



**S T U D E N T**  
**SENATE**

# Career Fair Holiday Proposal

The Student Senate Academic Affairs Committee

Chair: Varun Rao

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Sub-committee Members: Joshua Thomas and Michael Gardner

*Passed by the 47th Student Senate on March 27, 2017 by a vote of 9-7-4.*

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## Background

This proposal is the result of the Rensselaer Union Student Senate responding to the student raised concern of students being unable to attend career fairs at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute due to coursework. A petition titled “Make Career Fair Day a Student Holiday” was started early in the Fall 2016 semester, and has received 328 signatures as of March 26, 2017 showing the students’ desire for this idea to become a reality (1). The Student Senate discussed this petition, and tasked the researching and writing of the proposal to the Academic Affairs committee on October 24th, 2016. After researching and looking into student concerns, the main goal of this petition has become to remove a current academic holiday, and replace it with an academic holiday on the day of the career fair for one or both yearly semesters.

Several holidays were considered as candidates for this project. Among them were Columbus day, a day from Thanksgiving break, a study day from the fall, President’s day, a day from Spring Break, Grand Marshal day, and a study day from the spring. After discussions with administrators and students, and research into peer and aspirant institutes attempting a similar shift, the Academic Affairs committee found that removing Columbus day and adding a Fall Career Fair holiday would be the best option. The reasoning for this change, along with other potential options, is discussed in the Procedures section.

A similar proposal was put forward by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Working Group, a group consisting of students, faculty, and administrators (2). This proposal and its contents are referenced several times throughout this paper, due to the fact that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute have a similar format

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for their career fairs, where one or two large career fairs encompassing many majors are held every year, and the one referred to in this report is the one held by the Graduate Student Council, Society of Women Engineers, and the Senior Class (3).

## Benefits

The students of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute will benefit greatly if this proposal is enacted. Not having classes on the day of the career fair will allow for more students to attend, as difficulty attending is a problem highlighted by the student petition itself. This idea pairs well with the new Summer Arch initiative, as it will give more students the opportunity to search for an internship or co-op to align with their schedule. Having a holiday on the day of the career fair will also give more seniors the opportunity to search for jobs pending graduation. Face to face interaction with a potential employer is key to increasing a student's chances of getting a job, and being unable to attend the career fair due to tests, classes, and labs may prevent many Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute students from having this benefit.

The proposal written by the Massachusetts Institute for Technology Working Group put forward the concept of a two year trial period, which will allow for data to be collected and a final verdict to be determined in terms of the amount of student benefit from this change (2). If a trial period is implemented at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, it will allow for any issues related to the removal and adding of an academic holiday to be resolved, and additionally make sure that the students are getting the most possible benefits from the career fairs.

## Procedures

### Potential Holidays

The Institute will not allow the creation of another holiday in the school year due to strict scheduling as dictated by the already demanding coursework. As such, if a career fair school holiday were created, a holiday must be taken from somewhere else in the academic calendar. For the fall semester, possible academic holidays to consider for replacement are the following: Columbus day, Labor day, and Thanksgiving break. Columbus day falls on a Monday in October, Labor day falls on a Monday in September, and Thanksgiving break (for RPI) is started on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving and is until (and including) Friday. The only holiday that can be no longer observed without issue will be Columbus Day. The holiday is already a controversial one and it is the holiday that is the most extraneous. For the spring semester, possible academic holidays to consider for replacement are the following: President's Day, and GM Day. President's day falls on a Monday mid-February, and GM day is on a Wednesday early-April . Given the holidays that can be replaced in the spring, this committee can only recommend President's Day as the only viable replacement holiday for the spring semester. GM Day holds too much significance to RPI for it to be replaced. While President's Day is a federal holiday, it could be replaced since many companies do not officially observe it so there is precedent for it not being observed. This committee also recommends that the Fall Career Day be held on the Friday of the Fall Career and that the Spring Career Day be held on the Wednesday of the Spring Career Fair.

## Two Year Experimental Period

The Academic Affairs Committee also recommends that a two year experimental period be enacted so that RPI can smoothly transition to the permanent enactment of this policy. The two year experimental period was also enacted by the MIT Faculty at the recommendation of their Undergraduate Association and Graduate Student Council (2). The proposed structure for our two year experimental period will require that for the first two years of the adjusted academic calendar data will be collected (collection will be performed by the hosts of the Career Fair) from the Career Fair(s) that occur on the new holiday(s). The collected data will consist of metrics such as: number of students attending, class years attending, majors attending, number of companies attending, and those other metrics determined pertinent by the Academic Affairs Committee. During the experimental period, a survey will also be administered to the students that following the career fair(s) they attended in order to qualitatively assess the effects of the new holidays.

The conclusion of the two year experimental period will occur after the last affected career fair occurs; at this point in time the data from the experimental period will be analyzed in comparison to data collected from career fairs prior to the experimental period. The analysis will be worked on by the Student Senate Academic Affairs Committee. The committee will then create a report that details the results of the creation of holiday(s) that coincide with the career fair(s), and they will provide a recommendation as to continue or discontinue the proposed change(s) to the academic calendar.

## Data

The Fall career fair run by the National Society of Black Engineers and the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers is considered the larger of the two career fairs at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, running over the course of two days and hosting over 200 companies. The Spring career fair run by the Center for Career and Professional Development is smaller, hosting 152 companies over the course of a single day. The Fall Career Fair had roughly 4,356 attendees, and the Spring Career Fair had roughly 1,000 attendees. The above data was acquired through email exchanges with the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Center for Career and Professional Development, the National Society of Black Engineers, and the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, which are available upon request.

The Student Senate Survey contained one question in regards to this issue: “Would you support removing an academic holiday (Columbus Day) so that there would be no classes on the date of the Career Fair?” This question was answered by 438 students, with 58% of respondents selecting the “Yes” option. While this is only a slim majority of respondents, this survey also had a small sample size, as less than 10% of the student body responded. This data was acquired via the Student Senate Survey.

## Conclusion

Student opinion from the petition, “Make Career Fair Day a Student Holiday,” displayed the desire to make the career fairs held at RPI more accessible by removing conflicts such as classes, homework, exams, etc. The Academic Affairs Committee recommends, based on the collected data and the pros and cons of each possible day, that the holiday of Columbus Day be removed and moved to the day of the NSBE/SHPE Fall Career Fair, and President’s Day be removed and moved to the day of the CCPD Spring Career Fair. In the case that only one holiday can be moved, the Academic Affairs Committee recommends that the fall Career Fair be the one that receives the holiday. The Academic Affairs Committee also recommends that a two year experimental period be conducted, and data collected, to determine the benefits and student opinions on the schedule change. The data from the trial period will be used to determine whether the program should be made a permanent change the Academic Calendar, retained and expanded if one of the holiday’s cannot currently be moved, or be discontinued.

The creation of a student holiday for one, or both, or RPI’s Career Fairs provides RPI’s students with many benefits. By removing classes, along with their related assignments and exams, as an obstacle to career fair attendance students will receive the benefits of: ability to attend the career fair, ability to procure a job, co-op, or internship that aligns with the Summer Arch Program, and ability to procure a job upon graduation. The Institute also stands to benefit as the number of students with jobs upon graduation will increase, and the success of Summer Arch will be boosted. The implementation of this proposal would impart a great benefit to RPI’s student body, and the two year experimental period allows for necessary changes to be made.

## References

1: "Make Career Fair Day A Student Holiday". *Petitions.Union.Rpi.Edu*, 2017,  
<https://petitions.union.rpi.edu/petitions/iQDk9mZ4vu8zrBDgn>

2: Hall, Steven et al. *REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP TO ASSESS THE SEPTEMBER STUDENT HOLIDAY EXPERIMENT*. MIT Working Group, 2013,  
<http://web.mit.edu/faculty/reports/holiday.pdf>.

3: "Career Fairs And Company Presentations | MIT Global Education & Career Development".  
*Gecd.Mit.Edu*, 2017,  
<https://gecd.mit.edu/jobs-and-internships/career-fairs-and-company-presentations>