Jackson: Well, I don’t look at it that way. Rensselaer is a complex institution, and there are many parts to it. Over a decade ago we set out to be a top tier University, The Rensselaer Plan, it was a holistic plan, and if you look at the six broad goals of that plan, they cover the whole waterfront in terms of what the University needs. If you look at all those six goals in the Plan, they are very comprehensive. That’s why we spend time talking about the hundred and forty commitments statements; the “will” statements. I would say the greatest accomplishment is the plan that was created and the fact that we have reprioritized all of the things that we have as a university and created a greater understanding of its value proposition and I think we do a better job across all the fronts that we have focused on.

Undergraduate education, enhancing that, and that means in all regards, obviously academics, but broader opportunities as well as how our students actually live. Research and graduate education, we give that a lot of focus in a number of things that we do and initiatives we’ve begun and carried out under the Plan. And then finally we talk about the enabling activities which have to do with our administrative functions, and we’ve come a long way down the road in terms of whether it is how we handle our physical plant, our communications and messaging—which always is a work in progress at any institution—or how we handle our finances. And so we have worked across that front, and that’s why there is so much such [as one achievement], because the Plan was meant to move the whole institution and we think we have done this.

Poly: Is there anything you have not been able to accomplish in your time here that you have wanted to accomplish?

Jackson: You know, there are a thousand things. I’ve expressed my focus and intent and that of others through the Plan, because that’s how I operate, and that is what has allowed us to bring things together and we are as much as we have been. We’re not done, and so that’s why we have the CLASS initiative. This was the next anchor point to strengthen the undergraduate experience. We’ve begun our activities on the international front with the international programs and expecting our students to have an international experience. The greater focus on research, strengthening under CLASS and under the academic umbrella, the Living/Learning Communities. We want to build a new building, right here, for the academic and research communities. There are a lot of things—reinventing, rebuilding, and enhancing the faculty with faculty hiring, because the root of the university is the faculty and so we still have a fairly robust hiring plan this year, but this is going to go on. We still have facilities to renovate. So that’s why … I don’t speak in singular terms, and in many ways, you see, that’s the harder way to do things.

I could say the Jackson Initiative is [that] I am going to institutionalize the student experience. So I get that done and I can say that’s my greatest achievement. Or the Jackson Initiative is that I’m going to get a big gift for the university, so I get 500 and so forth. That’s an example of an initiative. That’s something people do operate. But that’s never been what I thought an initiative needed.

If one talks about institutionalizing the Student Experience, then that is part of an overall holistic perspective about how we wish to educate our students—to have people more in a global view; to make them more globally aware, with the ability to work across disciplines and across sectors. That gets embedded in the academic programs whether you are talking about things in the Swanson Multidisciplinary Design Lab or about how research is done in a multidisciplinary way, or about grappling big issues like sustainability, or energy and the environment. All of these things also broaden the need for us to focus on CLASS for all of us. It plays into institutionalizing the student experience. It plays into what CLASS is about. So these things are never picked out singularly, and that makes it hard for people sometimes to appreciate the whole picture—because people want to talk about one thing, and the one thing, is a plan to be a top tier, world class technological research university with global reach and global impact, and it’s never changed. But as we’ve gone along, our view has broadened.

If there is one message, it is that there are multiple streams, but they all are tied together under this overall headline of what it means to be a world-class institution. And Rensselaer has always had a very strong focus on undergraduate education, and we’ve never abandoned that. In fact, we feel that our play is that we have what I like to call unique univer- sities, but overall inclusiveness and a broader intellectual and scientific entrepreneurship as something that we teach, we research, and we do, has expanded into a broader focus on innovation and that’s why things like the Lemelson-Rensselaer Prize are important. Diversity—diversity has always had a broad meaning. Obviously gender, ethnic, and cultural diver- sities, but overall inclusiveness and a broader intellectual and geographic diversity for the Institute as well. Then there is our impact on communities: our internal communities, our alumni communities, the broader national and international communi- ties, if you see us as a component in a number of things that we do and initiatives we’ve begun and carried out under the Plan. And then finally we talk about the enabling activities which have to do with our administrative functions, and we’ve come a long way down the road in terms of whether it is how we handle our physical plant, our communications and messaging—which always is a work in progress at any institution—or how we handle our finances. And so we have worked across that front, and that’s why there is so much such [as one achievement], because the Plan was meant to move the whole institution and we think we have done this.

Poly: What do you currently see as the Institute’s greatest strength?

Jackson: What do you currently see as the Institute’s greatest strength? It’s interesting that this is a really astounding story and it’s one we continue in terms of our students and alums that we send out into the world and what they ultimately do with the issues that they face. Any institution has challenges, whether it has to do with the issues that a student faces or challenges that we have to face around events and other kinds of initiatives, and to seek information and counsel and to allow our students to deal with the issues and to feel confident and to feel that they can all work on together, including me. But the second is more important. And that is that if you look out strategically, the world is changing. There are emerging economies and emerging markets, and increasingly there are so many people who are moving around the world. The world is obviously much more global, and the idea that, as a technological university, we’re going cover every language that is strategically important, in the conventional way, is just not obtainable. But that doesn’t mean we don’t intend to offer the greatest language opportunity we can. There has been a lot of discussion around languages, like French and German. I studied German myself in college. And then I lived in Switzerland, and so I studied French. But if you asked me would those be the languages I would study today—no. I would probably study Mandarin, I’d study Hindi, I would study Swahili, I would study Russian. Nobody has asked me about those languages.

We’ve got to kind of come along in terms of this broader context of the range of languages that are important in the world, what communication really means. Then you bring it back to who we are as a technological university and say, what can we do; to help students in the specific transition away from this traditional but very limited language focus we’ve had to do in the past, to get our people to be more skilled, more fluent, and do with … how people learn cognition in learning. And so with that I’m gonna turn to Robert [Palazzo] and Prabhat [Hajela].

Palazzo: I agree with the president that the traditional language instruction is simply not going to be adequate to meet those kinds of demands. Technology is going to play an extremely important role in language ac- quisition, retention, and refresh throughout the rest of your life. There is no question about it. Do we even have the technical tools right now that are going to be necessary? We’re just look- ing into that, and we’re not convinced that the technical capability in the immersion environment is going to be there. The fundamen- tal and the methods that are taught in language instruction are adequate anywhere.

Jackson: But we intend to create them.
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Hajela: The kinds of languages covered by the National Association of Self Instruction in Languages are those critical, national-need type of languages that Dr. Jackson just spoke about. So, we are now members of the NASIL Consortium. A student will have the ability to access material. There are eight languages that are available either on the DVD format or online, and we issued you a password, and [you] simply go online and you are able to access the material. And these are languages like Kurdish, Mandarin, and Cantonese included there [in addition to Korean and Brazilian Portuguese]. NASIL is a tool that is essentially designed to provide language instruction to a broad range of students on and on campus. You find the classical languages [everywhere]; you find French and Spanish, you find German available, but these languages are the critical languages, it's the kind of language instruction, but also for graduate students if you want to do self-improvement, you can go online and start to learn that language. If you want to do it online, the license is issued to you for six months. If you want to do a DVD format, which is preferable, the books are shipped in the US. But it also happens to be a living, learning laboratory where you also learn about cognition and perception and the rapidity with which people learn and the retention of what they learn. And so this is appropriate for a place like Rensselaer.

Pdy: Aside from the '86 Field, the next phases of ECAV, the work related to the science center, and the president’s house, what kind of big projects are planned?

Jackson: We don’t do project planning in advance of program planning. So what we’re looking at is stepping and taking stock of where we are in the Rensselaer Plan. What the next evolution is, what our big thrusts are, and out of that will come a more broadly based campus, facilities, and building plan. And so I have no hot new projects, but I think what we have done has been pretty astounding in terms of not only the new things we’ve built, but the general renovation and re-purposing of the facilities and buildings all across the campus.

And so we have CLASS, we have internationalizing the student experience, we have the Chapel + Cultural Center, we have sustainability, orientation, and initiatives, we have the signature thrusts; and in the end, those will drive where we want to go. But the center for science is a linchpin, because that allows us to coalesce a lot of dispersed activities, and in bringing those together in a world-class facility it frees up other space... Having said that, let me give you Claude [Round].

Round: We really are at a point where we're looking for a comprehensive strategic look at the programs of the future, so we would design facility and capital plan accordingly. But, nevertheless, this upcoming fiscal year we’re doing $4.5 million worth of deferred maintenance and work to upgrade our safety systems. We’ll be starting shortly after commencement with the first phase of restoration of some façades, the light colored brick on the Low Center. We’ll be starting the first phase, the replacement of that brick, this summer. We’ll be doing work on fire alarm systems—upgrade the fire alarm systems mostly in the area of our network capabilities. Upgrade on the network capabilities; we’ll be getting the first phase of a program to replace some of the emergency call phones and the call lights. The first generation of these phones has outgrown their useful life, so we’re going to replace those. We’re going to develop a digital computer lab for the School of Architecture. We’re also going to invest in and develop a bridge in the School of Science and technology programs and science labs while we continue to plan forward for the new center for science. We’re going to make some short-term investment in equipment and facility upgrades on a priority basis in the School of Science so that some of the priorities will not necessarily wait until we start construction on the new building.

We are going to continue the phase in our landscaping improvement; the ‘86 Field and that area being the focus this particular year. We’re also going to invest some hundred thousand dollars in some maintenance upgrades, cosmetics, refurbishment in resident halls, but there is no intent, you know, that EMPAC is some special thing that nobody gets to use or touch. The same is true, by the way, of the East Campus Athletic Village. I’ve been clear that these were to provide world-class facilities for our varsity athletes, but to provide world-class facilities and gathering spaces for the whole Rensselaer community. And when we talk about the Rensselaer community, first and foremost, we always start with our students. But it also takes time to grow up and evolve programs and facilities for the broader use, and I think what the Requiem Performance demonstrated is that we are beginning to do that. But having said that, let me let Laban [Coblentz] and Eddie [Ade] Knowles speak more specifically to that.

Knowles: OK, I would just say that before [it] was actually a building—before the first shovel went in the ground—we agreed that we needed to start thinking about how the students would be engaged and connected to EMPAC. And so we were doing what I call the showcasing of our performing arts groups in a number of venues, EMPAC being one of them. You know that we did a signature event last year with Béla Fleck. We’re doing another one this year [with Girl Talk], but it’s not going to be at EMPAC, it’s gonna happen at ECAV.

The point I’m getting at is that EMPAC is an important venue for us, but it’s one of many that we have on campus and I’m definitely closer to this than others, but you know that [Managing Director of the Union] Rick Hartt and I really partnered with [Director of EMPAC] Johannes [Goebbels] to start designing ways to create the opportunities for student engagement in EMPAC in a very formal way, and over time witness that evolution. Just a few examples: several weeks ago, there were major performances by a number of groups here in the Union, in the McNeil Room. That will be repeated again and again so it’s going to happen at EMPAC. And so we’re doing what I call the showcasing of our performing arts groups in a number of venues, EMPAC being one of them. You know that we did a signature event last year... It’s the last time that I really talked about that as a cabinet this was the morning. And it’s something that a group of us have been talking about repeatedly. Dr. Jackson’s made it clear that she wants to dig into it in more detail this summer. So the point there is it’s actively on our minds. I’d say, in addition, we’ve kind of loosely

next evolution of that is to use a platform like EMPAC where you can use everything from the knowledge of how people learn, to game engines, to computer graphics to create unique environments that help people to learn, whether it be language acquisition or something else, but in an interactive, immersive, and even literary facility in a language. It’s the kind of language instruction and cultural immersion, they should go hand in hand. As a result, as part of our study abroad program, during the inter session break and at the beginning of summer starting in 2011, we’ll be introducing a three-week, intensive language study course. Right now we are looking at Spanish in Costa Rica or Panama. We are looking at Singapore for Chinese for the language study course. Right now we are looking at Spanish in Costa Rica or Panama. We are looking at Singapore for Chinese language study course. Right now we are looking at Spanish in Costa Rica or Panama. We are looking at Singapore for Chinese...
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Professor Hajela and I will look at what are the classrooms, what are the outfitting needs, we'll go into the summer session making sure those needs are there and we've put in long-term needs that go into our performance planning and capital requests that the president would receive, which is a combined result of all that activity which is always pretty much ongoing.

Jackson: When I came to Rensselaer, I inherited a very huge deferred maintenance backlog, and we still have a deferred maintenance backlog that's huge, but we made a huge investment because as we've made renovations of facilities, by definition, we've fixed a lot of other related things. And what many people don't see are the big infrastructure projects that have been done on the campus, whether you're talking about steam lines, electrical conduits, and provision for the campus fiber optic backbone, communication systems. Most of them actually occur over the summer, so most people don't see them unless they happen to be around in the summer. Sometimes we have surprises, and so we have to deal with them then. We've replaced, over the time of the plan, the roofs on 22 different buildings here on the campus, and so these are things, what I call the non-project projects that make a big difference in terms of the functionality of various places. But I think it's fair to say we've systemized more carefully and continue to systematize the assessments we make of classrooms. Res. Halls and the major facilities to be upgraded every year as well as having the specific approach through FIXX to do specific things that may cause a problem during the year.

Round 5: And student input is an important part; I [get] significant student input through the facilities committee. The Student Senate is very aggressive in sharing information, Lee Sharma has been very helpful in that, the student commissions, Pizza with the President, Pizza with the Cabinet, [which] are excellent sources of information. I get a lot of feedback from the President as she has spoken to them, and she's made the time and has feedback, and then the president just asked for your feedback, so please participate in the process, because it does affect the decisions.

Jackson: From time to time, I actually walk through the residence halls, not always when you all are around, and sometimes that plays a role in things instantaneously being on the list, such as Sharp Hall a couple years ago. And this relates directly to the fact that you don't see are the big infrastructural things that we've done on the campus. So, kind of on a similar note, is there going to be a vendor in Evelyn's Café soon? And what's the timeline on that?

Jackson: Yes. Yes. Soon, just very soon.

Round 7: Matter of fact, we had a meeting yesterday and we're gearing up the deli operation in the café to begin in mid-August, but that doesn't mean they are going to wait until mid-August to start having a presence in the building.

Jackson: We've made a decision to take on a particular thing in that way that the academic year opens next year it'll be fully operational.

Poly: In light of the on-campus housing requirement for sophomores, are there planned upgrades to residence halls and any residence halls in specific?

Round 3: Yes, I mean, generally our work will occur throughout the campus. So at this particular point in time there is no single project.

Jackson: But we do a lot of work on the Res. Halls over the summer.

Poly: On a similar note, are there any planned renovations for classrooms?

Round 4: Certainly, [though] rather than talk about classrooms, we'd like to talk about academic infrastructure, because the labs and the studios have to be [treated] in the same perspective as the classroom. Right now we're focusing on some of the science facilities including the science labs. We also have some recommendations; there is a task force that gives us recommendations, and a facility committee; the Student Senate offers me input as well based on observations and feedback that they get from the student population. And that input is now being looked at on the scope of work and priority perspective to determine what areas we're gonna be working on. And the folks in the School of Science are helping to identify what lab we prioritize. That information is not available yet for an announcement.

Jackson: On the other hand, if you have specific classrooms that have specific problems, you should make sure to transmit that through FIXX to Claude [Round 3]'s folks.

Hajela: I personally walked through most of the classrooms on campus during the fall semester and we prepared a list of what needed to be done and where. And that's how these prioritized lists are prepared. We try and see, even down to the aesthetics ... looking at the seats in the classrooms and seeing ... do they match?

Poly: With these new world-class facilities we have like ECAV, [will there be] a move of the rest of the athletic department to the Division I level, joining men and women's hockey?
Jackson: It’s kind of thing where discussion comes up from time to time, but we have no specific plans to make such a move in the near future. Our aim is to have the residential experience as a core part of our curriculum, including separate houses and dorms for students in different divisions. It makes us unique. There are only eight colleges and universities in the country that have split Division I/Division III residences, and we’re6 well served. And, it’s a way for us to move beyond our perspective, and certainly mine, for building ECAC was simply to provide world-class facilities for our students, not because there was some inherent plan behind it to go to Division I status. Our students at Rensselaer are not just the young, attractive individuals that we like to preserve in the House, but the House. It’s not the new facilities. But, no, we don’t have any specific plans to change the divisional status of our athletics teams.

Powy: Were you wondering if we could talk about the CLASS initiative, especially since it’s kind of modeled of a liberal arts school’s experience. Could you talk about how it integrates with the RPI community?

Jackson: Well, the original college model came out of places like Cambridge [University] and Oxford [University]. Those two [are] very venerable higher education institutions in the UK, and some people might argue that Oxford is more on the side of the liberal language arts. But Cambridge is very strong in the sciences. At Rensselaer, the sciences are included in the college, so we have college campuses. Yale is a major research university and it spans the full spectrum, and it is the grand-daddy, so to speak, of the college of science. And it is really a mixed model. It’s really a mixed model. It’s just a residential college model to some extent, because the CLASS is not just residentially based, that’s the commons, that we talk about with the live-in deans and ultimately the faculty dean of the commons, or faculty deans of the commons, where students live, that’s a mix of opportunities and programming through that. But, it also is time-based clustering based on your class year, and that’s why we have the class deans. And just as we have a Dean of the First-Year Experience, because students, as they are transitioning into Rensselaer from high school to college and through the first year, they have unique needs, unique experiences, and unique ways in which we can help them grow and enjoy and become anchored to this place that is Rensselaer. And then, ultimately, to start to move into majors and more specific experiences and thinking about career opportunities, there’s a difference in what they should be doing. And that’s why we will assign, beginning with the freshman class in the fall, a class dean. And so these things are not only meant to cover and be an advocate for the student, but also create new and specialized programming that will play through things that the students do as a class, as well as what specifically happens in the residence halls and through that system. It will also be to bring the faculty and students together in ways beyond just the classroom and the laboratory and the halls, and give them unique opportunities to try to build on that, and ultimately faculty fellows who will be affiliated with the given residential commons.

Knowles: Yes, I would add to what the president said that the model that we’re creating is uniquely Rensselaer in that we’ve gone beyond what I would call the real classic defined residential college model that speaks primarily about the students who live in the residential campus. If you will, we’re embracing fraternities and sororities.

Jackson: And off-campus students.

Knowles: Our students who are in the Greek life community are now part of the Greek Life Commons, and students who live off-campus are considered part of the Off-Campus Commons. And that, and in of itself, is unique within the whole Residential College Model. I think our student leaders who went over to visit some of the other Greek life commons, I think they didn’t find that type of fully embracing model that says, wherever our students live, they are being embraced within our residential college model.

The other aspect of this that I think is unique is for us is that there are aspects of what we are embedding within all of our commons, some core themes that you have heard me talk about at previous occasions here. There are a number of areas in terms of institution’s thrusts for us in our academic programs, in media and the arts. We talked earlier about EMPAC, we think about what we’ve done in creating an extraordinary venue, but it speaks to the hundreds of opportunities for students in media and the arts. No Rensselaer student should graduate from this institution without having some type of experience. And, it’s a matter of, it’s a matter of engaging in an activity as an artist in the media or the broader arts, or just experiencing by virtue of having a chance to be engaged as an observer as members of the community. But when you think about some of the other core elements that we’re focused on, in terms of personal development, individual roles, this should occur over the course of the student experience whether you’re living in the residential, the Greek life, or the off-campus commons, but there is a unique role for our Archers, and engagement, voice, and role in the faculty dean of the commons, yes, leadership activities, but now we’re challenging the Archer Center to think about leadership development as time-based.

Jackson: What should that look like over the course of four years, and how does that play into broader perspective of leadership development potential of global citizens?

The third aspect of this, in terms of professional development, is to really turn the concept as we’ve traditionally thought about it at Rensselaer, which is, I’ll come here, I get a degree and then I go out and get a job. Prabhat and I are partnering on a much broader view of professional development that involves international experiences abroad, co-experiences, international think tanks, national think tanks, professional development that begins to challenge you in ways that take you beyond your current major and links you to other opportunities that lead to pathways that you may not have considered coming to Rensselaer.

And then, of course, Communitarian, which is something the University of Massachusetts [Amherst] Think and Do, the community of Rensselaer, but beyond that, how do you become engaged in the community of Troy, the state, the federal, and beyond, again, focusing on that over the course of four years as undergraduates?

We asked the deans, the faculty deans, the assistant deans of the Off-Campus Commons, together in ways beyond just the classroom and the laboratory and the halls, and give them unique opportunities to try to build on that, and ultimately faculty fellows who will be affiliated with the given residential commons.

Hajela: I think that from my perspective I can just add two more things to this. This is a unique opportunity to bring faculty and students together in ways beyond just the classroom and the halls, and give them unique opportunities to try to build on that, and ultimately faculty fellows who will be affiliated with the given residential commons.

Walker: Just in direct response to the question about the emergency incident last week, and the use [and] the deployment of the RPIAlert system. Since then, we have done work to really focus on that incident and analyzed everything that worked well and analyzed things that might need improvement. I think during the question-and-answer portion of this, there was some confusion about what specific actions need a little more attention. So coming at this from the point of view of communication, especially in a situation like that of being a two-way proposition, there are things that we’ll be discussing with the officials of the City of Troy to make sure that in an instance like that in the future, the communication between the offices of the Rensselaer and the officials of the City of Troy, it will be improved.

I would concur with the Mayor about that. There are a lot of things that have gone on there that have been unpleasant, and frankly, unfair, I think about the way that things have been handled. Our role as a community partner has to be that of a community leader and a community partner that can all go back to the recognition of what the president said, and that is that any time there is any threat to the life and safety of the students and other members of this community, that trumps all other concerns of how we contact ourselves during that sort of a situation.