

The Disenfranchised—Who are they?

# Research professor aggravated after being counted out

LINDA LAYNE  
**Columnist**

Professor Don Steiner, who has a bachelor's in chemical engineering, and a master's and a doctorate in nuclear engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, worked as a member of the research staff at Oak Ridge National Laboratory before joining RPI in 1981 as Institute Professor of Nuclear Engineering. For the past 26 years he has maintained an active teaching and research schedule, teaching two courses per semester and developing four new courses for RPI. For over 15 years, he coordinated the capstone design course in nuclear engineering. He has also mentored both undergraduate and graduate students in his research field, fusion energy development. From 1995 until 2002, Steiner was chair of the environmental and energy engineering department. From 2002 until 2006, he directed the Nuclear Engineering Program in the Department of Aeronautical, Nuclear, and Mechanical Engineering. In 2005, he relinquished his tenure and his chair as Institute Professor and became a research professor in order "to create a slot for a hire in nuclear engineering." Even as a research professor, he continued to teach until Fall 2007.

Steiner has also made valuable contributions to the Institute in terms of service and has been an active participant in faculty governance. He served two separate terms as a member of the Faculty Senate and was appointed by the provost's office to chair the Steering Committee for the most recent self-study for the Middle States Review, which occurred between 2003 and 2005. He explained, "Every 10 years, institutions of higher education must go through a comprehensive self-study and submit a report which is reviewed by a visiting team which, in turn, submits its own report to the institution including recommendations for improvement."

He continued, "During the recent Middle States self-study process a number of findings dealt with the problems of shared governance and communication at RPI. Yet when I received the first draft of our report most of those findings had been removed. Working with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, I was able to reinstate the 'missing' findings and submit an accurate report. The Middle States Evaluation Team Report recommended steps be taken to facilitate shared governance and improve open communication."

In response to my question about his level of investment in RPI he replied, "I have been at RPI for nearly 26 years and have been engaged

in a wide variety of activities here. I consider myself highly vested in the desire for the success of RPI. I am certainly more vested in RPI than the current provost."

When asked how he felt upon learning that the trustees had defined research faculty as non-voting he answered, "I was disappointed but not surprised since the president and the Board have been 'hostile' to the faculty for over four years. The president has worked to isolate the Board from the faculty and the Board has allowed this isolation to occur." He added, "Governance is not the only issue at stake here. Integrity and trust are also involved. As a faculty member, I have come to question the truthfulness of the administration in its recent actions."

Steiner explained how the disenfranchisement has "motivated me to be more outspoken about the deterioration in open communication and shared governance at RPI. Many research professors were former senior faculty at RPI. We feel that the pronouncements of the Board and the administration have been

particularly disrespectful because we have been so vested in the success of RPI. In fact, I know of several colleagues who no longer give financial support to the Institute because of the actions of the president and Board."

When asked why research faculty should have the vote, he replied, "Any healthy organization should welcome diverse input from a variety of stakeholders. A university, in particular, should value open communication and shared governance." I couldn't agree more and question why an administra-

tion would take actions to alienate valuable, respected, committed members of the RPI faculty as such Steiner.



**Don Steiner, research professor of Mechanical, Aerospace, and Nuclear Engineering**

Editor's Note: "The Disenfranchised—Who are they?" is a three-part column granted to Linda Layne, Hale Professor of Humanities and Social Sciences, to profile individuals in the RPI community who were directly affected by the 2006 Board of Trustees directive restricting the definition of faculty at Rensselaer.

*The Disenfranchised—Who are they?***Librarian speaks about governance**

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Irv Stephens came to RPI in 1969 having earned the degree of Master of Library Science from the State University of New York at Albany and worked in the New York State Research Library's Automation Group and for the Huyck Felt, Inc., as a technical librarian.

At RPI he started off as a library systems analyst because, as he explains, "I was interested in applying data processing to library operations. Dabbling in information technology has continued throughout my 38 years here. Librarian duties have involved me in three areas: For the first 10 years, I was responsible for overseeing and developing the research journal collections; for the second 10 years I served as the humanities bibliographer, and for the remainder I've managed public services activities: circulation, interlibrary loan, and collection management. Throughout this time I've remained engaged in developing and promoting various library automation projects."

Stephens has been very involved in faculty governance; he served three stints on the Faculty Council and worked on the 1986 committee that revised the constitution and changed the Faculty Council into the Faculty Senate. He also

served a number of times on the Faculty Senate Nominations Committee.

Stephens says, "I was attracted to RPI because it was of a size where I felt I could have an impact. I especially liked that librarians were clearly part of the academic community. I was hired directly by the provost. The library, although not a school, was an academic unit. I remember being introduced to Provost Clayton Dohrenwend on my first day. We shook hands and he handed me a copy of the *Handbook for Academic Staff* and said that except for the parts relating to tenure most everything else related to me. I was expected to conduct some library-related research, be involved in professional societies and participate in community service."

Librarians and archivists they teach individual students as well as provide guest lectures in classrooms. It is because of their role as educators that Stephens believes that librarians and archivists "need to be explicitly covered by 'academic freedom' in order to be free to engage in these activities. The redefinition by the trustees may have jeopardized that."

When he learned that librarians and archivists had been disenfranchised, he was quite surprised. "I think the most troubling aspect is the cut off of communication with people ... all who have been engaged in the education and research activities of the Institute for years. All of the disenfranchised

have been removed from the faculty e-mail list so we don't know what is going on unless one of the tenure/tenure-track faculty forwards messages to us. I have observed that even some tenured people suddenly became reluctant to talk about the issues ... I feel that a long-established arena for communication has been shut down; that's counter to academic tradition." While acknowledging that the change has "not yet impacted my day-to-day activities," he worries that, "In the long term, if librarians and other academic 'types' are excluded from participating in academic forums in a meaningful way, it will affect Rensselaer's ability to recruit the best people."

Stephens believes that, "All the ... disenfranchised groups should participate in governance because of their ongoing roles in education and research." I share his view that "an inclusive governance model can make Rensselaer a stronger organization in the long term."

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# Retiree discontent with Institute governance

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**Columnist**

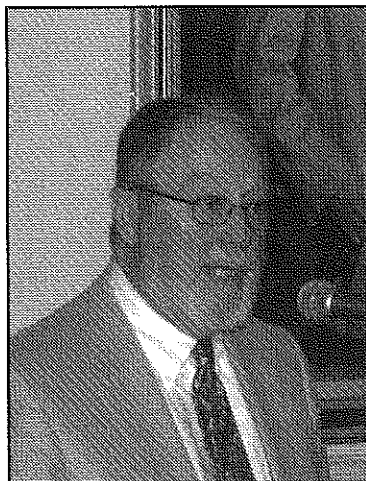
Retired professor S. Michael Halloran received a bachelor's degree from Holy Cross College and came to RPI in 1967 as a graduate student and teaching assistant in communication and rhetoric. He was promoted to assistant professor when he completed his Ph.D. in 1973. He taught undergraduate and graduate courses in rhetoric, writing, and literature, as well as interdisciplinary courses. He is proud of the 28 doctoral dissertations he directed and the fact that, "Two of my former doctoral students now hold endowed chairs, two others have chaired departments, and two have served as editors of refereed journals."

He retired in 2003 but still makes presentations at lectures in the Department of Language, Literature, and Communication, and is available to mentor graduate students and serve on doctoral committees. Halloran is still an active scholar; he has published two books and more than two dozen referred articles, and is currently working on another book. He regularly presents papers at academic conferences, including two keynote presentations last year.

Halloran also has an impressive service record at RPI. He served as chair of the Department of LL&C and as associate dean of Humanities and Social Sciences and was also active in faculty governance. He served a term as secretary of the Faculty Council—predecessor of the Faculty Senate—and served four years on the Faculty Committee on Promotion and Tenure. Since retiring he was elected to the position on the Faculty Senate designated for retired faculty and also serves as the recording secretary of the Rensselaer Retirees Forum.

One of the explanations given by the administration for restricting the vote is that others aren't as fully vested in RPI, so I asked Halloran about his investment in RPI. He has served under nine presidents, seven provosts, and can recall six trustees that he has had direct dealings with. He added, "While I am sure that at least some of the administrators and trustees named

above would characterize faculty members as having served 'under' them, I prefer to think that



**S. Michael Halloran '73, retired professor of the School of H&SS**

I served 'with' them ... I am an alumnus as well as an emeritus faculty member. I have spent my academic career at RPI and hope to remain an active scholar based at RPI for many more years. I participate regularly in colloquia in my department and value deeply the relationships I have formed with faculty and graduate students, including those who have joined RPI since I retired. I am deeply offended by the idea that my 'investment' in RPI is somehow weaker than that of active faculty

members. For better or worse, my professional identity will remain tied to RPI for as long as I remain active as a scholar."

When the trustees changed the definition of the faculty, thereby disenfranchising him, Halloran explained that he felt "disappointed and angry, but not particularly surprised. While my department has welcomed my continued

participation in its activities, I have found that RPI is not much interested in having emeritus faculty remain active in the affairs of the Institute. I find this puzzling because many emeriti have professional connections and prestige that can be of practical value to graduate students and junior faculty, as well as experience and perspective that could be of use to administrators."

"[Retirees should be involved in governance because] we are the collective memory of the Institute. We have a perspective on how the Institute has come to the present moment in its history, and that perspective is important to the making of decisions about where we are going in the future. And—contrary to the provost's assertion—we have a major investment in the Institute. RPI is not to us a rung on the career ladder that leads upward to MIT or ... wherever, so it matters greatly to us that RPI should succeed over the long term."

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