



SUFFER

**The RPI Disorientation
Guide**

Why a disorientation guide?

As students coming to RPI, we all distinctly remember having questions, feeling as if there were simply unspoken agreements, understandings, rules, and a variety of things that were at first not apparent. Being a college student, especially at a university like RPI, is difficult. There are unique challenges and scenarios that you the reader may not find yourself immediately prepared for. This guide was put together by a crowdsourced student-driven effort to better help our younger and newer student cohorts, and to hopefully make the difficult transition a bit easier and less stressful. There are simply things that RPI does not tell you during orientations and NRB events that we as freshmen wish we had known.

First, a bit of history. RPI was established in 1824 as the "Rensselaer School" (renamed RPI in 1861), and was one of the first schools to offer a degree in civil engineering. A similar guide to this one did not exist until approximately 1985, in which the "Not the Rensselaer Handbook," was published by Steve Stanton and Tom White et al. a second version of this document was made in the form of the "RPI Wiki," published in 2004 by Kevin Panko, with the permission of the original authors. This "Version 3," seeks to update these. To take a quote from the original, "It is written to be used as a reference guide to not only surviving at RPI, but for surviving with style."

- The Students

**A special thank you to
all that provided your
wonderful words for
the freshmen, and the
artists who brought
this guide to life!**

**You all are what make
RPI the school that it
is, and it's been
incredible to see the
help you provide to
the freshman class.**

**From all of us
compiling this, thank
you!**

Life At RPI

College life can be confusing; for many it's their first time living somewhere other than home. Here are some compiled general tips from other students.

Food and Drink

When choosing where to eat based on what food dining halls will have, try to use the RPI dining website (rensselaerdining.com) to see what's on the menu. It's not always reliable, though, so your best bet will be to check out Sage To-Go first (just to check out if they have anything you'd like), then go to Commons, which has the most options out of all of the dining halls.

If you need to get coffee/snacks, try to get them in off times, a.k.a. not on the hour/half hour, as those are when classes end. Sage coffee is easier on the stomach than DCC Starbucks coffee. Library cafe is very overpriced, so it's recommended that you get food before you go to the library, and bring it to a study room somewhere. Sage cafe will not take card at certain times during the day. Panera will sometimes give you free coffee if you just ask for a coffee and nothing else.

I know you might see or hear about caffeine pills. As someone who in their 2nd semester freshman year was intaking 800+ milligrams per day and only sleeping for 4 hours every night, If you already do them, the best thing is to work yourself back down. Sleep > Caffeine and it's better for your grades. Your grades are not worth considering if jumping out a window (humorously, deprecatingly, or seriously). They can be nice because they get you the caffeine without drinking coffee. I hate coffee, it's too bitter. If you really really need it, once a day is okay. Otherwise go for the soda or the coffee. It forces you to slow down the intake.

Learn to use a microwave. Learn to use a microwave while drunk/high, at 4am, blindfolded, with your non-dominant hand. You don't want to be the person that sets off the fire alarm and makes an entire dorm of students evacuate just because you forgot to put water in your ramen, didn't take the pop-tart out of the wrapper, or let your popcorn pop for too long.

Getting Around at RPI and the Surrounding Area

Make friends with people who have cars, it's a lifesaver for groceries and being able to enjoy Troy and the Capital Region. Getting off campus with some friends on weekends will save your mental health.

Bring boots!!! Or at least something that'll keep your feet dry. There's lots of rain, and even more snow at Rensselaer. You don't want to be spending your entire day going from class to class with wet socks. Life at RPI is already one giant, metaphorical wet sock, don't make it more so.

NOTE: During the pandemic please limit your use of public transit to essential trips only

Riding the CDTA (Public Buses). The CDTA buses are FREE with your RPI ID. The routes that go by campus are the 87, 286 and 289. The 87 bus goes from downtown Troy to Walmart via RPI campus. To make sure you go on the right direction of the bus from campus: Eastbound (Walmart) from freshman hill use the stop on the Troy HS side of the road, and from the union use the playhouse side stop; Westbound (Downtown) from freshman hill use the stop on the freshman 5 side of the road, and from the union use the union building side of the road. To go downtown from campus you can also take the 289 (from North/E complex or Chi Phi) or 286 (from union side or North/E complex). You can use the CDTA bus to get to the farmer's market, the grocery store (Market 32 or Save A Lot), Starbucks, Sonic, a lot of fraternities (Downtown, Eastside), and if you're down to kill some time you can even go to downtown Albany or to Target in Latham. It's truly an underutilized resource by RPI students and especially useful to get around Troy as a freshman with no car. I found it helped my mental health to take a break and leave campus at least once a week, and I used the CDTA to get around all 4 years. It also helped me get to know Troy which is honestly a lovely place, there's so many local/small businesses downtown and the people tend to be very nice once they get to know you.

Unless you have a bike/skateboard/other cool form of transportation, you are going to do a LOT of walking. Prepare yourself! :) Even when I was living in quad (the closest dorm to campus), getting places was a bit of a workout.

Try to sneak into various buildings with your friends at least once. If you try enough doors, you will find one >:)

Safety at RPI and Title IX

Title IX. Go to the NY Coalition Against Sexual Assault. Go to the police. RPI will NOT help you. They will do anything to save their own butts and liability while throwing you under the bus. There are several Poly (newspaper) articles and local news articles citing the horrific things the admin has done to both female and male victims. Do not go to them. Go to someone who can actually advocate and help you.

I want to give advice regarding safety.

I hate to bring this up to freshmen just leaving home, but I've had experience dealing with title 9 cases. I'd just like to say that RPI has a reputation for not handling it well/being lenient to the perpetrator at the expense of the victim/not being professional (victim blaming, divulging confidential information to people unrelated to the incident, etc.) so I would just like to recommend reporting to the police if something serious that they would feel ok with reporting/pursuing action on were to occur. This is something important that is a pretty grim topic to discuss, but since freshmen go through informational sessions regarding consent, title 9, and sexual assault, I feel this is also something important to consider were they to encounter a situation of this type. I have known a few students who unfortunately experienced a title 9 related incident in their freshman year, and they found reporting it to pubsafe to be ineffective (only kicked the perpetrator off campus for a semester and then was allowed to return to the institution, nothing came of it and they just felt unsafe and traumatized, etc). Freshmen can do research about the topic themselves as there have been publicized articles regarding the topic of sexual assault handled improperly at RPI. Sorry if this is too heavy but this could save some people some grief.

Some other advice is that Troy can be sketchy off-campus, so just beware of your surroundings. I (a female) have been followed a few times (people have tried to lure me to their cars/empty buildings, yelled things at me regarding my race/ gender, etc) during the summer while off campus, but feel that Troy is safer during the school year when students are around. Don't let that stop you from exploring troy however, as it's a super cute place full of history and despite my negative experiences I really enjoyed my time in Troy. Just do your research on parts of Troy that sees more violence and use the buddy system.

Dealing With Administration

There are tons of rules at RPI and there may be many times where you are told "no". At RPI, most of these rules are bendable. Despite the fact that you might be told no five times straight to your face, most barriers at RPI can be surpassed if you are willing to put in the effort to fight the administration on whatever is obstructing your goals.

Basically anything can be fixed by filling out an additional form. Want to change classes late? form. Want to take a class that you aren't able to add for any reason? form. Want to take a class that doesn't exist? Form. Want to change majors without fitting all the requirements? Form (and maybe more depending on the major, for CS it's 2 forms and they make you get reviewed by a committee).

RPI Admin sucks. Here's some tips to get what you want. (How to get out of arch, get your club out of trouble, and generally make your voice heard)

1. Emails don't work. They'll "get lost", or be outright ignored. Write them anyways, but make phone calls.
2. Phone calls don't always work. The administrator will be "busy", "sick", or "dealing with something else". If you're having trouble reaching them, find where their office is (a good bet is academy hall), and sit outside until they'll meet with you.
3. Document everything. After a phone call or in-person meeting, write an email thanking the administrator for meeting with you, and quickly summarizing what you talked about. This creates a paper-trail, prevents them from going back on their word, and forces them to either agree with you or take time out of their day to correct you.

If you have your own health insurance, rpi charges you an additional 700 dollars every semester for their insurance unless you opt out, you can opt out on the student health center portal.

When engaging a member of RPI administration in a conversation that matters (for example, Jade Felder re. Arch) always walk in ready to brawl, because if you aren't ready to stand your ground you'll get roasted and toasted.

A Small Message from the students at the Disorientation guide:
Remember when facing admin, lots of us have done similar things before, we know how scary and world-ending it can feel. Take a deep breath, and stand your ground. **You got this :)**

Dorm Living

Be assertive with your roommates early on when they do something that bothers you, like kicking you out to have sex with a partner, or having friends over to drink in the dorm. Remember, it's your room too, and you are paying for a place to sleep and be safe. Don't be afraid to escalate to an RA if necessary, but often just talking to your roommate about it can help.

This is about doing laundry. Freshman year I lived in Crockett Hall on Freshman Hill, Sophomore year and Summer Arch I lived in Stackwyck. If you find yourself with not much to do on a Friday or Saturday night, it's a great time to do laundry as nobody else does laundry then usually. Sunday from 12pm-late evening is usually the busiest time for laundry in dorms from my experience.

The Friday/Saturday night thing can also apply to other things like Grocery Shopping!

If you live in on campus housing, you aren't allowed to have candles in your room or toaster ovens. The second one is pretty dumb IMO.

If you've never lived on your own before, allow me to let you in on a tip. There is a very easy way to get everyone in your dorm to intensely dislike you - cause the fire alarm to go off. During the day it's tolerable, but at night it's an egregious offense. Depending on which dorm you're in, setting off the fire alarm could cause all nearby fire alarms to go off as well. Please, just don't do it.

Get yourself a small backpack and a big backpack. Big contains everything you might want to be away from your dorm (laptop/charger/mouse, gum, snacks, a book, all your class notes, etc.). Small is for short trips when you are returning soon.

Maintaining a social life & other general tips

Sometimes as a freshman you try to spend all your free time with your new gr8 college friends but its always good to make time to spend alone whether that be to catch up on work or just to relax and take care of yourself!

Go into things with just a little bit of enthusiasm. I went in with a LOT, and it rubbed off on other people. Being nervous is fine, it happens, I was nervous a lot when I started college. It gets way easier after you have made a fool of yourself on day 1, raised your hand and answered a question wrong, wound up at an event you had no idea was happening and enjoyed it, or even engaged in difficult conversations. It's all a part of your college experience, and that's what the fun part of school is.

GZ Basement shows are sick as fuck.

If you are a woman, I would absolutely recommend going out of your way to make at least a few female friends or join a woman-specific club. RPI is a really male dominated atmosphere. I thought that this wouldn't have an effect on me, but I was wrong - I ended up really relying on female friends to let out steam. That woman mentorship program is a solid way of doing it if you have trouble making friends.

The helpdesk in the old church across from the library (VCC) is open 8am-10pm weekdays and even sometimes on weekends (normally, both may change because of rona), and can/will help you with pretty much any computer or tech related problem you have, and most times will try to help with any other problems as well.

MAKE SURE TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND SHOWER REGARDLESS OF HOW MUCH WORK YOU HAVE!

History: A lot of big bands used to come to Albany in the 80s and through the area but not because this area is any good or anything. Place barely had a population or scene worth mentioning, especially then. It was because some RPI grad students were cooking up some of the best and purest acid on the east coast and they wanted to try it out.

RPI Speak & Acronyms to English Translator

At RPI you'll find many acronyms and phrases that can be confusing at first. We've done our best to compile the more useful ones here.

Archies - Students within the School of Architecture

The Armory - Generally refers to the basement of the Muller Center, which is the gym at RPI. This is sometimes called the "Alumni Sports & Recreation Center," on older campus maps.

BARH - Burdett Avenue residence hall, and the dining hall within.

Bella's - Big Apple Pizza.

CII - Also called the Low building, the Center for Industrial Innovation is where most recitations are held. Connected to the DCC via the 4th floor, where a bridge crosses the windtunnel, and simultaneously sitting on top of it.

Daddy's - Father's marketplace (only after 10pm.)

DCC - The Darrin Communication Center. Generally where larger classes are located. The seat color of DCC 308 is almost as legendary as the time a bird family lived in the rafters for a week.

FoA - Foundations of Analysis, MATH 4090

Frosh - A term of endearment for freshmen. Generally used by upperclassmen.

GS/Gov Suite - Student Government Suite GS is short for Gov Suite, which is short for Government Suite, which is short for Student Government Suite. Gov Suite is used in conversation, while GS would be used in Discord chat. GS is used ONLY by certain students who hang out in the Student Government Suite but have nothing in relation to RPI student government.

IEA - Introduction to Engineering Analysis.

IED - Introduction to Engineering Design.

JEC - J. Eric Jonsson Engineering Center, located just past the DCC. Generally where IEA takes place.

J-ROWL - Jonsson Rowland Science Center, located behind CBIS and the DCC, home of the Physics Department and SoS hub.

LITEC - The Embedded Control class, ENGR 2350.

MRC - Materials Research Center, located next to Cogswell Labs.

P/NC - Pass/No Credit. A grade option for non-core classes.

The Rat/Rath - The Rathskellar room, located in the basement of the Union.

RSDH - Russel Sage Dining hall, also just called Sage. Not to be confused with Sage labs. You will not have classes in this building (RSDH), which is located near the DCC and the Playhouse.

Star Trek Room - DCC 337. The weird semicircular one. Don't climb on the wall at the top, falls from that hurt a lot.

VCC - Voorhees Computing Center. The old church. This is where you should go if your laptop gets broken for whatever reason, as well as if you need to print something other than standard size.

Buildings at RPI

The RPI campus is obviously mainly buildings, and exploring campus can be a very fun time. Here's some info on them!

All Building Floor Plans

The floor plans for every campus building can be found here:

<http://zim2411.info/floorplans/>

Some are out of date, but it's really helpful for finding classes (especially if you have anxiety about wandering around)

Amos Eaton (Eaton)

There is a Mathematics Library 3rd floor of Amos Eaton. It is also a good study/nap spot too.

As you enter AE, take the stairs on your right and head to the 3rd floor. This is the mathematics department, so you'll find your math professors on this floor or the 4th floor. Enter the 3rd floor, take a left, follow down the short hallway, and take an immediate right and into the library.

Here you'll find many textbooks that usually are way too advanced for you, but nothing stops you from opening up a random textbook and attempting to read it. A printer and a few computers are located here as well.

A display case of old books and artefacts lies there as well. Interesting stuff to look at. MAKE SURE TO RETURN BOOKS TO THEIR ORIGINAL SPOT!

BARH (Burdette Ave. Residence Hall)

I would definitely recommend BARH for living. It may be a little farther away, but it's cheaper and has its own dining hall. The food, especially weekend brunch, is the best of all the dining halls, and at least while I was there, it had a fantastic social life.

It's really far from campus (5-10 minute walk, but going uphill is brutal until you get used to it), but it's the only freshman dorm with a dining hall inside (very nice on those subzero winter days) and the rooms aren't too bad. Only real issue is that there is no AC, so for the few weeks of summer at the start/end of the year, it can be a bit unpleasant.

CII/LOW (Center for Industrial Innovation)

This building has great places to study quietly or in groups.

The top floor of the CII is informally called the throne room. I won't spoil the surprise, check it out!

DCC (Darrin Communications Center)

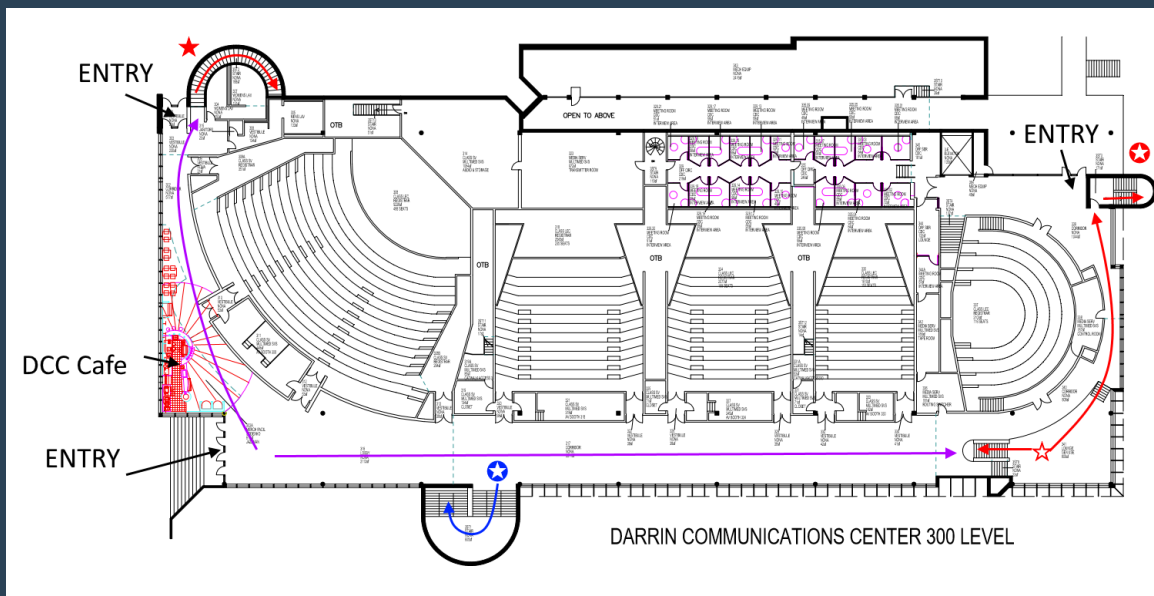
If the library is full, at night all the rooms in this building (and the connected buildings) are empty and unlocked and 99% of the time no one will kick you out until classes start the next day. only downside is that once the outer doors lock, you can't get back in the building if you have to exit for whatever reason.

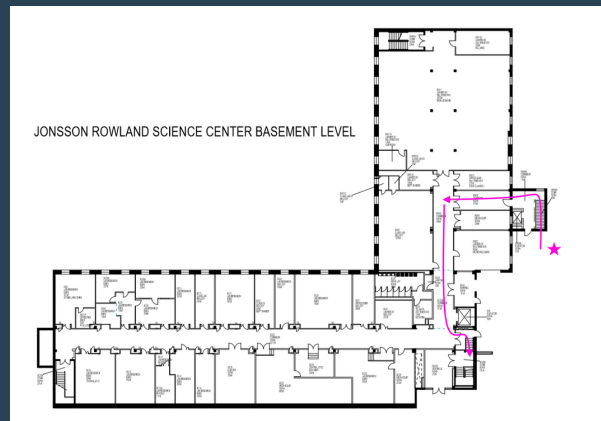
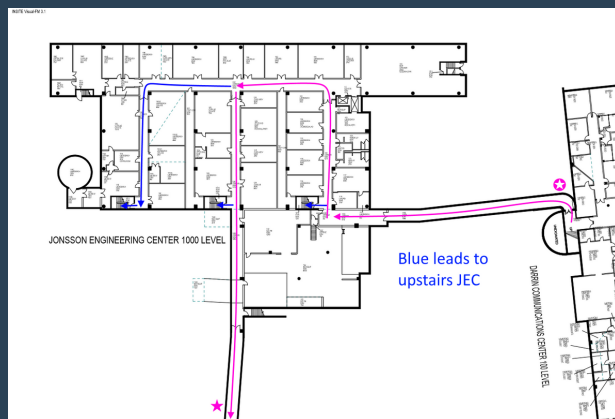
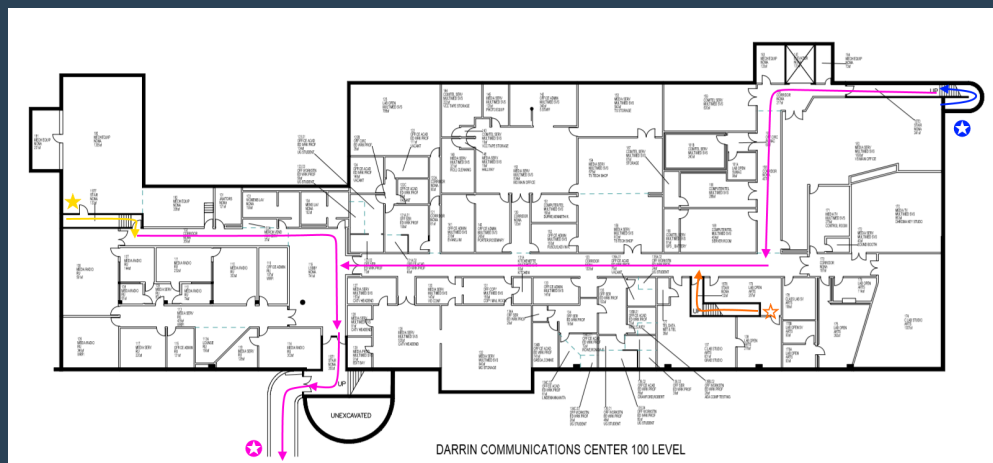
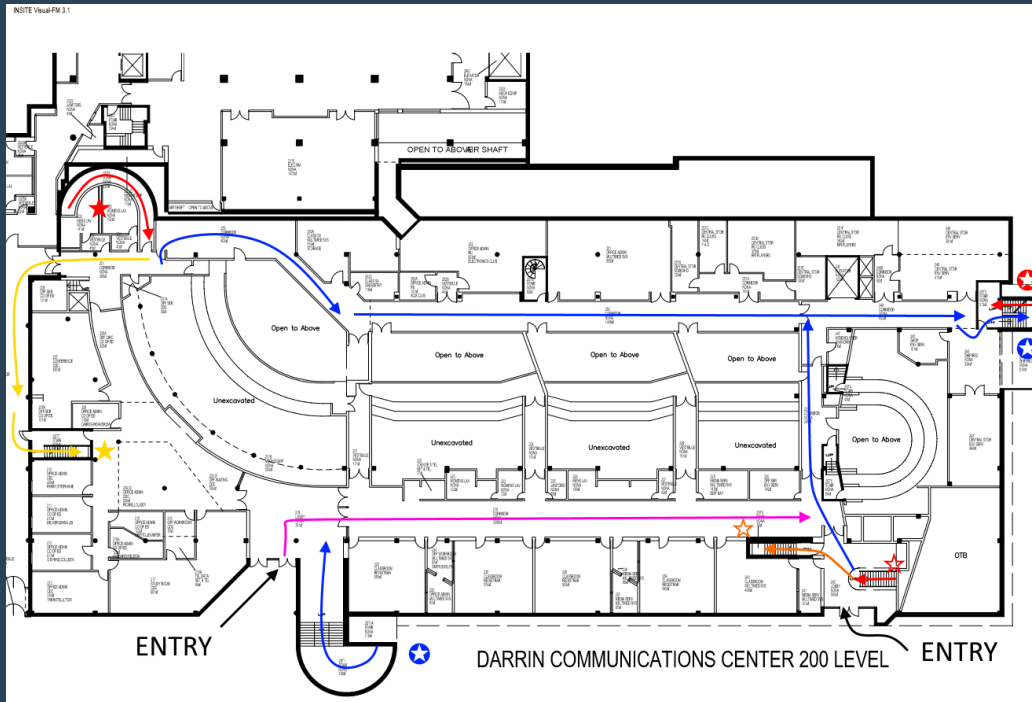
DCC tunnel to JROWL and JEC

There is an underground tunnel that connects JROWL to DCC and JEC. Great if you want to avoid the rain or snow.

As I am unfamiliar with the architecture of JEC, I will lay out the path one would take to reach the underground tunnel from DCC and to head towards JROWL.

Use these images as a guide.





You'll most likely encounter the 300 level of the Darrin Communications Center. A lot of your lectures are in this building. Starting from the café, you can head to the left towards a spiral staircase, to the right to another staircase, or further down. There you can head down another staircase, or go out of your way to go down a fire-exit. Simply follow the red or blue arrows down the stairs.

On DCC 200, you'll find more classrooms and great places to sit down and wait for your classes. Note, each of the lecture halls can be accessed from this floor in two places. If you went down the spiral staircase, go past the door and take a right. Go past a double-door and take a left. You'll notice the makers lab on your right. Go straight until you spot your first door on your left. Go inside and take the stairs down. You can also take a left and follow the hallway. Once you pass a set of doors, you can either continue straight or take a right. If you go forwards, take the door on your right around the corner and enter the fire-stairs. If you came from the bottom-right stairs, open the door nearest the double-door and follow the staircase down. Or, go through the double-door, straight, and then right to get to the fire-exit.

On DCC 100, just follow the pink arrow wherever you came from.

If you came from the yellow arrow, go down the hallway and take a right.

If you came from the orange arrow, exit the stairs and take a left. Follow down the hallway.

If you came from the fire-exit, or blue arrow, go straight, take a left, then a right and go down the hallway.

Here, you will pass by the RPI Radio station. Near the bottom, you'll see some glass doors, pass through them, and through another. You are now inside the tunnel that connects DCC and JEC.

Dining Halls

If you like background noise, the dining halls are by far the best place to do work. Come at odd times, find a table in a corner, and enjoy refreshments all afternoon.

There is semi-circular brick bench right outside of Sage Dining Hall. One person sit on one end of it, someone else sit on the other end. Then, try whispering. You should hear the person spookily well. It's a fun way to entertain yourself for 5 minutes.

Greene Building

On the second floor there is the Archie library. It's small, but usually very quiet and good if you want to nap or study in peace, even if you're not an architecture student yourself.

For non-architecture majors, the Greene building is an excellent shortcut when travelling from the DCC/freshman dorms to the Sage building. However, this is only possible during hours when it is open to all RPI students.

Ricketts

Get to class early. If not it's a pain to find a seat or get to one because the aisles are so small.

Sage

4th floor is empty after classes end (4 ish), large tables/lecture halls, usually empty, good study space. Or first floor is empty as well after 4/6-ish.

Avoid Sage 3510 at all costs. The desks are small to the point where they are unusable (roughly the size of your hand with fingers spread). The room is notorious for being unusably hot during wintertime. The only good news I have is that this room is unlikely to be used during the COVID outbreak, as it isn't set up well for social distancing.

The 5th floor/top floor of the Sage building has a huge and very cute student lounge that's great for studying and probably for napping though I haven't tried to myself.

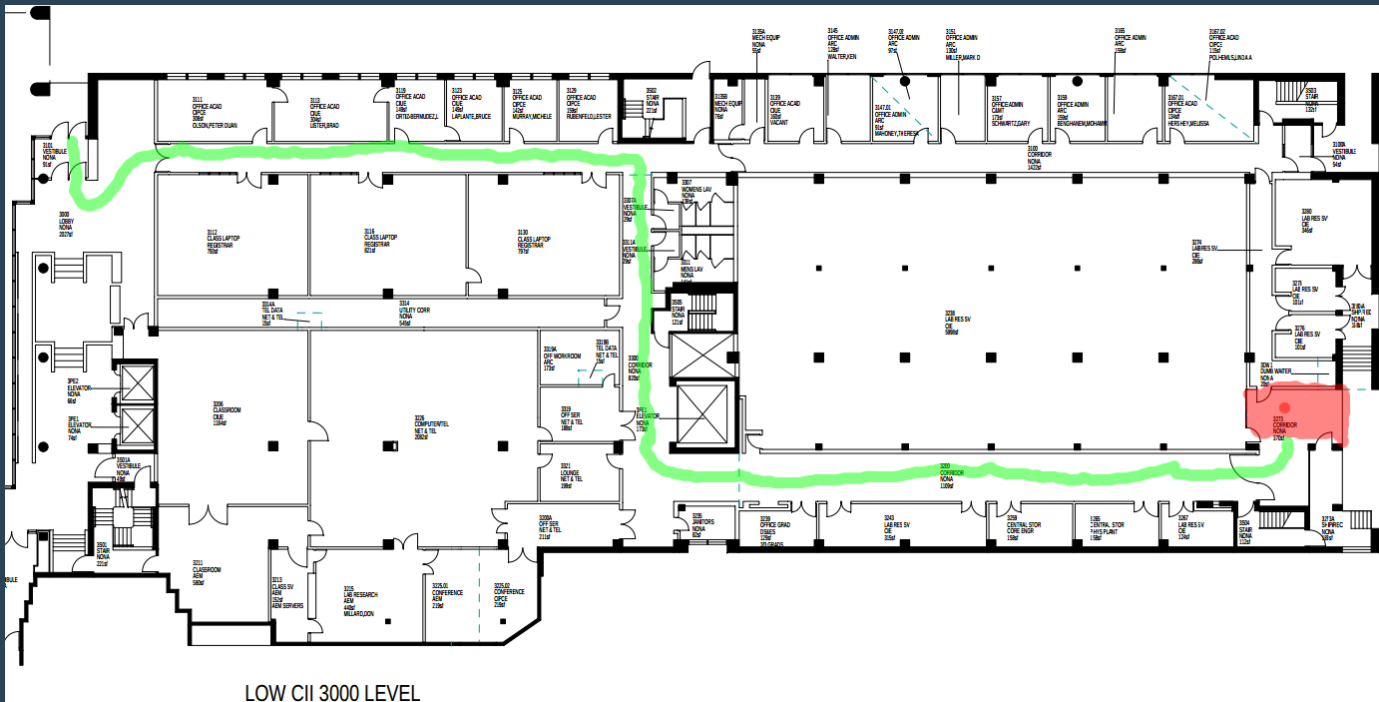
Highly recommend

Steam Tunnels

Going in the steam tunnels is not only dangerous, but you can and often will face expulsion if caught.

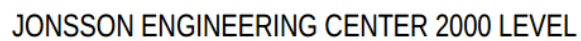
Tech Dumps

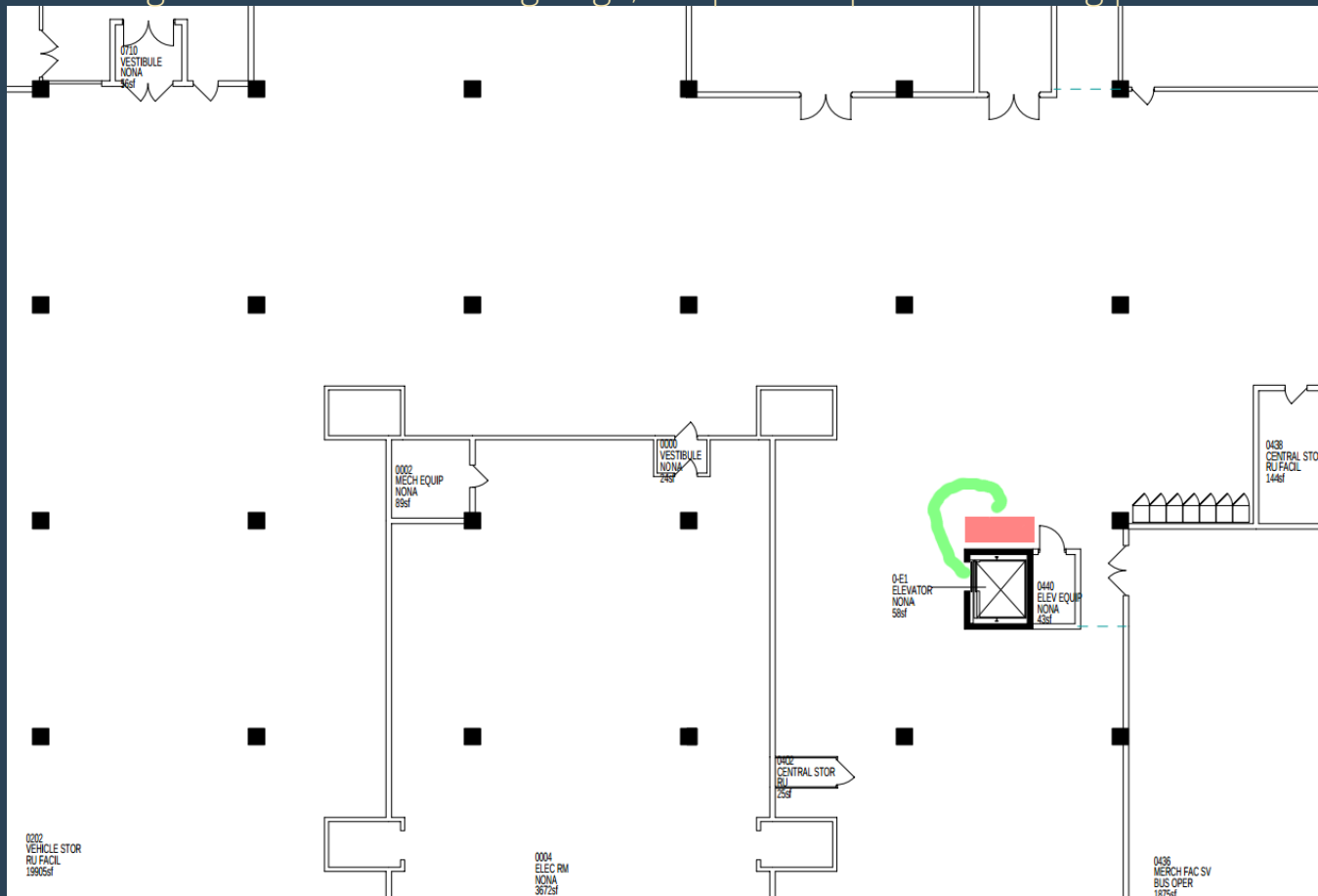
Low/CII Tech Dump: frequently used, lots of decades old equipment



Cogswell: Occasional gem, not used very often





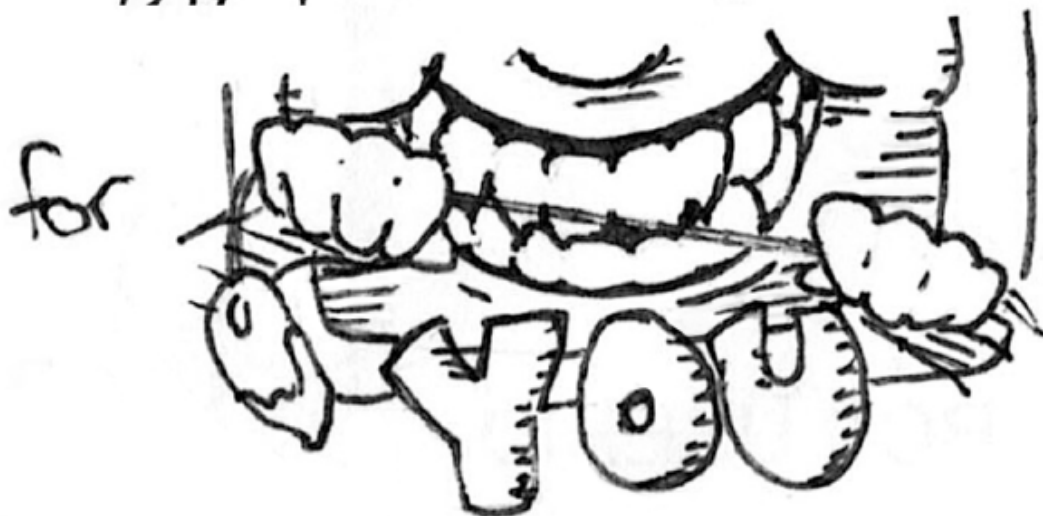
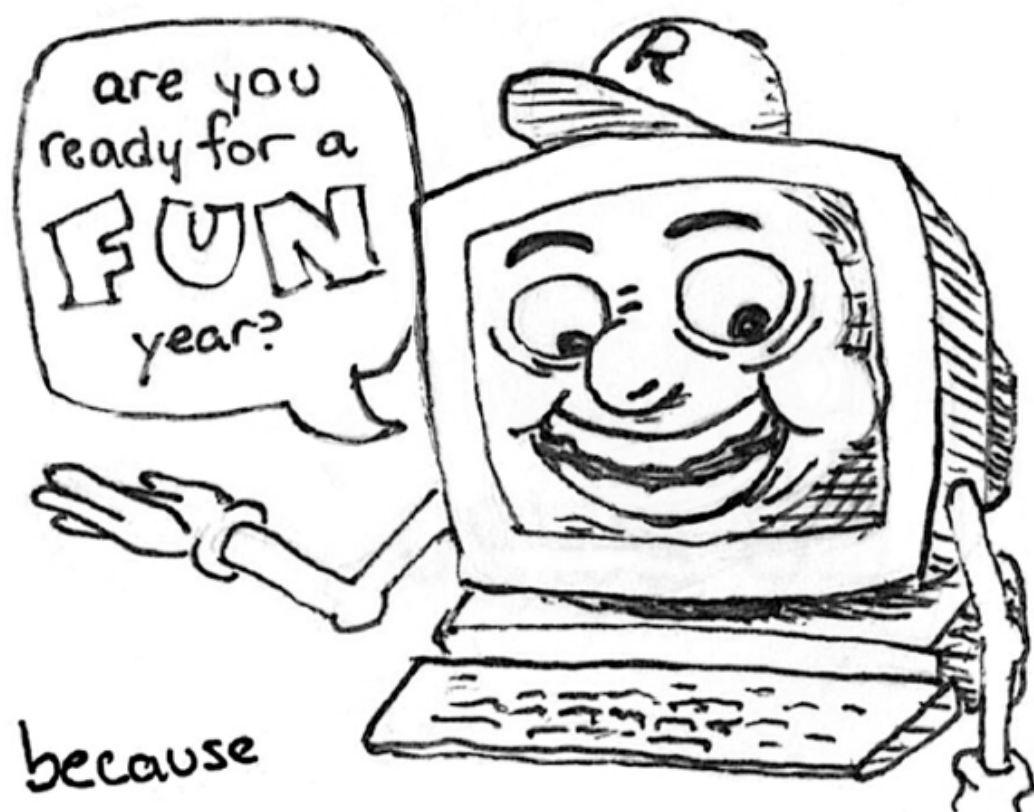


VCC

Walker Labs

West Hall (specifically West Hall Auditorium)

Avoid at all costs if possible.



Academic Advice

Academics at RPI are some of the most challenging you'll experience. Here's some advice from your upperclass peers.

Scheduling & Choosing your Classes

Do not always trust your friends or upperclassmen's opinions!!!! I had to learn this the hard way. Everyone has different learning styles and academic drive. While it is good to ask around about classes and professors before you take them, all opinions should be taken with a grain of salt. Many people may find classes super intuitive where others may struggle endlessly. This is just the nature of how school works. Find out what learning style works best for you (ex. long lectures with PPT, professor gives you printout of notes, preferring examples over theoretical lecture, homework difficulty, etc.) and ask about THAT rather than how hard a class is or whether a professor is good or other super vague, super subjective questions. Also, I would make sure the person you ask is at a similar academic level as you. If you're a 3.0 GPA student and you ask a student with a 3.9 GPA how difficult a class is, chances are your definitions of difficult are very different!

Register for more credits than you plan on taking, up to the full 21 if you can. Then go to the first or first few lectures for all of them. Then drop the ones you don't like for whatever reason. This is particularly good when determining which non-mandatory classes to take, and which professors you like.

For Undeclared Engineers: Take all the 1 credit "Intro to ____ engineering" classes. They're interesting looks into what each discipline actually does, and only 1 hour lecture and 20 minutes hw per week. Plus if you like the professor, you can approach them to ask about working in their research labs. Undergrad Research is a great way to boost your resume early while doing really interesting work.

Take as many independent studies as possible - they're usually easier than a traditional class so they give you a bit of a GPA buffer, and they allow you to dive deeper into the specific areas that interest you (plus they can look really good on a resume!)

Try to load up on classes in your first couple of semesters (Freshman & Sophomore Years) because the difficulty of classes ramp up significantly in Junior and Senior Year, especially in Engineering. Remember when professors would say that you need to spend like an X amount of hours per credit for each class? That may not apply to freshman and sophomore classes where you could get by doing less, but it becomes the reality in upper level courses. Taking 21 credits in freshman year will feel like taking 12 credits in Junior year. Also try to do your homework the day it's assigned or just relatively early to the due date so you have time to go to office hours or recitation to ask questions.

When making my schedule, I use YACS or QUACS (websites) to see all of the different possible schedules I can have. Then, I will get rid of any classes that are during the times that I don't like (for example, 8ams and 6pms). After narrowing that down, I will go into SIS and see the location of each section and get rid of any class that is in a faraway building (because I personally hate walking to West Hall, Pittsburgh, and Carnegie but other people might think otherwise). Also, try to take classes with your friends. It might help you actually go to class maybe, but at least you'll have someone to do homework with and ask questions. Also, try to plan your 4 year schedule too when scheduling classes to make sure what you're doing will keep you on track (in terms of pre-reqs and co-reqs and how some classes are fall/spring only)

The Earth Science department is a hidden gem here at RPI. All of the professors are fantastic, and since the department is so small there's lots of opportunities for undergraduate research. If you're interested in majoring in either Geology or Environmental Science, don't discount it just because there's a small number of students. Also, if you need a free science elective, this is the place to be! You can and are expected to learn a lot, but the professors do actually want to see you succeed.

Realize a lot of folks hate 8ams. Me included. But if there's a specific professor you want, sometimes the section open with seats is an 8am. They're usually way smaller too (25-40 people) so you can have a better more personal lecture as opposed to a 80+ person lecture.

If you are on the fence about being in engineering or not, start out in engineering. It is much easier to switch out than it is to switch in. This was a huge mistake I made. *Ce la vie!*

Making the most of classes & your time

Take notes, even if they are the most basic of points--we talked about this in class today, X means Y, etc. Keep them organized by class. Label, and keep all of them! Classes do not always build on the same subjects, so you might unexpectedly find yourself referencing old notes

I recommend getting two spiral notebooks per term. One contains notes, scratch work, etc., for Monday/Thursday classes, the other for Tuesday/Friday. Wednesday classes can tick in somewhere. Usually a single-subject spiral is enough for 3 classes. Also, get 3 folders. Split two like the notebooks, and carry lined and printer paper in the other. At the end of the term you might have a few handouts you want to keep, but usually you can reuse folders.

GO TO OFFICE HOURS!!!! Professors want you to succeed but they can't help you if you don't help yourself. Just looking at grades they can't distinguish people who are struggling versus people who just don't care/are taking the class P/NC. Also, forming good relationships with professors will help with letters of recommendation and potential research opportunities!

Use backtests to literally **RATIO** your exams.

It's a bit of old stuff, but www.rpistudygroup.org has some old course homeworks, labs, and tests.

As much as it might suck to hear, your high school gpa doesnt matter anymore. You start completely anew in college and it doesnt matter what your gpa or SAT was. I had an incredibly high gpa in high school and really struggled my first year, especially second semester. You need to let go of any past ideas of yourself and start fresh. Do not be afraid to ask for help. Do not be afraid to admit you dont know something. Its okay. I PROMISE! As someone who was terrified of asking for help their whole life in fear of looking dumb, it only hurts you in the end. It doesnt come down to intelligence; it comes down to efficiency. Don't study hard, study efficiently. Also, on a related note, dont burn yourself out. Still make time for your friends, favorite shows, parties, or even taking lone walks around campus. Don't treat yourself badly in an effort to "focus more" on academics, athletics, relationships, etc.

SIT IN THE FRONT ROW (unless room is organized so your neck would get destroyed looking up). I wrote like 15 tips but this one takes the cake. Also turn your phone off in class. It's an attention, enjoyment, performance, and overall attitude hack of unimaginable power.

Do scratch problems of all your homework before writing up a final neat copy. Scribble everywhere and mess around and then once you have the path figured out write the neat copy. Why is this effective? *It saves you from having to write super carefully on your live submission copy when you're still exploring possible dead ends and methods!* It will LITERALLY halve the time it takes to do homework. Truly unbelievable.

If you come from a high school with smaller classes, don't worry about 100+ person classes being "different". Usually, only people in the first 3 rows are actually engaged with the class and constitute the pool of people that might actually ask questions. The "effective class size" is much, much lower than the number of people in the class. Classes will (in most cases) have just as many questions asked as in high school! There's this myth of not being able to ask questions and "lecture" being a one-way conversation. That's totally not the case. My average class size was 25 in high school and I was super worried about this, and it was all for no reason.

There will be lots of other advice in this guide about how HARD RPI is: how difficult the exams are, how you were valedictorian but you're going to die in every class now because you were the "pampered student who never had to study" so prepare your mind to fail. ALTHOUGH there is some reason for this statement, in that there ARE valedictorians etc. who didn't bother reviewing at all for tests, who did bare minimum work. BUT many of you aren't like that. It's very tough to evaluate yourself since there aren't many benchmarks in high school for comparison of if you put "enough" effort in, and this "warning" really serves to make everyone discount themselves no matter what. What I will say is that any student who did well in high school with HONEST EFFORT and interest/involvement in their STEM classes will make out JUST FINE! Chances are if you're feeling like "but I really feel like I did do my best but now I'm not sure..." you are putting forth the effort and will continue to EXCEL!

A possible benchmark for difficulty/time (since I believe the high perceived difficulty leads to lots of unnecessary self-doubt and stress): I went to a public high school, nothing special. Senior year 3-4 APs (Stats, Physics C, Spanish, Calc BC) and a general level English class. I felt that my time commitment and difficulty level for 4 classes at RPI (Quantum Phys, Diffeq, Calc III, Chinese) was ABOUT EQUAL! RPI is not nearly as nuts as it sounds! Hopefully this observation of **relative** difficulty should translate decently well to other people who have taken the same AP classes.

Homeworks are all GRADED for ACCURACY if you are handing them in. That was a big surprise for me. BUT again, you'll find it isn't nearly as big of a deal as it sounds.

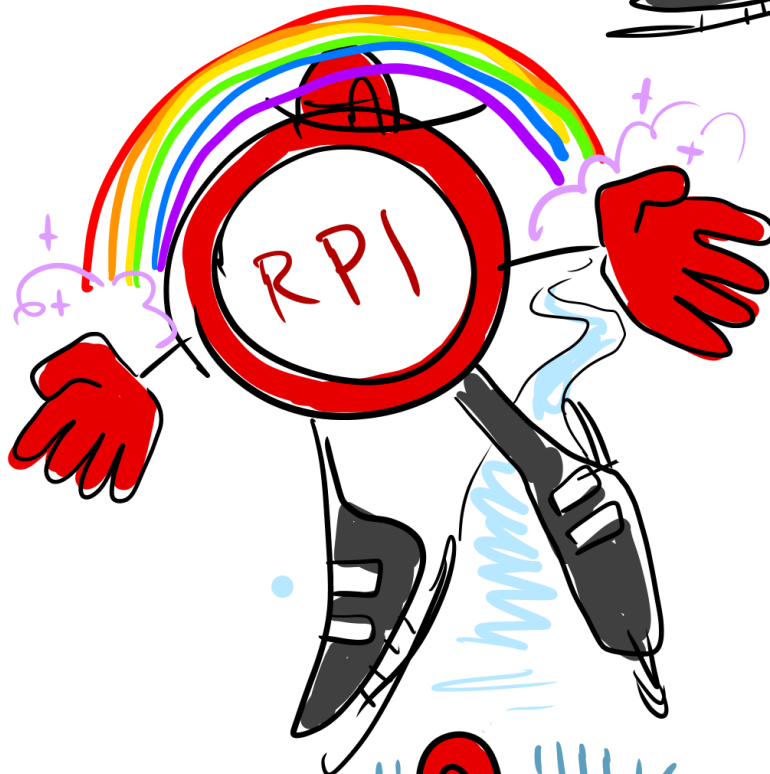
RPI is challenging. I know you might go into college with 4-5 classes on your plate and think you'll have more than enough time for anything compared to high school where you might've taken more classes. Although that may be true for some, for the most part, those courses you take usually require a large investment of your time. It's okay to have fun and take breaks, but you must learn how to manage your time in order to get everything you need to done. I highly recommend making a google calendar with all of your classes and extracurriculars. One of the best decisions I made as a freshman was making one. Also, go to office hours. Always.

Undergrad Research

Don't ignore all of those emails about undergraduate research! Research looks great on your resume and can help you get some real world experience in your major. Plus, research will give you credit hours or you can get paid for it, so if you have the time reply to those emails!

My recommendation for research is to approach professors for independent studies if no labs are doing what you're interested in. At least in my experience, professors are super eager to help.

About URPs (Undergraduate Research Projects). If you are interested in grad school, it's a great idea to start looking into doing research early on. As a preface, you should build relationships with your professors by going to their office hours (both to keep up with their class, and to chat) from your first semester if possible. Once you have these relationships with professors you can start talking about your research interests, which skills you have or are working on, and ask about any professor looking for students to do URPs. They are usually available for credit (and a few credits per semester). Your first URP doesn't have to be in your dream field, or even in your same department. I've heard of people whose first URP included being tech support, or cleaning out water tanks, but that's a great way to get your foot in the door. When you join a URP I would highly suggest working with the grad students (and even the professor) to learn about the specific project/field you're working on, regardless of whether you've taken coursework in that area. It's okay if after a semester or two, you switch groups/professors/departments for your URP too! This will really help cement good relationships with professors with potential for really strong letters of recommendation for your grad school applications, and hopefully make you even more interested in your field of study.



Greek Life

Greek Life at RPI can seem daunting, and there is a lot of confusion around it. Here are some tips from other students to stay safe and have fun.

Joining Greek Life & Rushing

Greek life is a great option for many students, each fraternity and sorority kind of has its own vibe, and you don't have to be a "partier" to join. I have a friend in a fraternity who doesn't partake in drinking at all, and still gets a lot about having a brotherhood. The RPI Greek community is accepting of students of all identities, my sorority has a few nonbinary members and some Greek orgs have trans members. It definitely doesn't hurt to go to a few rush events for the free food (sorority recruitment is a bit more of a process), and who knows, you might find some people you really get on with well.

As an incoming freshman last year I never thought of myself as the type for Greek life. When meet the Greeks and rush came around in the spring semester my friends had to drag me to events just so I could learn about it. I ended up actually enjoying myself a lot and joining a fraternity. All this is to say that as a freshman try to do all the Greek life activities and rush events possible, you never know what you might end up liking. Plus many across campus will tell you that Greek life is pretty much the only way to have a constant social life while at RPI, so if that sounds like something for you make sure to rush.

Join Greek Life! It's such a great opportunity to become part of a bigger group on campus. You'll meet some of your closest friends, and even after college, you'll have a network of alumni and other members who you can connect with. You'll have access to school back-work, even if it's not from your organization, being part of Greek Life will give you access to other organizations' back-work. You'll be on the Greek List for parties on campus. This may look very different because of COVID but it's still a great way to get social and meet more people on campus

Whether or not you think you want to be in Greek Life go to rush events. They're just fun events that everyone is welcome to. You can meet great people, get free food, and have a good time for just showing up. Nobody is gonna kick you out if you say you aren't interested in joining, we love it when students come to our events, the more the merrier. Greeks on campus have tons of friends outside of the Greek Community and we love reaching out to clubs to co-host events.

If you are interested in joining, be active during recruitment (known as rush), and rush more than one Frat. For Freshmen, you can't join until your second semester but still go to a lot of events and meet people. Keep up contact with the brothers even outside of formal recruitment to show you're truly interested. All houses are unique and have a lot to offer. Find the one that you're comfortable with.

Don't take it personally if you don't get a bid to the house you like either. If it doesn't work out with one house, nothing is stopping you from joining another. Also stay in touch with the friends you've made, just because you aren't a member doesn't mean you can't be friends with brothers.

Most if not all houses at RPI practice values-based recruitment; we want members that share our values and sometimes that just doesn't line up no hard feelings. Beyond that, keep your grades up and stay involved in other clubs or sports. A lot of houses have GPA requirements and some even require you to be in other clubs. All houses want well-rounded individuals. If you keep this in mind you should have no trouble finding the Fraternity that suits you.

I am affiliated with a Greek organization and it is probably the best decision I've made at RPI. Almost everyone in my house did not expect to go Greek when they entered college, and you probably don't think you will either. Even if it doesn't seem like your scene, give it a chance. There's a couple cool houses that neither haze nor party all the time, but will provide you with the academic and interpersonal support you need to be a successful student.

Parties (we won't pretend they don't exist)

If you are a woman, do not go to Frat parties alone! This is the case at any college, but RPI is not great at sexual assault cases. It is not unlikely that, in the case of a sexual assault, the school will not help you. Stick together at parties! Use a buddy system! Take this shit seriously!!!!!!

For parties, I honestly found it was usually more fun and safe to drink with several friends in our dorm than go out to overcrowded parties. Be careful of older students who could take advantage of you, me and my friends were once invited by an acquaintance to an off-campus apartment frat party, and later found out he was told to "Invite all the slutty freshmen you know". I'd generally advise to go to a party with several other people you know, all leave at the same time, and possibly have somebody stay sober to look out for all of you. I'd also advise getting a sober ride from a frat brother, instead of walking home.

If RSE ever becomes unbanned, it has never been a safe place for people, especially women and queer folks, and has a history of date rape unfortunately. Avoid going there.

The best way to find Greek parties is to be friends with a Greek person. They're very on the down low nowadays, but they 100% still exist. Also, a shit ton of other clubs have parties, not just the Greeks. If you stay committed to any number of groups on campus, you are most likely going to eventually start going to their parties.

Books

Books can be an important part of any class, but don't go spending hundreds of dollars on them just yet...

Don't buy books early

Never buy textbooks before the start of class unless your professor has explicitly told you to. Look for books on Free & For Sale, and you can save a lot of money. The second semester of my freshman year I took a few classes most people usually take their first semester (IEA, Chem 1), and I got all of my textbooks for free from friends who didn't want to go through the hassle of selling them. I ended up making \$40 on my books that semester when I sold them.

Most books can be downloaded for free online

Websites such as Library Genesis, ZLibrary (<https://b-ok.cc/s/>), and SciHub have tons of textbooks in the form of a PDF. If you don't find the book you're looking for online, ask around! There are several people on campus with 10+ GB of textbooks. The only caveat is that some classes will require you to use software which can only be accessed via a code found in the book. In this case you're most likely going to have to buy the book, but whatever you do avoid the bookstore as much as possible!! It's a total scam.

Clubs

Clubs are a great way to spend free time, and get involved on campus. Here is some club info from other students, to get you started!

UPAC Cinema

We're the go-to movie theater on campus. We usually sell cheap tickets for a variety of different ones, from blockbusters to foreign films. We also sell concessions as well at prices cheaper than school prices. There are several member requirements that will have to be adjusted, but as a member, you're also allowed to watch the movie for free as security. During the showing, you can do whatever you want, from work to playing games with other members. We're practically a board game club at this point. As a member, there are also discounts on concessions as well. Another plus is free pizza if you help out during set up for the night's showings. We also have paid job positions available as projectionists. Overall we're a group of chill people that like to hang out with one another. We probably won't be operating in-person for the semester so much of this isn't applicable however, I hope those who express interest in the club reach out to be added to our discord.

Foreign Language Club

Foreign Language Club (FLC) is a great place to practice speaking and reading in a foreign language with others. Our largest groups include Japanese, French, Spanish and German. We're also glad to help students who are still learning/perfecting their English. Meetings typically consist of conversing in a foreign language (usually in groups of about 3 or more people who are learning the same language), reading books aloud, trying to translate media into or from a foreign language (such as manga or newspapers), learning grammar, as well as watching movies and cooking/eating foreign foods.

If you're not able to join us in person this semester, you can join us online on our Discord server! : <https://discord.gg/vfhfHHU>

RPI Crew Club

RPI Crew Club is RPI's rowing team!

If you're looking for a great, full-body workout (it's not just about your arms!), rowing is a great sport that is not only physically challenging, but also requires focus and technical skill. Each of our boats holds 4 or 8 rowers, and we always appreciate new members, no matter your skill level!

If you're not a fan of the physical side of rowing, we can also teach you how to be a coxswain. The job of the coxswain is to steer the rowing boats (shells), as well as to lead drills, take charge of boat safety, and most importantly, strategize during races and motivate the crew. Coxing is a great way to improve your team leadership skills, and we are also glad to teach any new members who are interested in becoming coxswains.

Although we are not yet sure if we will be able to hold practices this semester, we typically hold water (rowing) practices from 5:00 to 7:00 P.M. on the Hudson River for novices, and in the A.M. for varsity. We also do erging practices (rowing machine practices) in the '87 Gym. You do not need to bring any equipment apart from athletic clothes and a waterbottle, since we have everything in our boathouse. Every semester, we also participate in several races, such as the Head of the Charles, and the Head of the Fish.

If you're interested in joining us, keep an eye out for the RPI Crew Club NRB activity (TBD). Visit us at crew.union.rpi.edu or for more information, email us at crew-membership@union.lists.rpi.edu. Hope we see you around!

Pep Band

Pep Band is a completely casual, show when you want to show, tradition that plays contemporary songs at sporting, campus, and other events! If you play an instrument but don't want the commitment of taking symphonic band as an elective, Pep Band is for you!

RCOS

If you're a cs major I highly recommend joining RCOS. You can work on a lot of cool projects that students and staff actually use (you don't need to have experience with the language/tech stack the project is coded in before joining). It's also amazing for your resume. Email professor turner about joining because they weren't at the activity fair when I was a freshman.

RPI Players

One of the bit criticisms you'll see of this school is the supposed lack of a social life. This criticism is really not true unless you don't join clubs and get to know the people in them - so if you're stressed out after reading through the sub and whatnot, it's ok! Take a breath. You'll be fine as long as you take some initiative. I can't speak for all clubs, but I imagine it is similar across the board. I will however do some shameless promotion of my favorite club, the RPI Players!

Engineers Without Borders

EWB is a really good way to get professional experience. Despite the name, all majors are welcome and encouraged to join. You do not have to pay for EWB-related travel, and can get the opportunity to go to places like Panama or Nicaragua. Additionally, they recently expanded their e-board so there are tons of leadership opportunities that are available soon. These leadership opportunities are fun and look fantastic on a resume.

Dungeons and Dragons Club

If you want to play D&D but haven't been able to find people to play with, the D&D club is a great place to find a group. The club is running online during the pandemic. During the year, events are run regularly, ranging from things like workshops to one-shots. The online D&D Club community is very active, with over 100 people in the discord server. Even if you don't regularly play D&D, if you're interested in TTRPGs at all the community is a fun thing to be a part of.

Habitat for Humanity

HFH is in a strange spot right now, and we don't know exactly how active we can be at the moment due to COVID-19. However, it's worth joining if you get the chance. You can be involved in things like fundraising, attending builds, and volunteering at a Habitat ReStore. Join and make a positive impact in your community!

GZ Basement

GZ Basement shows are sick as fuck. A club for local music and DIY shows.

Professors

Professors can really make or break a class. After all, they're the ones presenting you material, and with whom your spending a lot of time. Wouldn't you like to hear a bit more about them, from other students? You're in luck!

In General

GOOGLE YOUR PROFESSORS. You can find backwork and usually reviews on pretty much anyone at this school, or if they taught somewhere else.

Christian Wetzel

Do not take physics 1 with Christian Wetzel. He is a very condescending professor and does not care whether you fail or not. He is also very hard to get help from even if you go to office hours, go to your grad TA!

Dan Lyles

He's a good dude, but don't take him for PD2. Only professor I've really regretted taking here.

David Schmidt

Hands down best calculus professor I've ever had. While I would not recommend people who need theoretical understanding of mathematics (math majors, physics majors, etc.), if you're an engineer or computer science, there's no better professor to get the fundamental application down.

Gina Kucinski

Great calc professor, I'm sad her multi class didn't fit in my schedule for next semester because I'd love to have her again. She can be a bit mean and be super hard pressed about everyone following her rules especially if you're in her calc 1 class, but she's still approachable and does want her students to succeed. Her tests are often like the textbook homework she assigns (she assigns Web Assign which is directly put into your grade and textbook homework which isn't actually checked unless you're in calc 1 and have a mentor) so she means it when she says if you want to succeed in her class, do the textbook homework.

Gina Kucinski

Professor for Calculus I & II. She uploads all of her notes online, but attending her lectures, while not mandatory, is incredibly helpful. She is by far the best professor I've had at RPI in terms of teaching the material and being helpful overall. She doesn't allow any use of technology in her lectures, so have a notebook ready for her classes.

John Tichy

Super great engineering dynamics professor. Easy to understand, and truly wants you to learn. He will spend countless hours in office hours helping you understand. If you put in the work, it'll pay off. Also former rock star (not joking).

Malik Magdon-Ismail

Very energetic and compelling lecturer when I took FOCS (CSCI 2200) with him. However, the examples he used in class were unnecessarily sexist (and sometimes sexual, yikes). For that class' office hours you mostly had contact with TAs and undergrad mentors, but I would personally hesitate to take a class where I would have office hours with him.

Rahmi Ozisik

Genuinely one of the best professors I've ever had. He's very clear, but also if you don't understand, he's willing to work with you. You'll get the grade you deserve, and he'll help try to get you above passing to get through the class if you put the effort into learning.

Sylvain Payen

While he's a good professor in more advanced classes, I'd try to avoid him in early game design classes. Instead, ideally, try to get Jim Malazita for Intro to Game Design.

Anxiety

RPI is a difficult school, we won't pretend it's not. Managing your anxiety can be paramount to success here and yet is one of the hardest things to do. Here's some advice from fellow students who have gone through the same.

Avoiding anxiety in general

Organization helps a lot. Putting your assignments on a Google Calendar can be really helpful for reminders and deadlines. Just go through and do them all the first week when there's no real homework. It's a game changer I didn't learn until my second year.

Take walks, breathe, talk to other people, go to club events and meetings, just meet people and make friends (easier said than done), go to office hours and ALAC (they're extremely helpful)

Removing myself from my current mind state is super important. Personally I live to be by myself in a room for a few hours and play music. It helps me forget about the world around me by emerging myself into a completely different world.

Take what you see on the subreddit with a grain of salt. People come here to vent, and you are only seeing the angriest side of the angriest people. Most people at RPI (at least people who I know) are not as unhappy as the subreddit makes it seem like we are.

If you're taking Data Structures (or any notoriously hard class), it's more worth it to SLEEP than to pull all-nighters doing the homework. It's not like you're going to produce good work from 3-7 AM anyway.

Find a group of friends that you can vent with/to (they don't even have to be in the same major). Since most of the majors at RPI go through their own version of pain and suffering, chances are they'll sympathize :)

I've got it, how do I manage it?

I try to maintain my physical well-being as much as possible (e.g. semi-regular sleep schedule, eating fruits/vegetables daily, some form of moderate exercise every day) because it has a direct impact on my mental health. Having a regular schedule and making both time and space to study keeps me accountable (Hello, ADHD), and it reduces the likelihood of letting assignments slide and subsequently falling into that spiral of guilt that makes it harder to do other work. I also block out time each week for hanging out with friends in person: our Sunday night board game time motivates me to get things out of the way earlier in the day/weekend so I can be there without distractions. I'm honest with my friends when things are bothering me, and I also give myself the space to do so for those times when all you want to do is cry. The Health Center offers free counseling, and I encourage others to give it a chance. Think of counselors like hiring any other professional to handle something you're struggling with on your own: if the sink still leaks after trying everything else, it's time to find a plumber.

Stress management for me was never too difficult. I'm not a very emotional person to begin with, and my high school was fairly rigorous. But for me, good ways to relieve stress are to find some time a few days per week to go to the gym. Exercise can really help take your mind off school or other things you're stressed about. You can also try clubs, cooking, etc

Make sure you find a really good outlet for your anxiety and try to use it at least 3x a week. For example, my freshman and sophomore years, my club was my outlet for school anxiety. My club allowed me to work on really cool projects and use my engineering skills in ways I wasn't getting to use in the classroom yet when academics got very grueling. After I came back from co-op and didn't have enough time for my club, I started going to the gym 3-4x a week to unwind and get my heart rate up. It's really important to take time to re-center yourself. Your homework, your studying, etc. will get done but you have to make time for yourself, too.

Get a mood and habit tracker app. It helps develop a sense of normalcy and routine. Go to the counseling center if you can, or reach out to outside resources if you don't trust the school. Admin sucks but there's a bit of a community in that all rpi students recognize life will suck really bad at some points, but so many people yearn to make connections. there is something and someone for everyone, even if it is just an outlet to vent. There are so many untapped resources out of the counseling center, do reach out to the office and they will be happy to help you. Continue therapy please please please if you already do! and if you want to explore medications this is a good place, there will be an in house psychiatrist helping you find what is right for you.

Build a support network with your friends, check up on them and ask them how they are doing. Don't compare yourself to others and move at your own pace. Bad grades don't mean your worthless or dumb. Not getting an internship, or research doesn't mean your any less valuable to people around you. Talk to a counselor even if you think things are good, they are free at RPI and a venting session is nice every once in awhile. Don't vent on your friends, because they may also be dealing with issues. Get a hobby that you can put free time into, so even when you are procrastinating or having a personal day, you can feel like you've been productive. Also, exercise. Even if its 30 minutes of running or 3 hours of playing soccer, exercise can lift your spirits. Never use alcohol as a means to escape your problems or when you have a bad day. It may feel good at the time, but it will cause you problems down the road. Lastly, explore the area. Keeping your head down all the time doing research or taking classes will burn you out. Take time for yourself and visit a different town or go hiking. Doing these things has gotten me through 4 years of graduate school while living alone with no family nearby.

Honestly I developed a lot of anxiety in college that I didn't know I had before. The best way for me to handle it is to spend time with friends doing homework even if we're all working on different classes. It can be isolating grinding out 5 hours of hw, but when you're with other people it's motivating and just comforting. Another thing to try and do is get used to planning when you need to get things done. When the gym is open I would try to build my hw schedule around going to the gym and the time it took after to freshen up/eat. The gym was a great way for me to burn off any anger or stress. Being able to plan when I was going to do hw also gave me an idea of when I could give myself breaks and go hang out with friends. I know planning isn't fun, but even just putting what you need to do today on a sticky note can really help

Getting help at RPI and in the surrounding area

If you have CDPHP (the insurance you get through RPI), you can access mental health services through the Doctor on Demand app. With the standard RPI insurance the rates for counseling were like \$5 per session when I used them, and the wait time to see a mental health practitioner was much shorter than the wait times at the RPI Counseling Center.

If you have an anxiety disorder or any other mental health concerns, the counseling center is helpful. You can ask to change therapists until you find one you click with. I think this is very important. General tips for managing anxiety is to find a balance between work and play. Do basic self care such as eating and sleeping regularly. Finding a club or hobby to give yourself breaks from school is important. My biggest advice is using the resources on campus (counseling center, ALAC, office of student success,) to get help in the areas of your life causing stress and anxiety.

Although therapy is free at RPI, consider getting an outside therapist who is not affiliated with the school. RPI therapists are not looking out for you as much as they are looking out for RPI. Things like revealing you're struggling with topics like self harm, depression, suicidal ideation, or even just eating can get you in trouble, where as if you told an outside counselor this, they won't rat you out or try to get you to take an academic leave.

If you're in need of any mental health help, honestly take Samaritan. RPI's Mental Health Center can be painstakingly slow to get you in the system and to a prescribing psych if you need one ASAP. Or if you can arrange a way to somehow keep in touch with your old therapist and/or psychiatrist. They say they use the "most recent research" but when I got told to 'just deal with it 4head' that kinda killed my vibe of ever going back. So yeah-- stick with your old therapist/psychiatrist if you can, or go to Samaritan, they're very helpful there I hear.

Avoid Keith, he's homophobic and invalidating, with some very outdated views. The rest of the RPI counselling staff is wonderful though.

Some encouragement

Don't stress about doing poorly on an exam; chances are the entire class are struggling too. The professors are understanding and most will make an adjustment to their grading percentages based on how the semester goes. It will be the first time for many that do poorly on an exam or project, but know your self worth; if you are signed up for a class then you are clearly smart enough to pass the class. Many people have said that GPA doesn't matter, and they are both wrong and right. Most employers use GPA to narrow down their selections, but if you are highly involved in a lot of clubs and prove your worth in interviews at company meet and greets then you will have a much better chance at getting a job/ internship than someone with a 3.3+ that doesn't do anything to show their interests.