INTERVIEW

Director of the Union Potts prioritizes trust
New to the role, Potts aims to fully understand Union operations

Brookelyn Parslow
Senior Reporter

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He later elaborated that he “owed it to both [himself] and to [his] family, as well as the school, that if this was ever going to heal, if this is ever going to move forward, the right person had to be here. And [he] did not want to be approaching that relationship with any blind spots.” He first looked at the position in January, and he spent time researching through a search consultant, asking around, and by reading newspaper accounts from The Chronicle, Times Union, and The Polytechnic.

Early on, he felt that “something [wasn’t] right,” and thought that he “actually [was] drawn to something where he might be able to just assist [and] help.” Potts later acknowledged that this kind of work is not for everyone, but that this student union “has incredible passions from all angles.” At the time, he thought “this might be something I’m attracted to.” Potts has expressed that he cannot change what happened before he got here, but his goal is to be productive and trustworthy.

In the past, Potts has taught French, coached football, and worked in higher education, including a five year tenure as associate dean of students and director of the student union at Indiana State University. He has led the construction of a new student union building at Southern Methodist University; later in his career, he completed a doctorate degree in educational administration at ISU and wrote his dissertation on the role of the college union.

Potts, as early as his first interview with RPI, expressed that a “student-staff partnership is the cornerstone of anything [he] personally [is] about now.” This requires that “we identify to ourselves a mutual need, a mutual trust, and a willingness to dialogue, which includes active listening and active response.” He plans to “take the time necessary to operate in such a way that trust is a very expected and natural spontaneous byproduct,” and views that as a prerequisite to anything he could do here. He also acknowledged that “standing in the gap” between students and administrators is an important part of his job.

While Potts thinks he has a good understanding of the issues at hand, he admits that he fully has to live in the environment to understand it. He has decided to live in Downtown Troy, has attended nearly every Senate and Executive Board meeting since he was hired, and has set a weekly recurring meeting with Grand Marshal Stef Warner ’19 and President of the Union Justin Ettine ’19.

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RPI Ambulance back in service temporarily

While waiting to request a new ambulance altogether, RPI Ambulance asked to go back into service with their current vehicle, expecting to do repairs in the near future. President of RPI Ambulance, Mary Claire Crochiere ’19, explained that since being taken out of service due to concerns about oil leaks in the engine, they had missed four student transports, which nets around $5,000 students needlessly spent on other ambulances.

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One piece of data in the calculation was estimates on ambulance staffing for hockey and football games. Since they must be staffed according to RPI policy and the RPI Ambulance is a free service, it saves money for the Athletic Department to use the club.

Volk’s estimates for how much the Athletic Department to use the club.

Executive Board Member Ben Volk adamantly opposed this idea. He created a risk index sheet, showing the net loss of RPI Ambulance continuing as negative $1,983.50. One piece of data in the calculation was estimates on ambulance staffing for hockey and football games. Since they must be staffed according to RPI policy and the RPI Ambulance is a free service, it saves money for the Athletic Department to use the club.

Volk’s estimates for how much the Athletic Department would save were significantly below the actual value Executive Board and Ambulance member John Jacangelo provided. Crochiere also noticed that the money saved by students who needed transport was also not factored into the risk sheet.

In a roll call vote, the motion to “allow RPI Ambulance to return its ambulance to service effective immediately” passed 8-3-1. A follow up motion was made to “require RPI Ambulance to complete all repairs to their ambulance related to its engine leak prior to the start of the Spring 2019 semester. If this repair is not completed on time, the ambulance will not be allowed to enter service until such a time that the repairs are completed.” This motion passed 13-0-0.

Treasurer of Students Exploration Development Space Ryan O’Neill presented, seeking a starter budget. SEDS has a $300 grant to make educational YouTube videos about topics in space that are both interesting to the community and easy to comprehend. SEDS is also working on campus to create a solid iodine ion thruster, which they plan to send to space by buying space on a rocket. The one concern with the proposition was the fact that the club cannot both be funded by the Union and external parties. However, the grant was a one-time payment, and Policies Committee Chair Caitlin Kennedy ’20 pointed out, “as a Union club, they have a right to basic things.” A motion to approve SEDS’ starter budget of $200 from stop-gap budget contingencies was approved 14-0-2.

The Muslim Students Association presented on problems they had encountered. For the five required daily prayers, students were given only a space under a staircase in the Folsum Library. Often the mats are stolen, and the space is suboptimal. The association asked for any help finding a better prayer space close to the academic side of campus. While there wasn’t anything the executive board could do, the Board recommended speaking with administrators of the Mueller Center as well as asking everyone to keep their eyes out for open spaces.

Club Volleyball was approved an $825 reallocation grant to enter a new league, the International Genetically Engineered Machine Club was approved as a Union-recognized club, and the Club Renewal and Probation Policies were changed.

Senate discusses transfer difficulties

Isabella Arroyo ’20 introduced the struggles of transfer students during the invitation to speak portion of the meeting after having had conversations with transfer student struggling to acclimate to Rensselaer while working in the Office of Student Success. “There is not a lot of representation for transfer students specifically. Especially since they face different challenges than the traditional student,” expressed Arroyo. She recounted an encounter with a transfer student who had the credits of a sophomore but since they had transferred, was considered a first year student. “They don’t have the same experience than other first year students,” since transfer students are unable to go to NRB and partake in other activities. Josh Beard, a graduate student who transferred to RPI as an undergraduate student, said that he had the same experience at each of the schools he transferred to. He remarked that the transfer students were often the “ugly stepchildren of the entire campus.” Zachary Taylor ’21 commented on what he saw at transfer student orientation while he was working as an advisor, and noted that, “they don’t have normal registration, they have credit evaluations, […] They are kept entirely in CBIS and then are released and sort of expected to become students.”

Nancy Bush ’19, offered to have questions added to the Senate survey and to “work off of the concerns we find in the survey.” Advaith Narayanan ’21 presented the opportunity to open a Senate seat specifically for transfer students. Senator Mary Clare Crochiere ’19 then proposed to have special seats on each class council representing transfer student interests. Senator Anthony Dai disagreed, citing reasons such as not having special positions for international students, a group on campus that comprises of a huge part of the student body, and suggested that having a special seat for transfer students could come off as negative discrimination. Graduate Senator Kinsuk Panda also expressed his concern that transfer students would be allowed to enter service until such a time that the repairs are completed. He created a risk index sheet, showing the net loss of RPI Ambulance continuing as negative $1,983.50. One piece of data in the calculation was estimates on ambulance staffing for hockey and football games. Since they must be staffed according to RPI policy and the RPI Ambulance is a free service, it saves money for the Athletic Department to use the club.

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President’s Fall Town Meeting

Wednesday, October 31, from 2 – 3 p.m.

EMPAC Theater
The Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center

Featuring
Institute Update • Q&A • Refreshments

rpi.edu to watch the live stream
Anahit Hovhannisyan
Senior Reviewer

Rich in marketing experience, Associate Professor Jeffrey F. Durgee is on the hunt to better understand consumer behavior. Durgee’s research is centered around the relationship between people and products—specifically, the relationship between a consumer and a brand, or a collector and a collection. With such insight, he can present a sociological perspective to marketing.

Durgee’s previous research has contributed significantly to the world of marketing. Two examples include the verb-object method and product drama. Alongside a group of fellow researchers at Rensselaer, Durgee developed the verb-object method, later cited by the Wall Street Journal, which touched on the idea of word association to identify consumer interests. They conducted a study where hundreds of verb-object associations like “flash-freeze food” were quickly suggested to mothers on a computer. The participants were asked to highlight some of the phrases that made a lasting impression, and these ideas were then further explored. On the other hand, the concept of product drama is used as a marketing tactic. For instance, Vick’s Dayquil bottle accompanied by a small cup has drama attached to it because of its resemblance to a shot glass. Durgee says, “The experience of that product is intense.” Often, Durgee finds himself asking questions like, “Why do people keep things for a long time?” and “Why are they so attached?” Inspired by global sustainability efforts, Durgee explored the idea of refurbished objects, and wondered if people are willing to do it. Specifically, he’s asked, “What would a business model look like where items are kept and refurbished, and how is the marketing different for these types of models?” To answer such a question, Durgee targeted the source directly. He found that although people are willing to refurbish items, the items they are not willing to refurbish are not the best for the environment. For instance, people are more reluctant to refurbish a car than a watch. Additionally, he found that skilled individuals who refurbish specialty items are the limiting factor. Ultimately, although refurbishing a valuable item is meaningful, the time, effort, and cost is too high.

Currently, Durgee is interested in “great art.” Referring to products like Coco Chanel’s little black dress or the Mini car, “great art” is unique—different from the norm—but remains important over a long period of time. Durgee is working to understand if people are willing to purchase items with the intention of keeping them purely for aesthetics. For instance, people tend to purchase fine art with the intention of keeping it for a long time. Would people do the same for a car? If so, “What makes a design classic?”

Durgee’s curiosity and passion for consumer behavior drive his inspired research. With such an inquisitive mind, there is no guessing what Durgee will explore next. 

Making Strides rallies 18,000, raises $680,000

ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21, MANY PEOPLE GATHERED around in support of breast cancer awareness and funding. In partnership with the American Cancer Society and Avon, the 23rd annual Making Strides Against Breast Cancer rally was held at Washington Park in Albany. People could donate and walk or run five kilometers in support of this rally. A total of 18,000 people came to this event to walk and learn more about breast cancer and how they could help. In total, the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk raised $680,000.
MAEVE MCENENY SPOOKS students on the Spirits of Rensselaer Ghost Tour, taking participants through the institute's past.

Namish Gali Senior Reviewer

"Colleges are great places to find ghost stories. They are old, and are places with lots of extreme emotion," said Maeve McEneny, our tour guide. That set the stage for a cold, chilly, and spooky night of ghost stories. McEneny is part of The Original Albany Ghost Tour and has been doing the Spirits of Rensselaer Ghost Tour since 2015.

The tour started off behind the Russell Sage Dining Hall, where McEneny explained Russell Sage's spirit, who haunts Sage Dining Hall and Laboratory. McEneny explained his history. Sage started off with a limited education, but worked his way up and eventually became a millionaire who enjoyed a lavish, extravagant life as a bachelor. However, he was also a man with deep prejudice: a misogynist who hated education because he himself wasn't educated past primary school.

When he died in 1906, he left all his wealth to his wife, Olivia Sage. Olivia then provided the funds for building RPI's Russell Sage Dining Hall and Laboratory. She also used his money to fund an all-women liberal arts college named after him: Russell Sage College. In doing this, she supported women and education, the two things he hated. Therefore, since 1906, the spirit of Russell Sage hasn’t been able to rest in peace and continues to haunt the buildings named after him.

But there’s more to Sage Laboratory. In the 1970s, there was an experiment going on in the basement involving testing the pollution levels in the Hudson River. According to alumni, there was a spill which caused the Laboratory to temporarily shut down. Horrifyingly, there was a story of a woman who came into contact with the spill and contracted a disease that resulted in her death, according to one article that McEneny had read.

Since then, there was a report of a professor seeing a woman staring at him while he was doing some paperwork in Russell Sage Lab. One woman also received an eerie voicemail at 10:13:13 on October 13. Creepily, when she reported Public Safety (who has a record of all calls going in and out of campus) if there was a call on that time, she simply hung up.

Next, we moved onto West Hall, which is allegedly the most haunted place on campus. West Hall has a disturbing history. From 1869 to 1914, it was the Troy Hospital; then in 1923 it was converted to a Catholic school. RPI purchased it in 1953 and did renovations from 1869 to 1914, it was the Troy Hospital; then in 1923 it was converted to a Catholic school. RPI purchased it in 1953 and did renovations in 1991 and 2004. We were told a story about a patient being beaten to death by the night-watchman at RPI. Obviously, his spirit isn’t going anywhere.

Then, there’s Nurse Betsy. She reportedly tortured insane patients in the basement. Later, she perished in a fire in this same basement. It is believed that the walls absorbed so much pain and suffering that their cries can still be heard.

During this tour, we were also introduced to stories of hauntings in the ‘87 Gymnasium and the spooky lore behind the tradition of leaving “the ghost light” on in theaters. Finally, we were told about the mysterious paranormal events that happen to anyone who sets foot in the Forest Park Cemetery—including one story of a young woman and her friends who went out exploring and were left vomiting black liquid for three days after.

The Spirits of Rensselaer Ghost Tour left me intrigued and with a newfound fascination for RPI history. Nonetheless, I’ll be a bit more cautious when I go to West Hall... just to be safe.
Students should prioritize Fall Town Meeting

TODAY, on WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31, PRESIDENT SHIRLEY Anne Jackson will hold the Fall Town Meeting from 2-3 pm in the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center. In past meetings, Jackson and her cabinet have considered time fielding questions from the Rensselaer community.

If you are a student here, you have a direct stake in the success of the Institute. This is one of the best forums in which you can ask questions and voice your opinions. Jackson and most of her cabinet are often in attendance, and this is an opportunity to speak directly to them and ensure you are heard. They serve not only to inform the campus as a whole on changes to, and plans for, Rensselaer. The best way to shape these plans as a student is to tell those present exactly how you think you’ll be affected.

The most recent Spring Town Meeting saw both students and alumni prepared with meaningful questions on a range of topics to be fielded by Jackson and her cabinet members. Since then, Director of the Union Charlie Potts was hired, the Student Senate expressed “dissatisfaction” with the process by which he was hired, the Greek Life Task Force was created, a Safe Ride vehicle was involved in a collision, the GM Week elections were audited, and Sodexo’s contract was renewed.

Whatever the concern, attendance should be your priority. Even as an observer, you’ll get a sense for the campus climate if you’ve been secure where you stand on certain campus issues. Don’t let your community engagement at RPI and your quieter expression of discontent through social media—use this valuable forum to ensure your voice is heard.

EDITORIAL NOTEBOOK

If you asked any of my high school friends what clubs I would have joined in college, I am 99 percent sure they would have never guessed the school newspaper. I hated writing, and when I had to write my college essays, I was counting down the days until the next semester. I dyed my entire right hand black for several hours, and yet I still have no idea what I’m doing. In college, I have absolutely no idea what I’m doing. I simply tour the tech dumps. For those of you who don’t know, the tech dumps are a great opportunity for scrap metal, cables, or small electrical parts, the tech dumps are a great place of learning for the most interesting.

As a prospective electrical engineer, one of my first actions upon committing to RPI was to search forums on the availability of free electronic components. Aside from a few labs—most of which require card access—the most commonly cited resource was the tech dumps. For those of you who don’t know, the tech dumps are a collection of bins where hardware is disposed. These can be found all around campus: the Darrin Communications Center, Jonsson Engineering Center, Low Center for Industrial Innovation, West Hall, Voorhees Computing Center, and more (a detailed list, including maps, can be found on the RPI subreddit). Since the start of my first semester, I have been making multiple rounds each week, some times each day, to these dusty back corridors and basements all around campus. Finds range from broken circuit boards and printers to fully functional Bluetooth speakers and capacitors bigger than my fist. You may need to make more than a few trips before coming across anything of value, but bring your friends and a couple of hammers—fun for the whole family! Of course, the entire concept of dumpster diving is based around the theory that one’s trash is another’s treasure, so if you’re looking for scrap metal, cables, or small electrical parts, the tech dumps are a great option for cheap supplies.

I still have no idea what I’m doing (what do I look like, an electrical engineer?), but my component collection has grown in size and complexity. My arms are bruised from carrying supplies, monitors, and stacks of circuit boards across campus; small chunks of solder and wire litter my floors, much to my roommate’s annoyance; and on one occasion, I dyed my entire right hand black for several days due to a leaking printer cartridge. I may be a reckless, dumpster diving hoarder, but hey—everyone has their hobbies.

When I wrote my first article, the red pen scared me; I didn’t want to see my errors. As I learned more about the writing process, I realized that I should love it, because it shows how I can improve. Do I still worry that my articles will be terrible? Yes, I admit that’s not a bad thing. It makes me work hard. Don’t be afraid to try something new, or something that you think you are not good at. If you have the passion to stick with it, you will improve. Just don’t be afraid of the red pen in whatever you do. Failure is the best way to learn as long as you remember why you failed. Just because you are at something now doesn’t mean that you are destined to be bad at it.
**Spooky things on Campus**

10. Steam tunnels
9. Sodexo food
8. Sage Laboratory attic
7. Stairs
6. J. Erik Jonsson statue
5. Deadlines
4. Summer Arch
3. West Hall
2. Tuition
1. 🧠

**SUDOKU**

Instructions

Fill in the grid so that each row, column, and 3-by-3 subsquare contains exactly one occurrence of the numbers 1 through 9.

Who shuts the door to the bus when the driver leaves?

**The Polytechnic** wishes you all a fun, spooky, and safe Halloween!
Did you know **Midterms** are more important than Presidential elections?

VOTE

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6**

Problems voting? Call the Election Protection Hotline at (866) OUR-VOTE • (866) 687-8683