with her demanding mother, and when she's not trying to navigate family complications, she's trying to reconcile her own evolving belief system with her Catholic school education. She's hypocritical one moment and genuine the next, her distinct personality shining through in each and every harrowing instant of rebellion (that often land her in trouble). Most of the course of Lady Bird's teenage years are driven by her

insistence on asserting her individuality in all aspects of her life, even though it's clear she's struggling to make sense of that exact desire and its implications on the ones she loves most. She dreams of New York culture, but treasures her first California drive behind the wheel.

Her growing pains are relatable in that they are a result of her discovering her sense of self and navigating long-held and new relationships, but what keeps her character so interesting is how she makes decisions based on these messy propagations. She's a natural rebel, but she has a cause that she's still trying to figure out and a heart that finds itself constantly changing its opinions on just how it wants to be mended and broken.

Gerwig, the sole director and screenwriter, will have you clutching your stomach in laughter one moment and tearing up at a philosophical character development the next. It packs quite a few surprising punches in emotional and physical transformation—how Lady Bird ends up in a "fuck you mom" arm cast, and how she navigates her way through the peaks and pitfalls of love and attraction with radically changing friends surrounding her all the way. Although such drastic changes in mood often end up over-dramatized in many films, the strength of the script shines through in each actor's revelatory work. There are legitimate explosions of emotion (a raised voice argument in a Goodwill abruptly ending with the perfect dress) and heartbreaking truths revealed (the strains of Lady Bird's romantic and familial relationships) in equal parts.

An opus of emotion worthy of all the awards it gets, *Lady Bird* is a must-see film of the year. If not for the excellent direction and daring performances, it's for all the intrinsic philosophical gold to be mined from its distinct yet recognizable characters. You won't soon forget it.

Lady Bird is in theaters now, currently reigning as the highest-reviewed film on Rotten Tomatoes and already nabbing awards for Ronan's bold performance and Gerwig's triumphant direction. ♦

CLUB SPORT

Racquetball team prepared for spring

Michael Kowalczyk

A Special to The Poly

OVER THE WEEKEND OF NOVEMBER 17–19, the Rensselaer Racquetball team traveled to Millersville, Maryland for its third meet of the 2017–2018 Eastern Collegiate Racquetball Conference season.

Following the meet, the 2017–2018 regular season standings were announced. The RPI Racquetball women's team is in second place, the men's team is in third place, and the combined team is in third place. Both teams have improved throughout the season, and the combined team is just 200 points out of second place overall.

Team President Will Puswald '18 knows the 200 points can be made up in the final regular season meet. "Our whole team is very well-balanced, with seniors all the way to freshmen contributing to its success. It is amazing to see our entire team eager to go out and compete at such a high level," said Puswald.

Team coaches and graduate student Kevin Mitchell and myself also voiced praise for the team. Coach Kevin recalls, "When I joined the team as a student, it was only five players. It was always a struggle to compete as a small team from a smaller school in the ECRC. Now, with a team of 16, we are able to challenge Pennsylvania State University, the University of Connecticut, and Army for the regular season championship."

Over the course of the first three meets, the team has positioned itself to have its best regular season finish in over 10 years. I am extremely optimistic for the next meet in late January and regionals in late February. I would love for the team to take home some regular season awards, but more importantly, I am proud that everyone has improved over the course of the first semester. If anyone has ever played the sport or would like to give it a try, please reach out to someone on the team; email Puswald at puswaw@rpi.edu, and email Vice Presidents Melissa Helm '20 and Nick Harrison '19 at helmm2@rpi.edu and harrin4@rpi.edu, respectively. ♦

DOWNTOWN TROY

Babes in Troyland enjoyable, neat

Brookelyn Parslow

Senior Reviewer

THIS SUNDAY, I VENTURED THROUGH THE SNOW INTO DOWNTOWN TROY IN SEARCH OF THE TAKK House, which was home to Babes in Troyland for the weekend. Hosted by Troy Flea, this holiday fair essentially served as a themed counterpart to the market that takes place during the summer months at Riverfront Park.

For me and many other people I spoke to throughout the day, it was a tease of how nice it would be to have the Troy Flea held year-round. The vendors and location were different, but the uniqueness and variety of items, pleasant atmosphere, and the friendliness of everyone present were all the same.

In the midst of all the stress associated with the end of the semester, Babes in Troyland was a refreshing break; it reminded me how much I love mingling at these kinds of community events. I completely forgot how easy it is to start talking to a person who is selling something she made or found somewhere. There are so many stories, and they are almost always worth hearing. (It is also perfect for people who are intimidated by spontaneous conversation, but want to get better at it. I used to be in that position, but because of events like these it's now something that I thoroughly enjoy.)

I generally love holiday markets for gift shopping, and Babes in Troyland was no exception. There were tons of neat, handmade items, including lotions, candles, bowties, miniature carved pots, and rings a man made from buttons when his wife's collection started getting out of hand. Near the entrance, there was also one woman stationed at a typewriter who sold antique-looking poetry that she created on the spot. Other vendors focused more on items that they found at auctions or in other "special places," with assortments of pins, vinyl records, comics, drinking sets, and vintage clothing scattered throughout the entire market.

To top it all off, The Ruck was set up in the main market room, Lost Highway Coffee Co. upstairs, and Monya's Confectionery near the entrance, along with a few other food vendors placed around the building.

I almost didn't go to Babes in Troyland since it was snowy and cold and I had way too much work to do, but I'm so glad that I did. Considering it's only its third year, I'm excited to see how this event continues to grow, and I'll certainly be keeping an eye out for it next year. ♦

The Poly wishes you good luck during finals
and a wonderful winter break!

STUDENT SENATE

Academic Affairs Committee progress detailed

Career fair holiday, ALAC drop-in tutoring, research symposiums currently topics of discussion

Darby Burns
Senior Reporter

IN THE LAST STUDENT SENATE MEETING of the Fall 2017 semester, the three main points of business were an update from the Academic Affairs Committee, a presentation of the Interfraternity Council's state of Greek life letter, and the approval of an informal learning spaces update letter written by the Facilities and Services Committee.

Greek Senator Sean Ferracioli '18 presented the letter regarding the current state of Greek life on campus that was written by Marvin Cosare '18, the 100th Interfraternity Council president, and approved 20-0-1 by the Rensselaer Interfraternity Council Executive Board. He read the letter (which can be found at <http://poly.rpi.edu/ng4c>) and then took questions. In response to Graduate Senator Kinshuk Panda's question asking if this would be a one-off letter or an annual occurrence, Ferracioli said that it was intended to be a one-time update, but that could change.

The update by the Academic Affairs Committee covered what's going on in several different areas of focus. The first part of the presentation was from the Undergraduate Research Subcommittee, whose current goal is to connect students with faculty to increase undergraduate research participation across campus. While originally the committee wanted to focus on expanding the annual research symposium, it has now switched focus and wants to expand the number of undergraduates involved with research by connecting them with faculty doing research and showing them that it is easy to get involved. The committee believes that this will cause the symposium to expand naturally.

Next, the presentation moved to Advising Learning and Assistance Center tutoring and a plan to eventually have online drop-in



Brooklyn Parslow/The Polytechnic

IN ITS LAST MEETING OF THE SEMESTER, THE STUDENT SENATE DISCUSSED the need for more informal study spaces on campus.

tutoring. They hope that this will make ALAC more accessible. They believe that the online tutoring will be convenient for quick questions, appeal to different learning styles, and increase awareness among students that ALAC exists.

Class of 2020 Senator Joshua Thomas then discussed the goal to assure adequate support is provided to underrepresented majors, also known as niche majors. He said that they are reviewing what the current

career fair representation is, and once they determine that, they will pursue ways to increase representation if it proves to be an issue. They are also looking into other areas in which niche majors can be supported, and in the future will contact the department heads of those majors.

Thomas also said that they are working on a proposal suggesting an implementation of a career fair holiday. They have created Senate survey questions to ensure that they are acting

on public opinion, and have also asked which day students would be willing to give up for the career fair.

Moving on to talk about their focus on The Arch and The Arch Task Force, Thomas said that they plan to review multiple survey results, identify the most pressing academic issue, and develop a proposal to address it.

The committee is also working on getting professors to put assignments into writing so that there isn't a com-

munication barrier with students who are less fluent in English.

The final item on the agenda was the approval of a letter written by the Study Spaces Subcommittee and approved by the Facilities and Services Committee. The letter was presented by Class of 2019 Senators Nancy Bush and Kinsley Rowan and discussed the need and options for additional informal study spaces on campus. The letter was approved by a vote of 17-0-2. ♦

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Budgeting goes 'smoothly'

Jonathan Caicedo
Senior Reporter

THE EXECUTIVE BOARD CONCLUDED THE budgeting process for Fiscal Year 2019 on Saturday, December 8, after addressing five budget appeals from various clubs and organizations. According to President of the Union Matthew Rand '19, the Board was able to provide an extra \$50,000 to clubs this fiscal year compared to last, partly due to growing class sizes. Rand commended the Board, saying that overall, "budgeting went very smoothly."

That isn't to say the Board didn't face challenges—notably with minimum wage increases and the upcoming Arch Summer Semester. In 2016, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo enacted legislation that would steadily increase the state's minimum wage annually, bringing it to \$12.50 by 2021.

Rand said that the Board needed to take into account what that meant for the Union's budget as a whole. At the same time, Rand emphasized the Union's commitment to providing meaningful work to students and continuing to expand the positions available. There are also plans to form a student employment committee that would provide training and make available various resources to Union employed students.

The Arch Summer Semester also posed some challenges in budgeting with clubs that wish to remain active over the summer. As this is the first summer semester with an expanded class, Rand said many clubs didn't exactly know what their membership for the summer would look like, nor the number of activities they'd like to host, which made budgeting for that challenging. However, despite the difficulties, Rand stressed that

the Board will always do what it can to accommodate clubs and give them what they need to operate, especially over the summer.

For the future, Rand highlighted plans to provide more advanced tools in the Union's Club Management System to make budgeting more efficient for both clubs and the Board. Features like tagging would allow clubs to distinguish between line items that are "necessary for the club's operation" and ones that "would be nice to have." Otherwise, Rand said clubs should continue their good work and cooperation with the Executive Board, and make sure they ask for everything that they might need in their budgets.

The Executive Board will meet January 18, 2018—the first Thursday of the Spring semester—at 8 pm in the Shelnut Gallery. ♦

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Editorial

Wednesday, December 13, 2017

EDITORIAL NOTEBOOKS

More to college than academics, grades

WHEN I FIRST CAME TO RENSSELAER, I REALLY DIDN'T KNOW ALL THAT MUCH ABOUT IT, BUT I thought I did. I, an engineering major who had always loved math and science, was going to a tech school. That turned out to be very true, however when I got here I found out that there was so much more than simply the academics I had been looking forward to and expecting. A huge part of life here on campus takes place outside of the classroom. Beyond the lectures and labs are a wealth of clubs, sports, competitions, and research available to those who are interested.



Darby Burns
News Editor

I personally believe that it is critical to have a life outside of academics. That's where you can meet friends and pursue what interests you. When all you do is school, it becomes too easy to get caught up in the little disappointments. All of a sudden it becomes the end of the world if you fail a test or receive a not-so-great grade on a paper. A constant single-minded focus on coursework also brings with it the trap of monotony. When all you do is wake up, go to class, study, and then go to sleep to start all over again in the morning, life very quickly gets boring and hard to maintain.

Participating in things outside of the classroom gives you something to work on and move forward with. You can see improvement in yourself, in the project, or even in your level of involvement within an organization. One of the things that makes Rensselaer unique is the openness of all its extracurriculars. If you want to join a club, you can; you don't even have to know what you're doing. Just ask and someone will probably show you. RPI and the Union provide a platform for students to stretch and explore their interests in whichever way they choose.

As I've talked to friends who go to a variety of other schools across the country, one of the major struggles that I've seen people face is in getting involved. Whether it's because everything comes with a competitive application or because every club is a massive, complex organization that is terrifying to attempt to break into, people struggle to find ways to fill their time meaningfully outside of schoolwork.

I know that school is why we're here, and that should always remain the priority. However, a great deal of learning can take place outside of the classroom and, in terms of maintaining happiness, it's important to have an expanded focus. It is well worth it to take advantage of the opportunities that exist for students on campus and look beyond classes to try what's out there. The chance is there, so why not take it? ♦

Preventing sickness

Staying safe, healthy during colder months

IN LIGHT OF THE FIRST SNOWFALL OF THE SEASON, IT SEEMS THAT WINTER HAS OFFICIALLY begun. Here in the Northeast, we can expect only colder temperatures to come and more snow to fall. Some of us find this season to be our favorite, while others would rather soak up sunshine at a beach. Whatever your thoughts are on winter, here are some of the precautions to take to get the most out of the season.

Many people associate the winter season with getting a cold or the flu. In fact, millions of people have some sort of sickness during this season. Therefore, it is important to take preventative measures to avoid getting sick. An important step in preventing the common cold is thoroughly washing your hands. This destroys bugs that you may have picked up from touching surfaces used by other people, such as light switches and door handles. It may be surprising to learn that heart attacks are more common in the winter. The cold weather increases blood pressure, which puts more strain on your heart. Similarly, your heart has to work harder to keep your body warm. If you have heart troubles, it is advised to keep warm and stay inside when necessary. Since you lose the most body heat from your head, wearing a hat to keep it warm is vital in the winter.

It also may be surprising to learn you are just as much at risk of becoming dehydrated in the winter as you are in the summer. We usually associate the summer season with dehydration. However, the dry air of winter can dehydrate you as well. That's why it is vital to make sure you are drinking as much water as you would drink in warm weather.

Another precautionary measure to take during the winter season is safety when driving in snowy and icy conditions. Winter weather is a significant cause of many accidents during the winter season. To help prevent accidents, it is important to follow some basic guidelines. When driving, accelerate and decelerate slowly. Accelerating and decelerating like you would do with clear weather can cause a loss in traction with the road. Also, when decelerating, it is important to remember that your car takes a longer time to slow down on an icy road. Going up and down hills can be challenging in icy conditions. To avoid any troubles, try not to stop going up as it will be difficult to regain traction. As a general rule, reducing speed when driving will not only give you more reaction time, but others on the road as well. Taking some of the precautions stated above can help you have a safe and enjoyable winter season. ♦



Peter Begonja
Business Manager

DERBY

Union fully staffed, save director position

HELLO EVERYONE! I HOPE YOU'RE ALL DOING well and finishing the semester on a high note. Congratulations! One more semester of life here at RPI is in the books, and the only things standing between us and winter break are a few finals. So best of luck on those, and happy holidays and safe travels to all.

As a quick aside, I would just like to say congratulations to all of our December grads. I wish you all the best of luck as you head out into the world, and I know that you will do us proud. This year, I have the bittersweet pleasure of wishing some very good friends good luck as they graduate, and to all of their companions, I wish nothing but the best. I know that you will do us all proud.

As we wrap up this semester, I want to take a moment to reflect on all that we have accomplished this year. Individually, every student here at RPI has changed, whether they have noticed or not. Each and every one of you has become a better student, a better problem solver, and a better leader. You have all faced and overcome challenges this semester, whether that be a difficult class, a conflict with a friend, or balancing a difficult schedule. You have all had to make a tough decision, and you came out the other side better for it. With each passing day, you grew stronger, smarter, and wiser. So this break, take a moment to reflect on the past four months and take notice over how much you've learned, how much you have grown, and set a goal for what you're going to accomplish in the next semester.

The Executive Board has also grown a lot this past semester, and I couldn't be more proud of all that we have accomplished. This past month alone, we have budgeted just shy of \$3 million to all of our clubs, organizations, facilities, and employees. And speaking of employees, the Union will be back to fully staffed (save for the director of the Union) come the start of the Spring semester! The Executive Board also recognized four clubs, officially opened the Student Veterans Lounge, and is in the process of finalizing some new furniture for across the Union. We also significantly expanded our social media presence through mediums like Instagram, started to look into redesigning the Union logo, and have taken a hard look at our operations and how they might be affected by The Arch. All in all, we've had a very productive year on the Executive Board, and I am excited to continue our work come next semester.



Matthew Rand
President of the Union

Now, I recognize that there have also been some concerns over the Union this semester. The Student Senate is hard at work looking at the *Union Constitution* and determining if changes need to be made. We are also going to continue to be working with administrators to address student concerns and advocate for students. Justin and I continue to meet with the administration and the Board of Trustees to discuss concerns. Fear not, we will not stop representing the wishes of students.

With that, I want to personally thank all of you who take the time to read these articles and stay up to date on the operations of the

Executive Board (hi Mom!). Your support for our Union and our operations is what makes this position worth it to me. It's an honor to serve as your president of the Union and I will continue to faithfully execute the office to the best of my ability to ensure our Union remains the hub of student life and involvement on campus for the next 127 years.

Best of luck, and as always, feel free to reach out with any questions, comments, or concerns.

Matthew Rand
128th President of the Union

TOP HAT

Enjoy winter vacation

I HOPE YOU DIDN'T BLINK, BUT IT IS ALREADY time for the semester to come to a close! I know; I can't believe it either, and it's been quite the semester, too.

As we wrap up for the fall, I am reflecting on all the students have accomplished throughout the semester, both through student government and across all parts of campus. With this in mind, I'm excited for what we will achieve next semester, and I hope everyone keeps their passion and love for RPI strong through the break. Of course, as always, you can reach me at gm@rpi.edu. Feel free to share any questions, comments, concerns, or ideas throughout the break.

Good luck, everyone, with final exams, projects, and assignments! I hope you all have an enjoyable holiday season, and I wish a Happy Chanukah, a Merry Christmas, a Happy Kwanza, and a Happy New Year to all who celebrate! Enjoy your winter vacation, and I'll see you all in January.



Justin Etzine
Grand Marshal

Justin Etzine
152nd Grand Marshal

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Debilitating effects of rape, finances

TWO MONTHS AFTER HANDING IN my dissertation, awaiting my second degree in construction, I was violently raped by a senior male in my field. He was 10 years older and vastly better connected, professionally, in a city where I was just starting out. He was drunk and angry and caught me off guard while I napped on a couch; I was sober. He was 6-foot and around 190 pounds worth of rugby player. I'm 5-foot-3 and around 120 pounds. Other than a few snapshots of the following few hours, I don't remember much of that night, nor most of the five weeks after. It was the beginning of the recession, and most of the construction industry were losing their jobs—women, notoriously, at a higher rate than men. Knowing I would be blacklisted from working in my field (nearly 90 percent men) if I reported a rape or my name got leaked from a police report, I kept my mouth shut to protect my career. He took what he took; I wasn't giving him my sole means of income too.

The expectation I had with the published salaries at the time of my enrollment was that I should have been able to pay off all my student debt within eight years. My

federal student loan payments were instead more than half of my salary upon graduation, because the only jobs available in the recession paid a fraction of pre-recession jobs. They didn't have income-based repayments or much in the way of deferments back then. There was no forgiveness. Those first few months drained my emergency fund to nothing. I decided that I would pay down tens of thousands I had in federal student debt as fast as humanly possible and then get out of the industry I'd only just mortgaged myself into. The career I'd envisioned working in until old age imploded before it even started. I didn't save—I just drilled down the debt as fast as I could. The recession stagnated salaries, eliminated benefits, and my salary never came near the expectation set when I enrolled in the two degrees.

I learned something about post-traumatic stress disorder, too—it can make your memories shift, like the goo inside a lava lamp. Parts of the memory will grow or shrink or combine with others in a fluid manner which is hard to pin down into a linear sequence of events. I was able to recount the full encounter only once in the last 10 years. It was during a

therapy session, and I spent the following four hours vomiting, and most of the next week, too. I knew I could never press charges against this man. The combination of trauma and shifting memories meant I could neither survive the process, nor would I be a reliable witness in securing a conviction. I also learned that PTSD can be triggered from a wide range of related emotions and sensations connected back to the event, such as when someone acts menacing, a person behaving in a controlling manner, or feeling trapped. They can all trigger a wave of terror. For me, it feels like a blowtorch blasting my face whilst someone pours ice water down my arms and neck. Construction is somewhat notorious for menacing characters and controlling behaviour. Most days are blowtorches and ice water, for me.

Whilst I've knocked my loans down considerably, I'm not even close to paying them off more than 10 years later, and it's repeatedly come at a horrendous price. I skipped meals to make extra payments. I lived in cheap, unsafe housing to free up money—both of which piled stress on stress. I liquidated my pension to pile

that onto the debt; it was so small it hardly made a dent. I've attempted suicide three times, because the combination of being trapped in debt and trapped in the industry was sometimes unbearable and death was the only sure-fire way to both clear the debt and escape the industry. The flashbacks sometimes mean I can't work for weeks at a time—again, impacting my income and the speed at which I can change careers. I graduated at the top of my class—I am exceptional at what I do ... on the days I'm mentally capable of doing it at all.

Rape isn't an accepted excuse for defaulting on student debt and abandoning your modestly paid career for one that pays a fraction of that, and a smaller fraction of what you expected to make when you were 17 or 22. Rape doesn't get you a scholarship or pay your bills so you can re-train in a different field. And, not everyone would want to put themselves through a meat-grinder of a legal process to even attempt to recover some of the financial loss.

I've done nearly everything I could to try and get out from under that debt so that I could leave this industry and build a new life, doing something more therapeutic, supportive, and far-removed from a cut-throat, macho environment. After 10 years, I finally have to accept that I am likely to fail in that endeavour. At less than 6.5 percent interest, I cannot get out fast enough to save myself financially and emotionally. I have to choose one or the other. Either irrecoverable financial ruin, by defaulting on debt I can't discharge in bankruptcy, that has limited forgiveness, and retraining for a lower-paid position which won't even cover half the interest; or risking a terminal breakdown whilst attempting to function in an environment which became unbearable before I even got the

second diploma in my hand.

This is a message for those of you taking on massive debt to launch yourself into your chosen field, with the hope of a bright and shiny future. Please remember, that there are things that may happen which are entirely outside your control. The behavior of others is outside your control. Global financial realignments are outside your control. Rapidly increasing automation and shifting employment landscapes are outside your control. While how you handle those situations is entirely up to you, sometimes—for whatever reason—your choices for remedial action may be limited. Your future has no guarantees—it's always a risk. Having debt which is stripped of considerable consumer protections, with interest rates at the mercy of a chaotic Congress, and which is leveraged on the expectation of a salary of a previous generation which the following may never achieve, just adds to that risk. I hope you heed this as a warning, so that what has become a nightmare for me and many others in my generation does not turn into a nightmare for you too.

Be very careful about taking on debt to get an education that may or may not pay your way for the foreseeable future. Federal loans, while better than private ones, are terrible traps in their current state, and a devastating financial mechanism which has obliterated the future for many in my generation who were foolish enough to believe the advice we were given by our parents: "It's the best debt you'll ever have." They were wrong; it's the worst. It's the only debt you can never, ever, escape. Not all women can leverage their gender into a nine-million-pound a year salary—for some of us it will be a devastating financial liability.

Signed,
#McToo
RPI Alumnus

INTERFRATERNITY COUNCIL

Greek successes at RPI

TO THE RENSSELAER COMMUNITY,

Following completion of annual elections of the Interfraternity Council Executive Board, it is appropriate that we provide the Rensselaer community a brief overview and update into the accomplishments and successes of fraternities this past calendar year. Despite various Greek life incidents at other university campuses, the Greek community at Rensselaer remains strong and continues to actively adapt to the changing student environment. We are growing in membership; significantly strengthening our relationships with the Rensselaer administration, faculty and Troy community; and providing significant support for philanthropic and volunteer service. Members of the Greek community have demonstrated their commitment through the various events and programs they meticulously plan and execute throughout the year. This past spring and fall recruitment periods were notable for fraternities across campus, significantly increasing our total membership. Recruitment increased fifteen and thirty percent for spring and fall periods respectively, which resulted in more than five hundred new members of the Rensselaer community deciding to join Greek life this past year alone. With these increased numbers, Greeks constitute nearly one third of all Rensselaer undergraduate students. These successes can be attributed to community-wide events sponsored by Greek organizations, such as the Greek Life NRB Trip, Meet the Greeks, and Pawling Crawling, all of which were attended by hundreds of potential new members.

With the increase of membership numbers, the relationship between Greeks and Rensselaer administration continues to strengthen. Beginning with the Greek Leadership Summit in the spring, fraternity leaders, along with representatives from the Greek Life Commons as well as the Dean of Students Office, came together to plan the year ahead and further integrate the Greek community with the rest of the campus, as well as improve organizational issues within the Greek system. Additionally, the various faculty dinners and events that fraternities host continue to help reduce the barrier of communication and increase understanding between students and the faculty and administrators. Open communication between fraternities and Rensselaer administration has created new and exciting opportunities for students, including the Greek Emerging Leaders series, led by the Archer Center, which serves to prepare

our young members for future leadership roles in their chapters and on campus, as well as the potential implementation of assistant Greek deans to act as advisors who would help support individual chapters.

Along with fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of their own respective organizations, fraternities strive to serve the general Rensselaer and Troy communities through philanthropy and volunteerism. Over the course of 2017 alone, Greek organizations have raised around \$100,000 for various charitable organizations and dedicated over 17,000 service hours. Such notable events include the Chi Phi and Theta Chi St. Baldrick's joint event, which raised more than \$20,000 toward cancer research in one single instance. Acts of service such as these not only bring into focus the amount of time and money dedicated by these fraternities to these worthwhile causes, but also bring to light the number of volunteer hours these causes need and would otherwise not receive.

Lastly, these successes would not have been possible without the efforts of the IFC and its members. We thank them all for the time and dedication they have put into revitalizing our Greek system. In similar fashion, the newly elected Interfraternity Council Executive Board will continue to build on the previous boards' accomplishments. I am now honored to introduce the new Executive Board, with Benjamin Lanning '19 of Theta Xi as president, Andrew Berger '19 of Lambda Chi Alpha as executive vice president, Nathan Shreiber '20 of Phi Kappa Theta as vice president of recruitment, Harry Smith '20 of Rensselaer Society of Engineers as vice president of social, Rohan Garg '19 of Pi Kappa Alpha as vice president of philanthropy, Neil Patel '20 of Phi Kappa Theta as vice president of risk, Jacob Blaustein '20 of Lambda Chi Alpha as vice president of public relations, Tyler Shepherd '18 of Phi Gamma Delta as treasurer, Jack Conlin '20 of Sigma Alpha Epsilon as secretary, and Sean Ferracioli '18 of Sigma Chi as Greek senator. Under their leadership and with the cooperation and support of the Rensselaer community, it is with great certainty that they will be able to bring new ideas, foster stronger inter-organizational relationships, and achieve greater goals.

Fraternally,
Marvin M. Cosare '18
100th Interfraternity Council President

the polytechnic

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