



# Rensselaer 200

Search for the Vice Provost for Student Experience  
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute  
Troy, New York

## THE SEARCH

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI, the Institute, Rensselaer) seeks an experienced and dedicated leader to serve as their Vice Provost for Student Experience (VPSE). This is an exciting opportunity to transform the student experience at RPI and lead a dedicated student life team in developing and supporting students. The Vice Provost will be a collaborative visionary tasked with charting and implementing the future of the student experience at the Institute. Under the leadership of President Martin Schmidt and Provost Rebecca Doerge, this is a distinctly opportune time for the VPSE to join RPI and capitalize on the strong understanding and appreciation for a holistic student experience and the opportunities that lie ahead.

Students, faculty, staff, and alumni of RPI make world-changing differences at the nation's oldest and one of the most renowned technological research universities. For 200 years, the Institute has fostered a legacy of changemakers confronting the most pressing problems facing humanity and our planet. As a top-tier R1 research institution, Rensselaer continues to build upon its reputation and mission to provide students with the education and tools needed for impactful careers. A leader in pedagogical innovation, the Institute prioritizes interdisciplinary collaboration in educating 5,823 undergraduates and 1,164 graduate students in 140 programs across five schools. With recent changes in presidential leadership and the provost, RPI is at an exciting inflection point. RPI is poised for significant innovation and achievements across the Institute, including the enhancement of the student experience.

This period of energy and determination is a terrific time for an accomplished leader in student affairs to join the Rensselaer community and serve as an unwavering advocate for student development and success, support a devoted team of professionals, and foster a community grounded in well-being and inclusion. The Vice Provost for Student Experience is a reimagined role of RPI's senior student affairs officer, as the Division of Student Life was recently aligned with the Provost's office. This move highlights the trust and essential partnership between Student Life and Academic Affairs in providing well-coordinated and effective services and programs. A collaborator and visible presence in the RPI community, the VPSE will assess, align, and activate the future of the Division of Student Life and the ways in which they support and engage students.

The position requires a leader with a creative and strategic vision, determination to succeed, a highly proficient collaborative skillset, and a thorough understanding of best practices in student affairs at a STEM institution. The VPSE will be, first and foremost, an advocate for students but will also bring the qualities necessary to manage and develop a dedicated staff effectively.

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in the recruitment of the Vice Provost for Student Experience. All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence, as noted at the end of this document.

## **RENSSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE**

Founded in 1824 as the Rensselaer School, the faculty, students, and alums of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute have been defining the scientific and technological advances of our world. A leading private national research university with highly ranked undergraduate engineering programs, it aims to educate the leaders of tomorrow with a particular focus on scientific, technological, and related careers. With a mission of celebrating discovery and the responsible application of technology to create knowledge and global prosperity, RPI's student body for the 2022-2023 academic year was comprised of 5,823 undergraduate and 1,164 graduate students with a student-to-faculty ratio of 12:1. Nearly 70% of the collective student body identify as male, 38% identify as students of color, and 16% of students are international. As a technological school focused on innovative pedagogy, RPI also provides transformative education and exemplary support for neurodiverse students. The Institute's operating budget is about \$440 million, with approximately \$120 million in annual research expenditures and an \$860 million endowment. In addition to its main campus in Troy, New York, RPI has important research activities in Lake George, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and a Technology Park campus in North Greenbush, New York.

Rensselaer offers more than 140 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. RPI is comprised of five schools: the Lally School of Management, the School of Architecture, the School of Engineering, the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, and the School of Science. In addition, RPI enrolls working professionals in online graduate degrees, certificates, and coursework through Rensselaer@Work. RPI researchers transcend disciplines and work together to address a range of global challenges. Attracting world-class research faculty while also building robust and innovative curricular programs that meet the needs of today's students and tomorrow's leaders is the foundation for the future of research at Rensselaer. RPI alumni have been some of the brilliant minds behind research and innovations related to the International Space Station, Transcontinental Railroad, the Brooklyn Bridge, and email.

Student engagement at RPI is active, with more than 60% of the undergraduate student population living on campus and over 80% of students participating in intramurals, club sports, or intercollegiate programs. RPI also has a rich tradition and culture of student-led governance, such as the Rensselaer Union. To enrich classroom and lab experiences, Student Life is focused on facilitating developmentally transformative experiences, services, and spaces for students. Student research is encouraged. RPI students participate

in research that has practical applications to industry and society. With intentional programs and resources available at each stage of a student's academic journey, the Institute provides a holistic approach to student support.

[For 200 years](#) Rensselaer has offered a unique and innovative technological educational experience. As the Institute's visionary leaders have long understood, ensuring the excellence of this experience requires learning opportunities that extend beyond traditional classroom or campus boundaries. The undergraduate student academic experience at Rensselaer, is unique and known as "[the Arch](#)." Students take a full semester's worth of classes the summer after their second year, paving the way to experiential learning. Given this unique academic, cultural, and hands-on professional experience, Rensselaer students are better prepared to assume leadership roles after graduation.

In October 2022, RPI celebrated the inauguration of its 19<sup>th</sup> President, Dr. Martin A. Schmidt. This is a homecoming for President Schmidt as he graduated in 1981 with his bachelor's in electrical engineering from RPI. He holds a PhD in electrical engineering and computer science from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). President Schmidt joined RPI from MIT, where he served as provost for eight years. He also served as a member of MIT's electrical engineering and computer science faculty and has a demonstrated passion for fostering inclusive communities. He co-chaired the board of edX and was instrumental in the spin-off of edX, using the \$800 million sale proceeds to create a new nonprofit supporting an open-source learning platform. He holds 30 US patents, has helped start seven companies, and is excited to bring his entrepreneurial spirit back to RPI. President Schmidt has launched a new strategic planning process, the [Rensselaer Forward Plan](#), to carry the Institute into the decade beyond its bicentennial celebration in 2024.

In June 2023, RPI announced the appointment of Dr. Rebecca W. Doerge as RPI's first female provost in its 200 year history, effective August 1, 2023. Provost Doerge joins the Rensselaer community from Carnegie Mellon University, where she was the Glen de Vries Dean of the Mellon College of Science. Prior to joining Carnegie Mellon in 2016, she was the Trent and Judith Anderson Distinguished Professor of Statistics at Purdue University, where she held a joint appointment between the Colleges of Agriculture and Science. A native of upstate New York, as a first-generation student, Provost Doerge studied theoretical mathematics at the University of Utah. She obtained her PhD in statistics from North Carolina State University and was a postdoctoral fellow at Cornell University. Provost Doerge is an elected Fellow of the American Statistical Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

RPI is located in Troy, New York, on the western edge of Rensselaer County, on the eastern bank of the scenic Hudson River. It is a quick drive to Albany with easy access to public transit, Albany International Airport, and Amtrak. The city of Troy is a blend of historical and contemporary urban community settings with boutiques, cafes, farmers' markets, and restaurants that serve the RPI community and the many families and professionals who call Troy home and appreciate its affordability and community feel. Moreover, the Capital Region of New York is experiencing exciting economic growth and development from both government and private-sector investment due, in part, to the passage of the federal CHIPS

Act, offering tremendous opportunities for community engagement between the University and local business and industry.

## THE DIVISION OF STUDENT LIFE

The [Division of Student Life](#) prepares students for leadership and for life, leaning into its motto, “You are welcome here. You belong here. We support you here.” Situated at a uniquely renowned technological university, Student Life is designed to augment classroom and laboratory experiences through the creation of a holistic, safe, and developmentally transformative experience for students throughout their academic journey. Student Life imbues intellectual agility, multicultural sophistication, and global views that enable students to learn, thrive, and change the world. In the pursuit of focused excellence and maximizing the ways in which Student Life strategically complements the academic mission of the Institute, the portfolio of the Division of Student Life is currently being assessed, and the Provost seeks the insight of the new Vice Provost to finalize the structure and direction of the division. Currently, the division is comprised of [13 departments](#) that support students through the management of programs, facilities, and services related to intercollegiate athletics, the campus experience, student success, wellness, and transition services. The Division has an annual operating budget of approximately \$30 million and is staffed by 165 full-time employees.

## ROLE OF THE VICE PROVOST

Reporting to the Provost, the Vice Provost for Student Experience is responsible for developing and implementing strategic initiatives that enhance student involvement, promote leadership development, support student success, and provide a holistic approach to the student experience at RPI by providing vision and leadership for the Division of Student Life. As the Institute’s chief student affairs officer, the Vice Provost is responsible for oversight, coordination, and management of all student programs at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. The Vice Provost collaborates and communicates frequently with other units of the Institute, including but not limited to Facilities Management, the General Counsel’s Office, and Information Technology. The Vice Provost serves as a member of the Provost’s Leadership Team and participates in strategic planning and decision-making for the Office of the Provost.

To perform the role successfully, the Vice Provost will be expected to carry out the following essential functions:

- Participate as an active member of the Provost’s Leadership Team to establish and implement the vision and goals for Student Life and effectively communicate, collaborate, and organize to achieve outcomes.
- Consult with and advise the Provost on matters related to student life. Inform the Provost and Leadership Team of current research and best practices in student engagement and higher education.

- Create a cohesive and supportive campus community that promotes student involvement, leadership development, and holistic well-being.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive performance plan and performance-based budget that reflects the priorities and needs of the Division; ensures fiscal responsibility for decisions regarding expenditures in the Division; and aligns with the Institution's mission and goals. Develop and implement expenditure tracking and controls, prepare quarterly performance and budget reports, and initiate appropriate cost containment measures as necessary.
- In coordination with the Division of Human Resources, oversee the recruitment and selection of staff to assist in attainment of goals and objectives. Provide leadership and mentorship to staff to foster a culture of professional growth and development. Carry out related human resource functions for direct reports, including hiring, evaluating, training, developing, supporting, coaching, and, when necessary, counseling and initiating disciplinary actions.
- Formulate and develop policies and procedures related to student engagement and experience, ensuring compliance with Institutional guidelines, policies, and regulations. Represent student interests in Institutional decision-making process and policy development. Serve as an advocate for student needs and concerns. Review student misconduct reports to ensure recommendations conform to university policies.
- Foster and maintain collaborations with academic departments, student organizations, faculty, staff, and external partners to create a cohesive, supportive, and forward-thinking campus community.
- Ensure that the organization is compliant with applicable state, local, and federal regulations, and codes; identify legal requirements and government reporting regulations affecting Student Life.
- Establish a trusting work environment in which participation, team building, respect, and excellence are fostered. Promote a welcoming, belonging, and inclusive community by advocating for best practices and initiatives that welcome, celebrate, and support a diverse student body and workforce. Build professional, productive relationships and open communication across all the Institute's constituents.
- Represent RPI in the community on matters pertaining to student programs and activities.

## **KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE VICE PROVOST**

As Rensselaer reflects on its recent successes as well as opportunities for future growth and investment, the Vice Provost for Student Experience will play a critical role as an institutionally minded leader. Specifically, the Vice Provost will address the following opportunities and challenges:

### **Create and implement an inspiring, shared vision for a fully integrated RPI student experience**

The VPSE will be instrumental in facilitating the remarkable transformation underway at RPI, which was set forth by the President and Provost. Guided by the [Rensselaer Forward Plan](#), which includes accessibility, safety, and inclusion as priorities for a welcoming community, the VPSE will lead the development of a compelling vision and strategy for the future of student life. The VPSE will work closely

with the Provost and academic affairs to chart a shared strategy that is comprehensive, sustainable in the near and long-term, and inclusive of the Division's breadth, offerings, and talents. As the Division transitions to its next leader, the VPSE must preserve what already makes student life at RPI successful and unique while creating a forward-looking vision consistent with current and future leading practices in student affairs that best suit RPI's needs. To be successful, the VPSE must facilitate authentic, intentional, and ongoing opportunities for dialogue with students, staff, and faculty. The outcome of the Vice Provost's vision and action plan must be a co-creation with key stakeholders throughout the institution. The VP should be invigorated by the opportunity to facilitate a student-centered transformation built upon strategy, innovation, and collaboration in an intellectually engaging community of changemakers.

### **Refine the current organizational structure with an eye toward focused excellence**

The VPSE should possess the management experience and disposition required to develop systems and structures conducive to the division's success. The VPSE will bring a track record of leading with a solutions-focused approach to navigating change. Barriers to innovation and communication should be removed, work processes should be streamlined, and transparency and clear decision-making paths should be paramount. In all activities, the VPSE will empower division staff, encourage teamwork and respect, and champion student success and well-being. Efforts are currently underway to assess the overarching organizational structure of Student Life. The VPSE will join the Institute at an opportune moment to establish the division's redefined portfolio and focus, identify the student learning outcomes that will guide the work of the Student Life team, and lead the planning processes necessary to chart a long-term and sustainable strategic vision.

### **Extend the division's legacy of student success, well-being, and community**

A motto of Rensselaer is "You are welcome here. You belong here. We support you here." The VPSE will embody this motto through their leadership and the advancement of the programs, facilities, and services offered by Student Life. An unwavering commitment to students, their success, and their well-being are the hallmarks of the Division of Student Life. The VPSE will build upon this legacy of dedication and service to the RPI student community by leading with a vigorous spirit of innovation, collaboration, and a commitment to the power of student life at RPI. With determination, patience, and vision, the VPSE will build strong relationships with colleagues, working closely across schools, colleges, and administrative leaders to develop a holistic approach to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality, supportive, student-centered experience. The Vice Provost should possess the expertise to advance belonging and inclusion at RPI for all students, including community members who identify as BIPOC, women and non-binary, neurodiverse, and international. The VPSE will be a student, staff, and faculty advocate with a visible presence on campus, actively working to build bridges and overcome obstacles to success across the University. The VPSE will work passionately with other leaders on critical university priorities around academic and personal success, well-being, and an inclusive and supportive community of change-making student scholars.

### **Engage, champion, and lead a team of dedicated professionals**

The Vice Provost will serve as a champion and consummate supporter of the Student Life staff in service to students. Through accessible and supportive leadership, ongoing engagement with staff, clear purpose, creativity, and transparency, the VPSE will lead and develop a talented and deeply committed team of professionals. The Vice Provost will bring strong organizational development skills, a track record of success and collaboration at the most senior levels of administration, and proven accomplishments in building and managing talented teams, particularly through institutional leadership changes. From recruitment and onboarding to professional and organizational development, the VPSE will champion exemplary workplace practices. As an experienced supervisor, this individual will bring and translate a deep understanding of the national landscape of student affairs at an academically rigorous STEM-focused institution. The Vice Provost will inspire and motivate both their direct reports and their teams and will build upon the division's legacy of collaboration. This leader will work tirelessly to represent Student Life across the RPI community.

### **Effectively manage financial and operational resources**

The VPSE will be a strong resource steward with a multidimensional understanding of students and student affairs. The VPSE will inspire innovation within their organization as well as demonstrate results-driven decision-making to effectively address challenges, improve efficiencies, and maximize the ways student life supports students through services, programs, and facilities. The Vice Provost must be an experienced data-driven financial steward as well as a strong advocate for resources – human, physical, and financial, demonstrating the university-wide impact of student life. The VPSE will manage business operations for Student Life and will need to be a responsible manager of resources who is creative, yet judicious and can gracefully make decisions in the face of constraints. They will lead a thorough and ongoing appraisal of current operations and practices, as well as revenue sources and expenses. In partnership with Institute Advancement, the Vice Provost will also be called upon to share a philanthropic vision and engage with alumni and friends of RPI and promote the exceptional and ambitious work of Student Life. In establishing their vision for student life, the Vice Provost will expertly lead their team in enhancing best practices, capitalize on opportunities to strengthen operations, and strategically invest resources in areas that will have significant impact and alignment with the future directions of student life and RPI.

### **Foster an exciting and engaging RPI student experience**

This is an exciting time to be at RPI. The reimagining of RPI's senior student officer as the Vice Provost for Student Experience is an affirmation of the Institute's commitment and ambitions related to supporting and engaging students. The VP must have an appreciation for lifelong learning and the transformative potential of being an RPI student. The VPSE will be charged with leading Student Life from a holistic point of view. From the moment a person hears about RPI, to the first few weeks as a student, to long after crossing the graduation stage, there are abundant opportunities to strengthen and generate pride,



enthusiasm, and affinity for Rensselaer. The programs, services, and student interactions with Student Life colleagues should capitalize on these opportunities for engagement. Long known for its renowned technological education and research, Rensselaer continues to strengthen this unique international community of difference makers. Creating opportunities to foster a meaningful sense of community, pride, and excitement for RPI will be critical for the VPSE. Not only is this important work fundamental for the purposes of student involvement and success, but also in creating channels for engagement with alumni and friends of RPI.

## **QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

In its Vice Provost for Student Experience, RPI seeks an exceptional student-centered leader. While no one person will embody all the following, the successful VPSE candidate will bring many of the following professional qualifications, skills, experiences, and personal qualities:

- An advanced degree in higher education or a related field is required; an earned doctoral or terminal degree is strongly preferred;
- Demonstrated progressive leadership and administrative experience, ideally in an academically rigorous environment and directly related to student affairs, including visionary leadership, strategic thinking, and an innovative spirit;
- Proven skills as a senior manager and supervisor in a complex and changing environment, with demonstrated ability to mentor, develop, and support staff from a breadth of student affairs functional areas;
- Consistently models and maintains the values of candor, openness, transparency, and inclusiveness;
- Sincere engagement with students and the campus community; a strong, visible presence and active participation in a range of campus activities;
- Sophisticated communication and interpersonal skills that inspire and build trust and confidence;
- An engaged university leader with well-developed political and diplomatic skills adept at effectively maneuvering through complex situations and can present information to university leadership and externally represent the institution's and division's missions and goals;
- A track record of responsible fiscal and other resource allocation management that is aligned with student needs;
- Proven ability to be dependable and deliver measurable results on time and within budget and can mobilize resources and remove barriers to success;
- Demonstrated success in advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives, as well as fostering a supportive and inclusive environment and embracing diversity in all aspects of a university community;
- The capacity to identify and think strategically about opportunities for creative collaboration across departments and a talent for bringing others on board and building momentum toward a common goal;



- Wisdom, judgment, and demonstrated ability to identify and analyze a variety of issues and problems, making recommendations for policy change and/or taking action to resolve them;
- Sophisticated interpersonal skills, including a firm but fair, approach to the resolution of conflict and change management;
- Proven ability to address crises with equanimity, discretion, and respect;
- Demonstrated experience in assessment, evaluation, and development of student affairs programs, services, and facilities;
- Strong oral and written communication skills.

#### **PAY TRANSPARENCY DISCLOSURE**

Expected Hiring Range: \$335,000-\$375,000

The selected candidate's salary will be determined based on factors that include the available budget, internal equity, and the final candidate's qualifications, experience, education and other job-related credentials. This hiring range is provided as Rensselaer's good faith estimate of the expected hiring range at the time of posting.

#### **APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, & NOMINATIONS**

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this recruitment. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications (CVs and letters of interest) should be sent electronically to:

Keight Tucker Kennedy, Partner  
Ivan Ceballos, Senior Associate  
Alexis Scott, Senior Search Coordinator  
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/rensselaer-polytechnic-institute/vice-provost-student-experience>

*Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity, Race/Gender/Veterans/Disability Employer. RPI welcomes candidates who will bring diverse cultural, ethnic, national, and international perspectives to Rensselaer's work and campus communities.*