MEMORANDUM

To: The Rensselaer Community
From: Shirley Ann Jackson, Ph.D., President
       Professor of Physics, Applied Physics, and Astronomy
       Professor of Engineering Sciences
Date: September 14, 2015
Re: Resilience at Rensselaer: Annual Community Theme

I am pleased to announce an exciting new initiative at Rensselaer: Each academic year, beginning this year, we will select a theme for the entire Rensselaer community to explore together.

This academic year, we begin with the theme of “resilience.” During the President’s Commencement Colloquy last May, I invited our four honorands to engage in a discussion about “Resilient Leadership for a Resilient World.” The complexity of the challenges the world faces today requires new models of collaboration – across disciplines, sectors, and geographic regions. In an increasingly inter-connected world, where intersecting vulnerabilities can lead to cascading consequences, resilience – in our infrastructure, our institutions, our civic and personal lives, and in our leaders – is more important than ever.

As we enter the Fall 2015 semester, we are launching a series of programs, courses, and events that will help us to identify the ways in which all of us can build such resilience into our lives, into the physical world that surrounds us, and into our social structures.

Faculty in each of the schools will be exploring the topic of resilience, its application within their disciplines, and its relevance across interdisciplinary boundaries. Student Life programs will help our students to investigate the meaning of resilience as an individual, as a member of a team, and as a leader. Through workshops, lectures, concerts, projects, and guided discussions, we will engage the entire Rensselaer community in a collaborative exploration.

To begin, we have chosen the book Authentic Happiness by Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D., as a common read for the academic year. This book, which we have provided to each first-year student, is accompanied by a website hosted by the University of Pennsylvania: https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/.

We soon will be announcing a number of exciting events around the topic of resilience, both on and off of the campus. We hope that you will join a lively and inspiring exchange, and help us build a new – and hopefully – long-standing, Rensselaer tradition, as we continue to ask: why not change the world?