



Rensselaer

General Counsel and Secretary of the
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Adam Steinbaugh
Senior Program Officer, Individual Rights Defense Program
Foundation for Individual Rights in Education
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Dear Mr. Steinbaugh:

Your letters dated October 9, November 3, November 8, and November 13, 2017, have been forwarded to my office. Because FIRE has publicized these letters, our students are also aware of the positions your organization has taken. However, the reason that Rensselaer has chosen not to respond to the details in your letters is straightforward: the dialog regarding matters raised in your letters should be – and in the case of disciplinary matters, must be – between the Rensselaer administration and Rensselaer students.

With regard to policies that affect students, Rensselaer student leaders are engaged with appropriate campus officials, and they have proven themselves very capable of articulating concerns and issues. For example, our student leaders recently provided detailed input to the administration regarding proposed revisions to the Rensselaer *Student Handbook* after several weeks of review. It would be both disrespectful and unproductive for Rensselaer to begin a dialog with FIRE on items that are more properly addressed between the Rensselaer administration and our students. Of course, Rensselaer students are free to read your materials and consider your advice in making their wishes and concerns known to the administration.

As for student disciplinary or “judicial” matters, it is essential that they be addressed internally through our existing processes, not through a public dialog with FIRE. You should be aware, however, of some important aspects of our process. Rensselaer’s disciplinary process begins with a Judicial Inquiry, which is designed simply to gather facts to determine whether a violation may have occurred. No student is sanctioned without the right to a fair hearing, which for the matters at issue would come before a Judicial Board comprised entirely of students. Finally, no student is sanctioned for expressing an opinion, provided it is within the realm of civil discourse (e.g., not hate speech or threatening). Disciplinary sanctions at Rensselaer are based on conduct that violates the rules and expectations set forth in our policies, not on expression of an opinion.

Free expression of viewpoints has long been a value and tradition at Rensselaer. I am confident that the matters at hand will be resolved appropriately through the processes I have outlined, and in a manner that fully upholds this value and tradition.

Yours truly,

Craig A. Cook
General Counsel and Secretary of the Institute