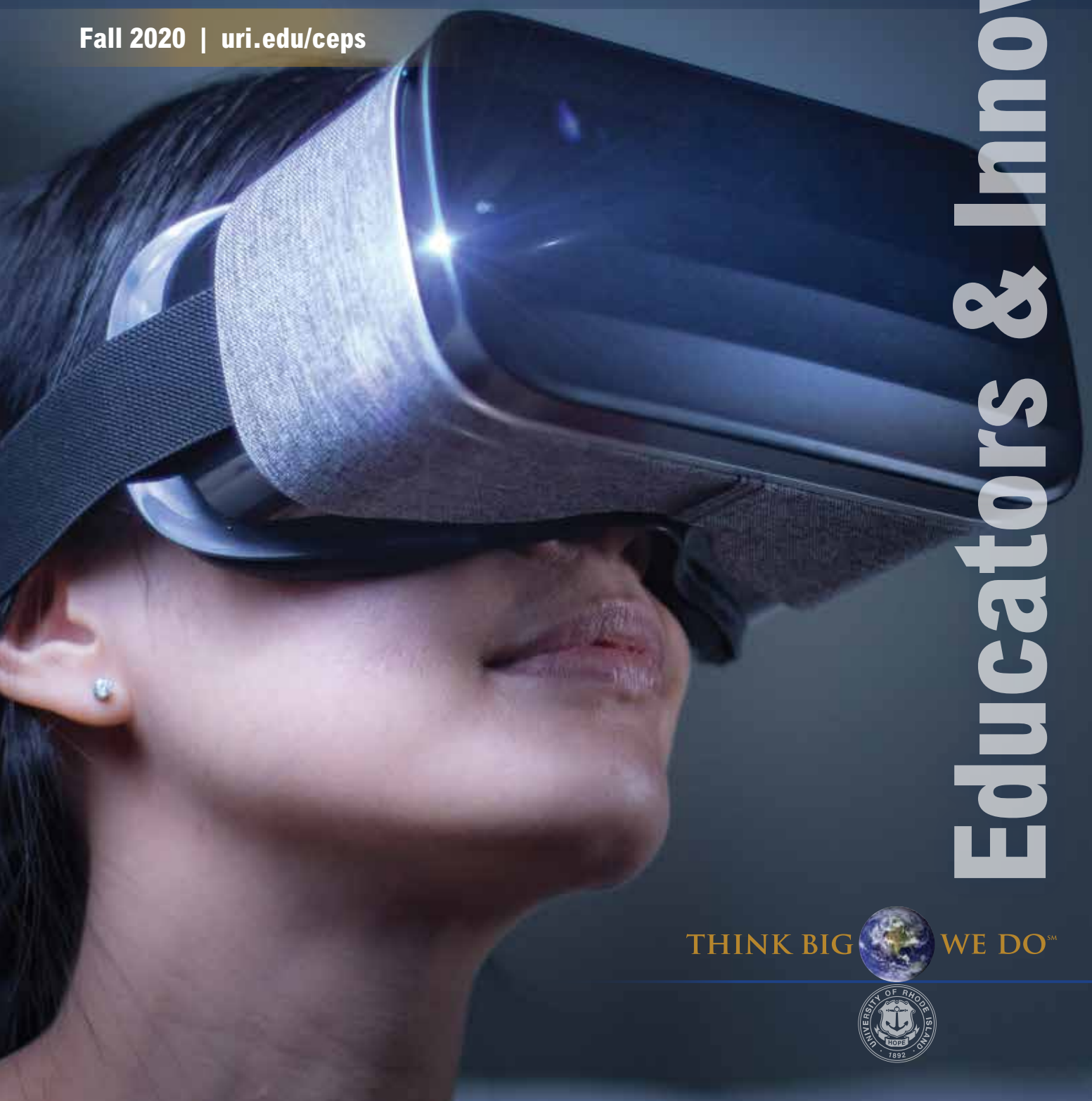


THE  
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Alan Shawn Feinstein College of  
Education and Professional Studies

Fall 2020 | [uri.edu/ceps](http://uri.edu/ceps)

Educators & Innovators



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# Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies

This newsletter features the latest news, feature stories, and new faculty for the Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies.

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## The Two Americas

*Inspired from Martin L. King Jr. (April 1968)*

BY R. ANTHONY ROLLE, DEAN  
ALAN SHAWN FEINSTEIN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

*Dean's message to graduates at the virtual recognition ceremony in May 2020*

The COVID-19 response in the United States has highlighted an often suppressed—and distressing—discussion: There are two Americas. One America is beautiful, where people have the milk of prosperity and the honey of opportunity flowing before them. This America is home for millions of people who have food and health care for their bodies, as well as cultural and educational necessities for their minds; and, they can exercise freedom and human dignity to lift their spirits. In this America, children grow up in the sunlight of a hopeful future.

But, there is another America. This other America has an ugliness about it that transforms the buoyancy of a hopeful future into the fatigue of despair. In this other America, millions of people are forced to live in distressing housing conditions where they do not have the privilege of having wall-to-wall carpeting, and often end up with wall-to-wall struggles and disappointments. In this other America, many young people are deprived of an opportunity to get an equitable and adequate education. Every year, thousands finish high school reading only at a ninth-grade level or below. Not because they're dumb, not because they don't have native intelligence, but because schools are inadequate, overcrowded, devoid of quality, and segregated.

Fortunately, as graduates of the Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies, you understand that the destinies of our two Americas are intertwined, and that somehow, we must learn to live together intelligently, or we're all going to perish together as fools. Whether we like it or not, we are inherently tied together, culturally, educationally, and otherwise. Our languages, our music, our material prosperity, and even our food, are an amalgam of multiple countries and cultures. In essence, two separate paths will not lead to opportunities for economic and political prosperity for all people.

Graduates, it may seem unfair, but the weights and pressures of previous generations now are yours. You must get your families, neighbors, and communities to see that we all need each other—regardless of which America you live in. Somehow, you must help people understand that in this pluralistic, interrelated society, we are all connected into a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. The power of equitable and adequate educational opportunity must be made available to all. And, this charge is also now yours.

However difficult it is during this COVID-19 pandemic, however difficult it is to continue to live with uncertainty, however difficult it is to live amid the constant hurt of injustice, I still believe that you, Feinstein graduates can and must change the world.

Congratulations Class of 2020—we are expecting great things from you.

Best wishes,

R. Anthony Rolle  
Dean, URI Alan Shawn Feinstein College of  
Education and Professional Studies



## URI Named a Top Teacher Prep Program

*Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies Chosen for Strong Classroom Management Training*

URI's Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies' undergraduate and graduate elementary teacher preparation programs have been named among the top in the country by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), a nonpartisan, not-for-profit research and policy organization, for strong training in classroom management strategies.

URI's undergraduate and graduate programs are among only 14 percent of elementary programs that earned an "A" rating, and serve models of excellence for others.

"URI's School of Education faculty work tirelessly to develop programs that best prepare future teachers for the classroom. Across the nation, school leaders consistently ask that teacher candidates arrive with exceptional classroom management skills, and it is a testament to our faculty that they have been recognized for providing just that," said Danielle Dennis, director of URI's School of Education.

Dean R. Anthony Rolle added: "All aspects of faculty life—conducting robust research, high-quality instruction, and state and national service to their disciplines—have come together to ensure that the

**"URI's School of Education faculty work tirelessly to develop programs that best prepare future teachers for the classroom."**

— R. Anthony Rolle, dean

School of Education continues to prepare teaching candidates extremely well."

Top-performing programs are recognized for requiring their aspiring elementary teachers to demonstrate—during student teaching, residency, or equivalent clinical practice—their ability to implement all five classroom strategies, which are:

- Establish rules and routines that set expectations for behavior.
- Maximize learning time by managing time, class materials, and the physical setup of the classroom, and by promoting student engagement.

- Reinforce positive behavior by using specific, meaningful praise and other forms of positive reinforcement.
- Redirect off-task behavior through unobtrusive means that do not interrupt instruction and that prevent and manage such behavior.
- Address serious misbehavior with consistent, respectful, and appropriate consequences.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped much of what happens in schools this year, including classroom management training for aspiring teachers. Several essential classroom management strategies can't simply be converted to a remote teaching environment, and many states and teacher preparation programs have moved their clinical practice experiences online or abbreviated them limiting opportunities to practice. However, the basic principles of quality classroom management still stand in spite of COVID and remain critical to the success of aspiring teachers in their future careers. ❖

*The full NCTQ summary of findings can be viewed at [www.nctq.org/2020TPRPractice](http://www.nctq.org/2020TPRPractice).*

# Lessons Learned from ‘The Cat in the Hat’

URI Education Professor’s Lifelong Odyssey of Teaching, Learning

BY DAVE LAVALLEE

Imagine learning from a University of Rhode Island professor who is friends with the Cat in the Hat, Bert and Ernie, and Oscar the Grouch.

URI students majoring in education and hundreds of teachers from school districts around the state don’t have to imagine such a thing at all. That’s because Associate Professor of Education Sara Sweetman, Ph.D. ’13, has been working closely with these TV stars and the talent behind them for more than a decade as a consultant to children’s educational media companies.

Since she arrived at URI in 2007 as a teacher-in-residence with the URI School of Education’s Guiding Education in Math and Science (GEMS-Net) program, the former special education and elementary school teacher in Jamestown and Bristol, Rhode Island, has become a national leader in developing science and math education programs with embedded learning opportunities for reading and writing. She’s also an expert who helps develop and research quality television and multimedia programming as an advisor to PBS Kids and the Corporation for

Public Broadcasting’s Ready to Learn Grant, and a mentor to hundreds of elementary and middle school teachers around the state who want to provide their students with the best science and literacy education possible.

Even with her demanding and multiple roles at URI, Sweetman and a team from URI conducted a research study with preschool children who interacted with materials created for the PBS Kids show *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!*™, providing the children opportunities to learn about science. The results of multiple analyses, released in April, revealed that the free and accessible media had a positive effect on children, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or whether they receive special education services. The eight-week study, conducted with 137 preschool children from 13 Rhode Island classrooms, suggested that more than twice as many children—56 percent—were able to accurately depict what scientists and engineers do at the end of the study than at the start (24 percent). In one portion of the study, the Nature of Science

and Engineering Survey, children from the lowest income households increased their scores the most, indicating that the multimedia program may help close the achievement gap that often exists before children even start school.

“There is a lot of mixed messaging in the media right now about screen time, and we as educators have concerns, as well,” Sweetman said. “However, we have a need to develop 21st century learners—learners who understand how to work with and develop advancing technologies. I think we need to shift the conversation from screen time to quality media integration for children. Media integration, like that found in *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!*™, in the classroom, and home is very active, very social, and often involves hands-on learning and materials, as well.

“As a learner myself, I learn best through investigation and hands-on experiences,” said Sweetman, the full-time director of the URI GEMS-Net program since 2010 who joined the URI faculty as an assistant professor of 2015.

“I learned early on that education is unpredictable, that what we teachers learn and what our students learn informs all of us.” —Sara Sweetman

And as Sweetman, who was recently promoted to associate professor of education, has learned over the years, even mistakes can be valuable, if not funny, experiences.

“When I taught in Bristol, I decided to use onions to help the students physically grasp the shape of the letter O. So I had the children cut the onions in two, paint the round portions and then had them use the onions like a stamp to make the letter O on paper. But the onion caused them to cry and wipe their eyes with their paint-covered hands. Then, the fire alarm rang for a fire drill, and here I was standing outside with my students, their faces covered in paint and tears.”

But it was probably that adventurous and innovative spirit that caught the attention of the GEMS-Net leaders when Sweetman participated in the program as a Jamestown teacher. They asked her to serve as a teacher-in-residence in 2007, and three years later she was named director.

“I learned a great deal in those first few years. Going in and out of hundreds of classrooms over the years was the best professional development experience I could have had. I saw so many amazing teaching strategies and thoughtful and caring ways to educate our young children from the teachers around Rhode Island.”

GEMS-Net now brings elementary and middle school teachers from 13 districts to URI’s Narragansett Bay Campus for work-

shops in science, engineering, and math, often run by URI professors.

But how did Sweetman get connected to programs like *Sesame Street* and *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!*™?

She has a lifelong friend who works at *Sesame Street*, and after President Barack Obama announced his Educate to Innovate campaign, the show’s director of education asked Sweetman to come to New York to talk about STEM education.

“During my first presentation at *Sesame Street*, I showed videos of Rhode Island teachers doing their work in the classroom. Those videos solidified what I could bring to the writers, directors, producers, and actors. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to teachers who let me come to their classrooms for the videos during which we talked with students and teachers.

“I immediately fell in love with the people who work in children’s television, in *Sesame Street*, and all of the shows and multimedia I have worked on. In all my endeavors since, I have found them to be some of the most passionate people when it comes to children and learning.”

In June 2011, representatives from *Sesame Street* arrived at the Narragansett Bay Campus to watch and engage in GEMS-Net workshops as teachers constructed mini-parachutes, competed in a parachute drop, and learned about the science of gravity, inertia, drag, and other factors that affect how parachutes work.

“Our relationship with Sara has been wonderful,” said Michelle (Newman) Kaplan, in 2011 during the visit. Kaplan is now the assistant director of content in the Curriculum and Content group at Sesame Workshop.

“We strive to introduce STEM education and exploration early to build a foundation for these skills. Not only does she (Sara Sweetman) have a lot of science education knowledge, she has a wonderful way of conveying

that to our teams.”

Later that summer, Sweetman went to work with the cast and crew of *Sesame Street* to help guide 12 of the show’s science, technology, engineering, and math segments. She also starred in four *Sesame Street* videos. In those segments, she chatted with Murray the Muppet and a bunch of youngsters from New York public schools.

“We were in Central Park in 90-degree heat in direct sunlight. When we were between takes, we had to pat the sweat off our faces. It was an experience I never thought I would have.

“I learned early on that education is unpredictable, that what we teachers learn and what our students learn informs all of us. Every day is a unique experience,” she said.

Whether teaching URI junior and senior education majors, children in kindergarten, crews at PBS Kids or professional educators, Sweetman is always aware of the profound responsibility that accompanies teaching.

“Teaching is a life-changing job, and you have to know that you are charged with affecting the lives of hundreds of people,” she said. “That leads us to GEMS-Net, where we emphasize that being a great teacher is a lifelong endeavor and that we are going to give you tools to be great.”

Sweetman also praises the school districts that continue to support and participate in GEMS-Net.

“It’s very hard to support continuous improvement, but our research shows unequivocally that students who have teachers who participate show strong improvement over time,” she said.

“The big question is how do we support people of Rhode Island and teaching and learning here and around the world? I don’t do any of this alone. I think one of my skills is surrounding myself with great doers and thinkers, and that’s how a lot of my success has occurred.” ❖





Sara Sweetman

# The Fabulous Sara Sweetman

*Teacher, Mentor, 'a Treasure'*

BY DAVE LAVALLEE

characters," Mirkin said. "You can't just insert a line of dialogue with the content and think a young child will register it because we'd like them to do so."

Mirkin said Sweetman repeatedly helped the team achieve the goal of getting the kids to retain the science through entertaining storytelling.

"She also prevented us from putting too many ideas in one story (an occupational hazard) and instead, to go deeper into that one idea," Mirkin said. "She has a lovely phrase: 'We want to create preconceptions without creating misconceptions' that will be appropriate for preschoolers. Lots of educational advisors don't understand this.

"The TV story is just the initial point of engagement, but our programs in Ready to Learn are made so that teachers or parents or other caregivers can take an episode and use it to teach more deeply and more personally to individual students. Sara was instrumental in helping us achieve this in *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot about That!*"

Mirkin could not say enough good things about Sweetman.

"She is as funny as she is smart and compassionate. I want her involved in every project I do for kids, and I envy her students who get to spend even more time with her than I do."

Betty Young, a URI professor of education for 25 years (now retired) and founding director of the Guiding Education in Math and Science Network (GEMS-Net), met Sweetman when she was an elementary school teacher participating in the math and science network. To this day in the program, teachers are paired with URI scientists and educators to change science teaching and learning from memorizing textbook facts to discovering science through experimentation.

"Sara has a contagious enthusiasm for STEM and implementing instructional practices that engage learners to love science and math," Young said. "She creates, she teaches, she leads. She moves with ease in the worlds of education: elementary classrooms, doctoral studies, *Sesame Street*, project management, and teacher preparation. She shares her joy of learning wherever she goes.

"I was thrilled when the School of Education hired Sara, my doctoral student, to take over my position," Young said. "I am so gratified that she has kept GEMS-Net alive and well, as I started it around 1996."

Kelly Shea, an education specialist in the GEMS-Net project, Ph.D. student in education, and member of *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!*™ research team, said Sweetman has been her mentor and colleague for the past six years.

"Sara provided me the opportunity to view and experience education from all levels," Shea said. "She always ensures that the student voice is present and that all decisions are made with student learning at the forefront. As a student in the doctoral program, I feel honored to have Sara as my major professor. I have grown as a researcher through her support and her ability to trust the process. She allows me to explore ideas and has a talent for asking just the right questions to guide my learning. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to work with Sara and all of the experiences in education our collaboration has provided me."

Jennifer Pietros called Sweetman a mentor to her as a Coventry middle school science teacher and as a student in the University of Rhode Island Rhode Island College Ph.D. program in education. Pietros joined Sweetman's research team for a National Science Foundation grant, titled "Computing in Elementary School: An Exploration of Computational Thinking Approaches and Concepts Across Disciplines" (Sweetman, 2018–2020).

"She has taught me so much about the research process from creating surveys, applying for approval from Institutional Review Boards, collecting and analyzing data, presenting at conferences, and writing for publications," Pietros said. "She provided many amazing experiences and opportunities, which have inspired and motivated me to learn as much as I can about the best practices for teaching and learning science. Sara's influence has led to enormous growth in my own learning as well as my students for which I will forever be grateful." ❖

If you read the results of a research project on *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!*™, you'll discover that the TV show and accompanying learning media have a positive impact on the ways children perceive science and scientists.

There is little in the research paper about the University of Rhode Island associate professor of education who directed the project for PBS Kids and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. But ask the people who work with Sara Sweetman and you'll find that she embodies the best of the teaching profession.

Lawrence S. Mirkin, producer of *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot about That!*™ for Portfolio Entertainment and owner of Mirkin Creative Inc. of Toronto, called her "the fabulous Sara Sweetman and a treasure." But at first, he didn't know anything about her.

Mirkin first connected with her after PBS Kids recommended that she be the science advisor for *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!*™.

"We clicked from the beginning," Mirkin said. "Sara possesses an unusual group of skills to find in one person. She understands young kids and their development stages. She knows the science. And she understands story and entertainment."

He said his job, in collaboration with members of the team, is to produce a television show to engage and entertain children while exposing them to science practices and concepts.

"Sara is a joy to work with because she understands that for the science concepts to stick with a young audience, you have to embed those ideas in the stories and the

# Cool, Calm, Collected

*Sgt. Blake Costa serves in Leadership Role during COVID-19 Pandemic*

BY SGT. TERRY RAJSOMBATH,  
110TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS DETACHMENT

*Reprinted with permission from the Rhode Island National Guard*



U.S. Army Sgt. Blake Costa, 1-103rd Field Artillery Battalion assigned to Task Force Guardian Medical Operations, stands for a photo on April 27, 2020, in Warwick, R.I.

"I think that's what's really made me the medic I am today," said U.S. Army Sgt. Blake Costa, medical section noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC), for the 1-103rd Field Artillery. "Just the exposure to nonstop trauma."

In the midst of COVID-19, Costa serves as the Medical Operations NCOIC for Task Force Guardian, a role that is normally held by an officer or senior noncommissioned officer.

"Most of the people in these roles are usually captains and majors, and as far as enlisted, they're usually E-7s and E-8s," he said. "I think the only people I outrank here are the cleaning crew."

As an E-5, what qualifies Costa to serve as a medical advisor to the Joint Task Force Guardian commander is his extensive medical field history in and out of uniform.

Before joining the National Guard, Costa served in the U.S. Marine Corps as an embassy guard. During the 2008 Islamabad Marriott bombing in Pakistan, he took part in rescue efforts which spurred his passion for medicine.

"I wasn't a medic. It was my first medical exposure, and I did a lot of hands-on stuff to help with the mass casualty events."

In 2013, Costa enlisted into the National Guard to become a medic. After qualifying, he made his way to Maryland where he worked as an emergency room (ER) technician at the Georgetown Emergency Department during the Ebola outbreak.

"A team of us were put together to be an Ebola response team," he said. "We had to manage a patient that came into Georgetown that was suspected of having Ebola. A lot of that was similar to the precautions that we're taking here."

Following the Ebola outbreak, for several years, Costa continued to work as an ER

technician. During the 2015 Baltimore protests, he was assigned to the western police district and worked at the world-renowned University of Maryland Medical Shock Trauma Center. There he was introduced to some of the best physicians from around the world and was recruited to work as a shock trauma technician.

After years of working as an emergency technician and a shock trauma technician, Costa volunteered his time and service in Haiti where he put all of his knowledge and skills to the test.

"I went out to Haiti for about three weeks, helped them reorganize their ER, and then worked with an American doctor and two American nurses," said Costa. "It was just a constant exposure to a wide variety of acuity patients."

He said his experience in Haiti was challenging, and made him the medic and leader he is today; giving him a different perspective for the way he attacks problems.

"With trauma, it's a lot of on-your-feet thinking," said Costa. "I got to observe and work with physicians and nurses, identify issues that are life-threatening, and only have minutes, if not seconds, to address and correct a problem for a person to live."

Costa's ability to remain calm and think on his feet has once again placed him in a position to greatly impact the health and welfare of service members and community members throughout the state.

Costa acknowledges his role as Medical Operations NCOIC can be challenging, but he doesn't find his job overwhelming. He said he's proud of the Rhode Island National Guard's response to COVID-19.

"This whole thing has been solving one problem after another," he said. "But I enjoy the problem-solving aspect of it. When you

look at what the Rhode Island National Guard has accomplished, I think we're doing a phenomenal job. Our state Civil Support Team (CST) expanded from a team of 26 to 226. To be able to go out and execute these testing missions with limited resources has been nothing short of impressive. Task Force Care is an artillery unit, and they're getting ready to go out and train nursing home staff on everything from (personal protective equipment) PPE use, (to decontamination), to testing. Task Force Support is led by an aviation and infantry officer."

The various task forces that responded to COVID-19 are comprised of soldiers and airmen from multiple professions. They work together, bringing their unique skill sets, learning from each other, and training others on everything from the proper use of PPE to COVID-19 testing technique.

"All these task forces have come together to make this state, in my opinion, one of the best states in the nation to respond to COVID," said Costa. ❖

*Blake Costa '23 returned to URI in spring 2020 to complete a human studies degree he started in 2011. He is currently a member of the 103rd Field Artillery Battalion of the Rhode Island National Guard.*

# Making Virtual Reality a Reality

*At New Lab for Teachers in Training, Possibilities Will Be Endless*

BY TODD MCLEISH

Students training to become teachers at the University of Rhode Island's Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies will have a new learning aid available next year: a Virtual Reality Laboratory that will enable them to practice and refine their classroom management skills, teaching methods, and other activities before facing a real class of students.



Proposed Virtual Reality Laboratory at the University of Rhode Island Providence Campus

The new laboratory is the brainchild of R. Anthony Rolle, dean of the college, who grew up in Northern California's Silicon Valley and believes that virtual reality technology can serve a vital role in teacher preparation.

"This lab will benefit students by providing them with multiple opportunities to practice the techniques they've learned in class or that they learned during their field experience," said Rolle. "It will also give them the opportunity to practice in the kinds of classrooms they may not have been exposed to before—(classes with) multilingual students, for instance, English language learners, urban students, gifted students."

Rolle envisions a space where aspiring teachers can wear virtual reality headsets and interact with virtual students in a realistic way. Fellow aspiring teachers and their professors also will be able to observe the process, which could be paused and restarted to provide feedback or allow for questions in real time. Interactions also could be recorded for review later.

"Here's how I see it: I put my goggles on and I'm in the classroom looking at 20 or 25 kids, and I start teaching," Rolle said. "Ideally, each of those kids could have an interaction with the teacher and with other students, just like in a real classroom."

The concept isn't new, but the technology is in its infancy, and Rolle doesn't believe

any of the existing platforms can accomplish what he has in mind. So he plans to build his own platform by combining existing technologies with two 360-degree cameras.

"The possible scenarios we could construct are endless," he said. "We had a committee this summer meet to discuss how to make this sound, pedagogically, and as part of the curriculum, and how best to instruct using this technology that will be effective in improving teacher self-efficacy and student outcomes."

According to Amanda Zelazo, the college's lead information technologist responsible for making Rolle's vision a reality, the Virtual Reality Laboratory will be constructed in a 40-by-24-foot space at URI's Feinstein Providence Campus. Eight virtual reality stations will be set up along three walls, with eight 43-inch monitors on the fourth wall connected to the virtual reality headsets so students and teachers can observe the virtual interactions.

"Virtual reality is a powerful tool and one we can readily use. We can create situations that are about as close to real life as you can get," said Peter Adamy, URI professor of education. "In our course on classroom management, the best we can typically do is offer a scenario—what would you do in this situation? But this software will enable us to plan

scenarios so you can practice exactly what you want. And it allows you to keep trying if you don't get it right the first time."

Research on teacher education finds that in order for aspiring teachers to learn, they have to make mistakes, recognize those mistakes, and learn how to avoid those mistakes the next time, Adamy said. Virtual reality enables them to make those mistakes and learn from

them before they have the responsibility of a real classroom full of students.

"Students who aren't interacting with the software are watching and learning throughout the process, too, so it's a win-win in terms of student learning," Adamy said. "And reports from the students are unfailingly positive."

In addition to training aspiring teachers, the Virtual Reality Laboratory could also be used for the professional development of teachers already at work in the classroom, as well as for a wide range of applications to enhance the curriculum in other academic disciplines, like practicing public speaking in front of a virtual audience.

Rolle is also discussing the possibility of creating virtual reality "backpacks" that aspiring teachers could bring with them into their internship classrooms to offer virtual field trips and other activities.

"Most schools don't have the money to invest in this kind of technology, so if we have the capability for our students to learn to use it and bring it with them into their internship classrooms, then that's great for everybody involved," said Zelazo.

The technology for the lab has been purchased and the room at the Feinstein Providence Campus is being constructed. Rolle hopes it will be tested during the spring semester and in regular use next fall. ❖

# Top Ranking for Graduate School

*URI School of Education Breaks into Top 100 by U.S. News & World Report*

BY JANE FUSCO

The School of Education in the University of Rhode Island's Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies was ranked 94th among public research universities nationally by the 2021 *U.S. News & World Report* listing of Best Public Graduate Schools for Education.

It's the first time the school has been in the top 100.

The rankings were released in March, as part of the *U.S. News & World Report's* annual report.

"This is a collective accomplishment for everyone in our college who does research, teaches, and works to attract and support top-notch graduate students into our master's and doctoral programs," said Terry Deeney, professor of education and co-director of URI's graduate programs in the School of Education.

Julie Coiro, associate professor and co-director of URI's Ph.D. in education program, added that over the past four years, a series of efforts has been set in motion to envision rigorous and flexible programs that "meet the changing needs of students hoping to make a difference in Rhode Island and beyond."

Based at the Kingston Campus, URI's School of Education prepares future professionals in the field of education across multiple specialties, offering teacher certification degree programs at the undergraduate and graduate level. Offerings include bachelor's, master's and Ph.D. degrees, in addition to graduate certificates.

Like many universities, the Feinstein college's School of Education has made improving *U.S. News & World Report* rankings a strategic goal, along with improving levels of local engagement, national respect, and global involvement in its academic, administrative, and instructional activities.

"After three years as dean of the college, I am proud that the collective efforts of our faculty, staff, and students are being recognized by *U.S. News & World Report*," said R. Anthony Rolle, dean of the college.

"Being ranked in the top 100 among U.S. public institutions is a recognition that will



Based at the Kingston Campus, URI's School of Education prepares future professionals in the field of education across multiple specialties.

inspire continued positive changes in academic opportunities for our students. In addition, the Feinstein college's research, granting, and community engagement efforts should begin to influence national conversations on educational improvement," Rolle added.

First published in 1983, *U.S. News & World Report's* rankings are based on information collected from educational institutions through an annual survey, government and third-party data sources, and school websites. It also considers opinion surveys of university faculty and administrators outside the school. ❖

**"Being ranked in the top 100 among U.S. public institutions is a recognition that will inspire continued positive changes in academic opportunities for our students."**

—R. Anthony Rolle, dean

# Adjusting Amid a Pandemic

Getting Back to Business as (un)Usual during COVID-19

BY LORI HERZ AND GAYLA GAZERRO

The days leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown were busy at URI's Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI). We had proposals to write, training programs to launch, classes to run, meetings to conduct, and graduations to plan. The hustle and bustle of preparing materials, coordinating logistics, registrations, and meeting with clients to finalize last-minute details was stressful at times but mostly exciting. We have always been doers at OSI—we say, “Yes, we can do that for you” and then figure out how to do it later. Need to change something mid-stream? No problem, OSI will adjust.

And then the rumors and speculation started. Are we really in a pandemic? Is URI going virtual? What about our trainings and classes? Can we run them? We were in constant contact with our clients, updating each other on the latest news and plans. Then suddenly, it all stopped.

Beginning March 16, most of us were “working from home.” Training programs and classes were put on hold. Meetings were canceled. Instructional materials were left in piles near the copy machine. Many of us thought it would be temporary—two weeks tops, then things would be back to normal. Many of our clients and students thought and hoped so, too. Then came the announcement that all colleges, universities, and K-12 schools were going virtual for the rest of the spring semester.

Stay home was the order.

While we at OSI pride ourselves on being flexible, creative, and catering to our clients' and students' needs, this time was different. There were many big questions, such as: How can we continue to be a resource to our clients and our students? Will we have enough work to sustain us? What does the future hold? Are we safe?

Talk about a time for great leadership! Lucky for OSI, we had that in spades. Deb Mathews, our director, quickly and routinely pulled us together for remote meetings twice a week. While Deb has many strengths, her ability to “center before you enter” was calming and reassuring. She set the stage for us to share our fears, our feelings, our hopes, our challenges. She made sure

we had the resources we needed to work effectively from home. She trusted us to be accountable.

She harnessed the strengths we all bring—Adella Francis, administrative assistant, helped us to technologies we had never heard of but needed to work remotely; Christine Dolan, team leader for credit programs, coordinated with internal departments and school systems to keep the dual and concurrent, nursing and other programs running smoothly; fiscal and support staff, Lori Palotti, Bruce Birch, and Ron Zincone held down the forts in Kingston and Providence so mail and deliveries could be received, invoices could be paid, budgets could be updated, plants could stay alive, and training materials could be upgraded in anticipation of remote learning; office assistant Lee Zeppetelle became a test student, while some of us built online curriculum.

Our talented team of consultants, Byron Willeford, Jen Vondenbrink, and Gene Knott, worked hard to take training programs virtual for our corporate and governmental clients. We all took advantage of professional development, learning how to run remote meetings, and retool curriculum for virtual learning. But the most important thing we did was to continue to be a resource to our clients, our students, and each other.

High-performing teams like OSI have a culture of trust that translates to our work with organizations. Initially, most of our clients were reluctant to go virtual. For meetings, yes. Training and classes, no. Like us, they were trying to figure it out. We gave them space, time to adjust. We kept in touch and proposed options. A few weeks into the shutdown, some clients and students were willing to give the virtual world a try.

“We need to give our employees a sense of normalcy, a sense of hope that they are important and that we still plan to keep them on board. We need to continue business as usual,” said Matt Cook from AstroNova.

It takes a good leader to recognize the importance of talent development and the importance of hope.

The training team for one of our governmental agencies was directed by their lead-



It takes a good leader to recognize the importance of talent development and the importance of hope.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Six months into the pandemic and into our transition to virtual learning, we can offer the following lessons learned and recommendations. As these examples demonstrate, virtual learning is doable, beneficial, and even fun! OSI, our clients, and students have been through many challenges in a short time. The future is still uncertain, but we have all emerged with new and enhanced skills and the confidence that comes from taking risks, collaborating, communicating, trusting, and learning. What started as unusual business has now become business as usual—and our prediction is that virtual learning in some form is here to stay.

**Science-related topics are among the most challenging**, as we experienced with our med tech program. Leadership development requires relationship-building and networking, in addition to skill-building.

- Recording lessons for asynchronous learning or synchronous Zoom sessions allows participants to learn at their own pace, absorb the material again, or make up a session that they missed.
- Be creative with how you deliver the content and allow for participant experiences. For example, use shared Google Docs that participants can access at any time on their own and build in homework activities that help solidify the content and prompt interaction between participants.

**Consider the technology challenges some participants may face**, such as bad or no Wi-Fi connectivity, inexperience with virtual platforms, organizational restrictions on video and audio, no access to personal desktops or laptops.

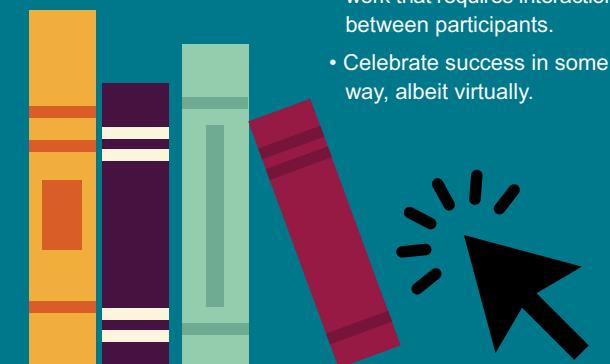
- Build in some kind of orientation to the technology being used, whether it be asynchronous platforms like Sakai or Brightspace or synchronous platforms like Zoom or WebEx.
- Provide an opportunity for participants to test out their connection or access to material before the official launch of the learning opportunity.
- Provide support and resources along the way.
- Always have a plan B if the technology fails, such as distributing materials ahead of the learning opportunity or as a follow-up.

**Consider support required** by a participant's organization.

- Fully brief company sponsors about the program.
- Research available technology and choose a platform that works best for the majority of participants.
- Provide a feedback loop for continuous improvement.
- Evaluate every learning opportunity.

**Consider what motivates participants to learn.**

- Provide a certificate, continuing education units or a license for completion.
- Build in a project that impacts both individuals and their organization.
- Consider engaging mentors or coaches to support individuals through their learning experience.
- Even with asynchronous learning opportunities, consider adding some interactive component, whether it be periodic synchronous meetings via Zoom or homework that requires interaction between participants.
- Celebrate success in some way, albeit virtually.



ership to keep training—remotely. The staff depended on them. The business of the agency had to continue as they are an essential business. The training leader reached out to us, and within a week from that phone call, we began training their team to teach remotely using available virtual tools, like Zoom. They upskilled quickly and have been teaching remotely ever since.

They encountered some obstacles, such as no cameras or audio available on employee computers. That meant the trainers could not see the participants and the participants often had to call in to hear the training. The training team demonstrated great creativity

and resiliency and met these challenges head on, using the chat feature to interact with participants and facilitate activities.

Many of our industry partners also came on board. The first to do so were members of our Real Jobs Rhode Island Leadership Partnership. Before the shutdown, we had 22 new/emerging leaders registered to take our Level 1: Being a Leader training program representing 13 Rhode Island companies. One by one, they all signed back on to take the program virtually. A short time later we launched our Level 2: Leading with Character and Competence program virtually; and then two versions of our mentoring program.

The impact that our virtual training had on program participants is summed up best by some of the evaluation feedback we received. Participants appreciated not having to travel to different training locations so that their work would not be interrupted for too long. They enjoyed a new way of learning, though many still value in-person classes. They could fit learning into their daily routine better because the class time frames were in shorter chunks. They appreciated receiving a recording of each class so they could make up a session they missed or review the content on their own time. Overall, 97 percent reported that they did not experience any

challenges to participation in the virtual training and those who did, cited the primary challenge as access to the Zoom application due to limitations of personal technology.

Given minor challenges, adjusting to the COVID-19 pandemic did not affect the outcome or compromise the integrity of the instructional training design or delivery. This was evident in survey responses as more than 80 percent of respondents rated their experience in the virtual training as either fantastic or good.

Thundermist Health Center decided to continue leadership development training with us virtually but it did not want to offer the same structured format of training at first. Instead, it wanted to help leaders and managers process the changes during the pandemic, as well as begin to explore how to better remotely manage teams. We offered a solution—Leadership Labs. These are facilitated discussions around topics identified by OSI in conjunction with the organization's leaders rather than formally structured lessons. The informal nature of these discussions allowed for peer-to-peer support as well as reflection and yes, learning from each other. Once Thundermist is able to transition back to its form of business as usual, we will resume our formal leadership program for the next cohort of leaders.

General Dynamics Electric Boat had two upper-level leadership programs running with us at the time of the shutdown. One group was scheduled to graduate in April, the other had just begun its program. The development of 70 upper-level leaders hung in the balance. We outlined in detail for them what one topic, Coaching Methodology, would look like virtually. There were technological challenges due to security restrictions in the company. There was hesitation. But there was also a trusting relationship with OSI, and they gave it a try.

While the evaluation feedback still favors in-person learning, participants appreciated interacting and seeing others during this pandemic on Zoom. They enjoyed the small group breakout activities and also how smoothly the class was conducted virtually considering the technological complications of doing so. The success of this one class

**While the evaluation feedback still favors in-person learning, participants appreciated interacting and seeing others during this pandemic on Zoom. They enjoyed the small group breakout activities and also how smoothly the class was conducted virtually considering the technological complications of doing so.**

can be attributed to the fact that participants had already gotten to know each other and build relationships in the classroom for many months before the virtual session. Others noted that they do not recommend running an entire leadership program virtually, as the relationship-building and networking that they value greatly would be lost. As such, OSI is about to launch a hybrid program for the next cohort of leaders, with sessions broken into a mix of virtual and in-person.

Yet another hybrid course emerged during the pandemic. For more than 12 years, OSI has been licensed by the R.I. Department of Health to offer instruction and programming to incumbent health-care workers with the goal of upskilling Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) to become medication technicians certified to administer medication to residents of Rhode Island's skilled nursing facilities. Students enroll in a 15-week URI course, coordinated and taught by faculty of the URI College of Pharmacy as well as professional practicing pharmacists working in the field. The course is offered two or three times a year depending on the demand and availability of instructors. Students must be certified as nursing assistants to be eligible to participate and receive official approval from their facility supervisor to enroll in the med tech class.

In partnership with R.I. Department of Labor and Training's Real Job Rhode Island initiative and the American Safety and Train-

ing Program Inc., we offered a med tech course during the spring 2020 semester to 22 students. As restrictions related to COVID-19 were established and enforced in late February, it was apparent that we could no longer offer in-person instruction and had to abruptly redesign the curriculum from synchronous to asynchronous learning.

Considerations included the overall safety and well-being of the students, instructors, and residents of the nursing facilities. At that point, the partners immediately brainstormed and by mid-March developed a hybrid approach to deliver the course and meet students' needs. The transition from synchronous to asynchronous learning had to allow for appropriate delivery of instruction and meet the challenges students

would face to complete the course. Such challenges included lack of skills to support the use of technology and limitations to access such equipment, familiarity with online instructional modes, and user-friendly instructional delivery.

Additional learning challenges now presented themselves for individual students, such as motivational learning, self-directed learning, working from home, and confusion amid a health crisis. The weekly in-person classes transitioned to recording weekly lectures and sending the link to students via emails; quizzes were administered through a URI online learning management system, Sakai, and Google Docs; and grades were automatically determined and registered. Students were provided direct support and resources including technical support from OSI and American Safety and Training, including laptops if needed, specific instructions for using instructional modes, and follow-up to insure smooth transition to asynchronous learning.

We are happy to report that of the 22 students enrolled in the spring med tech course, 21 passed the class and may now apply to the R.I. Department of Health for their medication aide administration license. It is our belief that without the support and resources of the collective and committed partners and more importantly the willingness of the students to wholeheartedly step into a new and challenging learning mode, students would not have passed the class. ❖



Ashley Adamson

## Teacher of the Year

*Alum Receives Honor in Surprise, Socially Distanced Parking Lot Ceremony*

BY JANE FUSCO

At the start of the 2019 school year, Ashley Adamson's website message to the parents of her third-grade students at Howard Hathaway Elementary School in Portsmouth, R.I., read: "I am looking forward to a productive and engaging year for your child."

Little did she know then that before the school year was over, she would be named Rhode Island's Teacher of the Year for 2021 by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), one of the state's highest honors.

In the coming year, Adamson will work with RIDE to help develop educator recognition initiatives and support programs throughout the state, and represent the state for national Teacher of the Year.

Rhode Island Education Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green said, "Ashley will be an incredible asset to RIDE over the coming school year as we focus on finding new ways to recruit, support, and reward our educators for the amazing work they do."

The surprise ceremony took place on May 26, 2020, at the school's front entrance without its usual fanfare. Instead, in keeping with COVID-19 regulations for social distancing, only a few colleagues and family were in attendance, while other colleagues, parents, and students beeped their horns and held congratulatory signs from the school's parking lot.

Hathaway Principal Lisa Little lured Adamson to school under the pretense of attending a professional development session.

"I was brought outside where my family, representatives from RIDE, cameras, and reporters stood. Upon seeing Liz Russillo—Rhode Island's

2020 Teacher of the Year—along with Mary Keenan from RIDE, I figured out what was happening," Adamson said.

"I couldn't hold back the tears, especially when I saw my 3-year-old son, Jack, and my husband, Jon."

Adamson is a 2005 graduate of URI's Feinstein School of Education with a double major in elementary education and history.

She has taught at Hathaway for six years of her 14-year career. She also taught third grade at Sowams School in Barrington, R.I.; and fourth-, sixth-, and seventh-grade science and robotics at Portsmouth Middle School.

Adamson, who grew up in Barrington, said she had been playing school since she was 6 years old and always wanted to be a teacher because she was inspired by her own first-grade teacher, Donna Carreiro, at Sowams School in Barrington.

As a URI sophomore, she was placed in a fifth-grade classroom at Horton Elementary School in Cranston, R.I.,

to observe the students and the teacher's approach to teaching a lesson.

"It was on that day that I left that school, called my parents, and told them I had most definitely chosen the right career path," she said. "It just felt right."

Her professors, she said, were "knowledgeable, caring, and pushed me to be my best self." They were always willing to go the extra mile and all offered after-hours assistance."

She is doing just that in being selected as the state's Teacher of the Year. "I will have the privilege to represent all of the outstanding educators we have across the state. I get to collaborate and learn from other teachers, not just in Rhode Island, but across the United States. I get to be a voice and be part of new initiatives and positive changes in education," she said.

It is her students, she said, who inspire her every day. "Those sweet faces I have the honor of teaching are why I continue to pour my heart into my job."

Some of Adamson's students came from Germany, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic, and spoke little to no English at the start of the school year. Within a short time, they made great strides in learning and speaking English. "Their perseverance and determination to succeed were a joy to watch," she said.

Passing the torch to Adamson, Russillo said, "One thing I am certain about is your ability to lead teachers." ❖

### Teacher of the Year Award

The Teacher of the Year Award program was established by the nonprofit Council of Chief State School Officers in 1952 to recognize educators and reward excellence in teaching. Each state selects a Teacher of the Year who then becomes eligible for the National Teacher of the Year.

The Rhode Island Teacher of the Year is selected by a committee comprised of members of the Department of Education and past Teacher of the Year recipients. Applicants undergo a rigorous process to win.

### URI Teacher of the Year Alumni

1992: Darlene Walsh '70, West Warwick, R.I.  
2009: Barbara Walton-Faria '79, M.A. '00, Newport, R.I.  
2010: Dana Ramey, M.A. '99, Middletown, R.I.  
2011: Shannon Donovan '95, M.S. '99, Scituate, R.I.  
2015: David Moscarelli '92, Ponagansett, R.I.  
2021: Ashley Acciaro Adamson '05, Portsmouth, R.I.



# Multilingual Learner Ambassadors

Department of Education, URI Team Up to Address Proficiency Gap

BY AMY CORREIA (with collaboration from RIDE)

In a coordinated effort to improve the ability of the state's school systems to educate multilingual learners—students who speak languages other than English as their primary language—the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and the University of Rhode Island have teamed up to help these students with targeted support, to ensure they get the most out of their experiences from early childhood through high school.

The 2020 Rhode Island Kids Count Data Book reports that 10 percent of the state's student body—13,792 students—are multilingual and English learners. As a group, multilingual learners in Rhode Island's K–12 education system perform below their peers. The need to address this proficiency gap has driven a number of efforts to improve the support system for students and educators alike. In 2019, RIDE launched an ambitious multilingual learner ambassador project to harness the efforts of educators who work in the state.

The five initial multilingual learner ambassadors collaborated with RIDE in a yearlong process that recently culminated in five projects that are now available for K–12 schools and districts to utilize: two graduate-level courses for administrators, a practitioner's guide to support students with interrupted formal education, a social-emotional learning website, a research brief on identifying multilingual learners with potential learning disabilities, and an informative guide on data-based decision-making.

The projects respond to urgent needs within the education system in Rhode Island, as RIDE and school districts work on how to best use local resources to reach more students and strengthen weakness areas in the classroom and school community.

According to the ambassadors, the team has brought thoughtful ideas and a perspective from the practitioner's and researcher's lens that underscores the need for a more intentional collaboration to align state policies and practices to support the endeavors of schools, educators, and students.

A second year of the multilingual learners ambassadors project will include a two-course series for administrators in multilin-



**“This partnership with the University of Rhode Island illustrates our commitment to improve equity and close the achievement gap in our state.”**

—R.I. Education Commissioner  
Angélica Infante-Green

gual learners education in partnership with RIDE and URI. This project addresses several key issues, including training administrators to make effective decisions that directly impact multilingual learners; overseeing and advocating for the implementation of effective programs; and learning how to make the most of language acquisition through standard grade-level content.

“This partnership with the University of Rhode Island illustrates our commitment to improve equity and close the achievement gap in our state,” said Education Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green. “This new course of study will directly support our administrators and educators in creating a more efficient system that expands and nurtures Rhode Island's MLL students. That is good for these students and great for our state.”

A collaboration with URI's Office of Strategic Initiatives to launch the state's first cohort to train administrators in multilingual learner education is now in progress. Administrators, who often hold multiple advanced degrees, have little to no incentive or requirement to pursue further education specific to multilingual learners. With that in mind, these courses are specifically designed for adult learners who are working professionals.

The courses will be offered in a hybrid format with both online and face-to-face meetings. The readings and assignments are relevant, research-based, and directly connected to needs of multilingual learners in their schools or districts.

Throughout the academic year, each administrator will complete an action-research project. The project requires administrators to select a problem that significantly impacts multilingual learners' education in their school or district. They will use current research and best practices to make meaningful and sustainable improvements to their identified problem. In this way, administrators will serve as informed agents of change to advocate for advancements in multilingual learner education both locally and statewide, as they will share their action-research projects with other educators throughout Rhode Island.

As the educational leaders in the state, administrators should feel empowered to make effective decisions when overseeing, supporting, and advocating for the design, implementation, and evaluation of English language assistance programs. The way to empower administrators is by providing them with affordable, accessible, and meaningful training.

The multilingual learners' cohort for administrators began in September 2020 and concludes in May 2021. While this is a pilot program, the goal is to scale up the course offerings in the 2021–22 school year. ❖

*Editor's note: Rabia Hos and Amy Correia, from URI's School of Education faculty for the Master's in TESOL/BDL program, are two of the five multilingual learner ambassadors for RIDE.*



## New Degree Programs

Nonprofit Administration and Professional Leadership Studies now Being Offered at URI's Feinstein Providence Campus

In Fall 2020, URI's School of Professional and Continuing Studies began offering two new bachelor of science degrees to help engage the community and forge entrepreneurial practices to thrive in volatile times.

The two new bachelor's degrees—nonprofit administration and professional leadership studies—are offered at the Feinstein Providence Campus.

R. Anthony Rolle, dean of the Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies, said the new programs were developed to address the economic, environmental, and social challenges of the times. He added that leaders will need new and innovative knowledge-based skill sets designed to better understand current systems; evaluate and execute potential improvements, and successfully manage both personnel and organizational politics.

“Both of these programs are specifically tailored for our adult learner student population,” said Jonathan Kroll, acting director for academic programs. Experiential learning and discussions that welcome students' experiences are key parts of the classroom experience. Classes are scheduled in the evenings and weekends to better align with students' work, community, and family obligations, he said. ❖

### NONPROFIT ADMINISTRATION

The nonprofit administration degree provides both the academic and professional development for nonprofit leaders and social entrepreneurs to design creative solutions that address vital community and social issues.

The degree aligns with core competencies of nonprofit agencies, including:

- Community and social innovation strategies
- Policy development, implementation, and assessment
- Multilevel community outreach approaches
- Equitable and inclusive administrative practices

An experiential program, it also engages students in case analyses, proposal-writing, project-based learning, and networking opportunities with nonprofit leaders. Students will gain insights and skills in critical thinking, research methods, conflict management, professional ethics, and persuasive communication.

“One of the strengths of a nonprofit organization is utilization of its dedicated and highly motivated employees who possess in-depth knowledge of fundraising, government relations, strategic planning, and organizational administration issues,” said Dean Rolle.

### PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP STUDIES

The degree in professional leadership studies is designed for those who want to advance into—or thrive within—leadership roles. It prepares students with the knowledge and practical skills to effectively lead their organizations and communities with the critical thinking and strategic decision-making needed for today's organizational challenges.

“I chose the leadership studies program because I have always been in leadership roles, and I want to learn new strategies that will help me improve my performance, public speaking, and confidence in myself,” said Keri D'Abrosca, financial coordinator of a dental office in North Providence, R.I. “I want to be able to solve difficult challenges and create a positive change in the workplace and community.”

**Both programs are tailored to adult learner student population.**



## By the first grade, students in Kenya speak at least three languages—English, French, and Swahili.

Kait Thibault traveled to Kenya in May 2019 for four weeks to observe and learn from students at the Nambale Magnet School in Busia. Everything, she said, was “one big learning experience.”

## An African Experience

### Education Student Makes Trip of a Lifetime

BY JANE FUSCO

Kait Thibault '20 was a fifth-grader at Georgia Elementary School in Vermont when Peace Corps volunteers visited her class to talk about their trip to Lesotho, Africa.

From that day on, Thibault knew she wanted to go to Africa.

“One way or another, I was going to make it happen,” she said.

And it did happen in May 2019 when Thibault, a URI senior majoring in elementary education, traveled to Kenya for four weeks to observe students at the Nambale Magnet School in Busia, Kenya, to study their curriculum and cultural practices.

Their education system, she said, is “exam-centric,” with a test given in every class, and national exams at the end of each academic year that are used for high school placement.

She also said there is a great deal of emphasis on test scores and the public disclosure of each student’s grade. The teachers return test papers from lowest to highest

grade, and read the name and grade out loud to the class. If there was no improvement in the grade from the last test, the teacher will drop the exam on the floor to be picked up.

“It was quite an image,” she said.

Improvements were also celebrated with encouraging words to help eliminate some of the pressure to achieve strict classroom standards.

Despite the distinction of grades, every student was treated equally, whether placing at the top or bottom of the class, Thibault said.

“A student with Down syndrome was treated in the same way as a student at the top of the class,” she said. Seeing this, Thibault gave the teacher a book on sign language to encourage inclusion.

She also noted the respect and reverence shown to teachers. Students would stand each time a teacher entered the room.

All students in Kenya are multilingual. By the first grade they speak at least three lan-

guages—English, French, and Swahili.

Despite the language barrier, Thibault was able to teach a math lesson and physical education class to 50 eighth-graders. She also played Frisbee with the children, having brought 30 of the flying discs with her to donate, as a gift from URI’s ultimate Frisbee team, of which she is a member.

Thibault travelled with Meg Steiger, a senior at Fitchburg State University, Steiger’s advisor Nancy Murray, and Martine Nolletti, founder of the Nambale Magnet School in Western Kenya. While there, she stayed at the Karibu, which means “welcome” in Swahili, the visitor’s house on the school premises.

To help finance her trip, Thibault baked and sold pies. URI’s Kappa Delta Pi education honor society also helped fund her trip abroad.

“Everything was one big learning experience,” she said, an experience she wants to share with her future students. ❖

## Creativity in Action

### Artists Pivot to Share Work Virtually in Time of COVID

BY STEVEN PENNELL

On March 17, two days before the public reception for the “RADical Women” exhibit, the governor of Rhode Island shut down the state due to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus. Almost instantly, it seemed as if the whole world had closed down.

This huge exhibit included artwork by 30 area female artists celebrating 100 years since the passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, giving women the right to vote. How do you share the message and celebrate the accomplishments of women for the past 100 years and the work of these amazing local artists in the time of a pandemic? How do you move beyond locked doors and shuttered windows?

You pivot!

By March 19, the date for the Gallery Night Providence reception, I created a virtual tour of the exhibit, posted it on the college’s website and Facebook page, and shared it with Gallery Night Providence, other online websites, and social media platforms.

The conversation with women artists scheduled in the URI Paff Auditorium became a remote, online conversation. By doing this, the programs reached hundreds of people in the community and possibly around the globe.

Originally thought to be a one- or two-week interruption, the pandemic caused the cancellation of the April solo exhibit and events.

Response? Pivot again!

I gathered more than 150 works of art from my own private collection, “Art from Around the World.” As this is, after all, a global pandemic, it seemed appropriate to celebrate the connections between all of the people of this planet. I hung the exhibit, created a virtual tour, and published it on social media.

As the pandemic continued in May, there was no possibility to gather and exhibit art from the public schools across the state as scheduled, as we have done every year since 2003.

What to do?

Pivot—again!

I turned to the college’s permanent collection of more than 250 pieces of artwork from “The Gift of Art to the State of Rhode Island,” from public schools around the state gath-

ered since 1994, that was hanging in the second-floor lobby. I filmed another virtual tour describing the work and published it online on social media platforms.

Just before art was to be delivered for the annual June URI-RIC-CCRI faculty-student-alumni exhibit, it became clear the closure would continue.

What to do? You guessed it!

Images, rather than physical artwork, were sent overnight by 70 artists, and a virtual exhibit of 200 works was created and published. It was viewable on a monitor along with an actual gallery window exhibit along Union Street with a dozen works of art and a QR-coded introduction describing the art hung in the gallery windows. Then a Facebook Live event was filmed, a guided Gallery Night tour outside of the same gallery windows. The posting of the Facebook event had more than 500 views.

Restricted access continued in July for the “In Abstraction” exhibit, with more than 100 abstract landscapes by seven noted area artists viewed only by a limited number of people on Gallery Night and by appointment.

But the artwork deserved more visibility. Again, a narrated virtual tour was shot and published on social media, a QR-coded introduction of the art visible through the windows was recorded, and another Facebook Live event touring the exhibit inside on Gallery Night, July 16, also gained more than 500 views.

As you can see, our pivots during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed URI’s College of Education and Professional Studies to continue to reach beyond the walls of the building to educate and inspire the immediate community and the global community to grow and thrive.

This new reality provided an opportunity to reach those who would not physically be able to make it to the University and to the gallery. Potentially, people across the globe are participating through our virtual tours.

The Arts and Culture Program is a microcosm of the college. We adapt to change in the community and the world. We respond to the needs that arise, providing education and resources, finding new modes of communication in marketing, and promoting what URI has to offer. ❖



“Oshun Changó” by Evans Molina



Laminabolitio by John Fazzino

Steven Pennell is the coordinator of the Arts and Culture Program at URI Providence Campus. He is theater instructor at URI and RIC, and a director, designer, actor, and playwright.



Nina Casacalenda teaches students at Hopkins Hill Elementary School in Coventry, R.I., before schools transitioned to remote learning in the spring.

## Teacher Candidates Innovative, Creative

### URI Student Teachers Helping R.I. Educators Deliver Remote Learning

BY TONY LAROCHE

Joe Verrier is the kind of history teacher you'd want in class. Student teaching at Pilgrim High School in Warwick since late January, Verrier divided his class into opposing factions—Western Rome, Eastern Rome, Goths, Sasanians—to teach them about the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of the Byzantine Empire. For lessons on the Middle Ages, students became peasants, clergy, apothecaries, carpenters, and nobles to create a functioning village. One day, Verrier donned a Viking helmet and “raided the village.”

“Working with kids is fun,” said Verrier, a Coventry resident who graduated from the University of Rhode Island in May with a degree in history and secondary education.

Like veteran teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools across the state,

Verrier had his teaching skills stretched last spring as classrooms transitioned to remote learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And, like Verrier, many of those educators were URI teacher candidates, assisting their host teachers, or clinical educators, in the classroom. In school districts around the state, about 140 URI teacher candidates contributed to remote learning efforts. Some were completing their initial certification for a Rhode Island teaching license while others worked on a final practicum in an area of specialization, such as bilingual/dual language or English as a second language.

With the switch to remote learning in March, the URI School of Education adjusted expectations for students completing early practicums to reduce the burden on their

host districts. But for students completing teaching assignments or final practicums, cutting those placements short was not an option.

“All these students have been working between two and four years to earn certification in the state of Rhode Island. We weren't going to cut their program short,” said Diana Marshall, director of the school's Office of Teacher Education, which secures about 2,000 classroom placements a year for undergraduate and graduate education students. “We made sure we were doing everything in our power to ensure they were still able to earn those certifications they were working toward.”

In their placements, URI teacher candidates helped out in numerous ways, leading

online classes, experimenting with new technology, and helping their host teachers transition to online instruction.

“From our clinical educators and School of Education supervisors, we've heard that our teacher candidates who continue to work in their classrooms are amazing,” said Marshall. “They're innovative, they're creative. They're coming up with lesson plans and strategies in ways that the host teachers hadn't considered. They're using technology in some really interesting ways.”

As Pilgrim High switched to remote learning, Verrier drew upon his own experiences with online college courses to design his lessons. He was careful not to overwhelm students with an unrealistic workload, provided a suggested schedule to complete the week's assignments, and gave students an opportunity to provide feedback. He also tried to keep the fun atmosphere the class had created. “It has been challenging, particularly making it so that my students could still feel as though this was their classroom,” he said. “After the governor announced

her reading initiative, it gave me the idea to make an optional assignment each week where I would read about history to my students. I have been reading while with my pet goats and horses, which I thought would help students relax a bit and take their minds off the situation.”

Rachel Schilke '20 connected with her virtual classroom of first-graders at the Wawaloam School in Exeter from her family's home in Westerly. Her mother is also a teacher. “It's been fun and challenging to both be home together teaching our students,” said Schilke, a human development and family studies major with a concentration in early childhood education.

Since March, Schilke worked closely with her host teacher to plan for the transition, exploring resources to help support distance learning. She used an online reading program to set up each student with books to match his or her reading level, and led reading and math instruction through Zoom.

“It's been a learning curve,” she said.

“Having taught this way for a number of weeks, we've gotten into a routine and become much more comfortable with the way

learning looks now. But not being able to see the students in person and have all the little conversations we had in the classroom has been difficult. This has been hard on the students, too, and yet there has been excellent participation in the virtual learning activities.”

Mackenzie Donnelly '20, of Westerly, experienced that with her fourth-graders at Ashaway Elementary School in Hopkinton as they dealt with not being able to return to school. To reduce their stress, she recorded herself reading to them and posted it on their daily online schedule, so students could listen and unwind.

“I feel as if we are making the most positive experience out of such a negative time, and that is what we need to take away from all of this,” she said.

**“They're coming up with lesson plans and strategies in ways that the host teachers hadn't considered.”**

—Diana Marshall, director, Office of Teacher Education

Donnelly, who graduated with a degree in elementary education, was working with her students in all subject areas while also taking over math and writing instruction from her host teacher. Since the transition to online teaching, she led the morning meeting with students, along with vocabulary and reading groups to help out her host teacher.

“I know as overwhelmed as I am, she has to be about triple that,” said Donnelly. “This has been a huge learning experience. It has been stressful and exhausting, as well. In comparison to a normal school day, I put in twice as much time lesson-planning and prepping.”

For Nina Casacalenda '20, one of the challenges was teaching younger students—first-graders—who had little experience using computers for learning. She relied on constant communication with parents and helped them with video tutorials. “A lot of the credit goes to the parents who have dedicated a tremendous amount of time in helping their child succeed,” she said.

Casacalenda, who graduated in May with a bachelor's degree in elementary education and certification in teaching English as a sec-

ond language, was an active partner in the classroom with her host teacher at Hopkins Hill Elementary School, in her hometown of Coventry. She took on such duties as teaching math and vocabulary, conducting the morning meeting with students, and, before the transition, leading students to lunch each day.

The closing semester in the classroom is the most important for teacher candidates, preparing them for taking on their own classroom one day, she said. With in-person teaching disrupted, it was difficult completing the expected three weeks of solo teaching along with other benchmarks that prepare teacher candidates.

She managed to get it done, but she had mixed feelings about her closing semester—a love for working with the kids and her host

teacher, but a feeling she didn't get the full experience of face-to-face teaching. But she said, “I value being able to teach in a way that no one has done before. Who gets to say they taught virtually for their student teaching other than the Class of 2020?”

Before student teaching, Katie Maher '20, of Ashland, Mass.,

questioned whether she had the knowledge necessary to successfully run a classroom, even though she had done all the work to prepare. But her time this past spring at Westerly High School was eye-opening.

During the semester, Maher, a double major in secondary education and English, worked closely with students of three sections of 10th-grade honors English and two sections of film study for seniors. Teaming with her host teacher, the transition to online went smoothly, she said. To start each class, Maher connected with students through Google Meet. Students then worked independently, with Maher staying online in case they needed help. The teachers also organized smaller online sessions so students could share ideas.

“I definitely don't feel as though I've lost out on my student teaching experience,” she said. “I miss my students, and it's difficult not being able to see them or gauge whether we're providing them with enough support as easily as we usually could. But I know now that if I can teach through this experience and all of the obstacles, I can do anything.” ❖

## NEW FACES

Welcome to the Feinstein College of Education  
and Professional Studies

### College of Education and Professional Studies



**JACOB AGUIAR**  
*Information Technologist*  
Jacob Aguiar's passion has always been technology, and he supports learning and instruction through 21st century technology. A 2019 URI graduate, Aguiar majored in music education and classical instrumental performance. As a URI student, he supported classroom instruction and also worked in the engineering department of the local PBS broadcast station. As an educator, Aguiar has worked part time with music programs at local schools such as Bishop Hendricken and has served as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Connecticut.



**ADAM BROWN**  
*Assistant Dean for Academic and Student Affairs*  
Adam Brown joined the college in July as the assistant dean for academic and student affairs and will lead the college's Office of Academic and Student Affairs where he will pursue strategic organizational goals for the college, its schools, faculty, staff, and students. These duties include managing and improving student recruiting, admission, enrollment, matriculation, retention, and persistence policy and practices. Brown comes to URI from Regis College in Weston, Mass., where he served as the assistant dean of academic student services; assisted in the oversight of academic advising, coaching, tutoring, and accessibility services; and directed projects designed to increase student retention. Brown earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a master's degree in English from Boston College.



**CHRISTOPHER HUNTER**  
*Associate Dean*  
Christopher Hunter, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering in URI's College of Engineering, was named associate dean for the college in July. In this role, Hunter will administer academic, faculty, and diversity affairs for the college. These duties include overseeing and supporting internal academic affairs, college committees, faculty-generated proposals, mentoring programs, curriculum graduate admissions and program accreditations, and issues of diversity and inclusion. Before joining URI, Hunter worked as a staff engineer for Harding Lawson and Associates in Bellevue, Wash.; for the King County Department of Public Works, Traffic and Planning Section, Seattle, Wash.; and for the Georgia Department of Transportation. Hunter earned a Ph.D. and master's degree in transportation engineering from the University of Washington, and a bachelor's degree in physics from Morehouse College.



**LUKAS CHAVES**  
*Coordinator, Case Management and Disability Services for Students*  
Lukas Chaves is the coordinator for the Outreach and Intervention Office and Disability Services for Students. He has worked as a clinician at Rhode Island Hospital's Psychiatric Emergency Services and an advisor for Bristol Community College's TRIO Student Support Services program. Chaves connects students with disabilities to reasonable accommodations with the goals of fostering an inclusive and accessible environment and promoting self-advocacy. Chaves assists students with non-academic challenges, including areas related to mental health, emotional well-being, and safety by providing outreach, resources, referrals, advocacy, and follow-up services. He serves on URI's ANCHOR team and consults with students, parents, faculty, staff, and other campus and community resources to best address the diverse needs of each student.



**JONATHAN KROLL**  
*Lecturer, Professional Leadership Studies*  
Jonathan Kroll received a Ph.D. from Fielding Graduate University in leadership with a focus in group mentoring, a master's degree in human development, and a bachelor of political science from Quinnipiac University. He co-founded two leadership training businesses and, during the last decade, has facilitated more than 250 leadership workshops, retreats, trainings, and conference presentations. He consults, writes, and teaches about leadership and mentoring.



**PETER NYE**  
*Lecturer, Nonprofit Administration*  
Peter Nye earned a Ph.D. in administration from Duke University, a master's in teaching from Boston College, and an M.B.A. from Cornell University. He served for 20 years on the graduate faculty at the University of Washington, where he helped to establish five new academic programs, including an undergraduate business program and a leadership M.B.A. Nye studies issues in judgment and decision-making with the goal of improving educational programs and personal life choices. This research draws on cognitive psychology, social psychology, and behavioral economics.

### School of Education Faculty



**EMILY CLAPHAM\***  
*Associate Professor, Health and Physical Education*  
Emily Clapham received a doctor of education degree in curriculum and teaching from Boston University, a master's and a bachelor of science in physical education and exercise science from URI. Her research has centered on new physical education, girls sport and physical activity participation, and ocean therapy for children with disabilities.

**FURONG XU\***  
*Professor, Health and Physical Education*  
Furong Xu earned her Ph.D. in kinesiology at the University of Georgia and a bachelor of science in physical education from East China Normal University. Her research focuses on practices and strategies that lead to increased physical activity participation in different age groups and the beneficial effects of physical exercise.



**HYUNJIN KIM\***  
*Associate Professor, Early Childhood Education*  
Hyunjin Kim received a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with specialty areas in early childhood education, elementary education, and educational psychology. Her research has focused on early childhood teacher education, early childhood policy and practice, teaching and learning in urban settings, family school community partnerships, pre-K and kindergarten.



**VIRGINIA KILLIAN LUND**  
*Assistant Professor, Elementary Language Arts*  
Virginia Killian Lund holds a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction from the University of Illinois at Chicago, a master's degree in teaching and learning from DePaul University, and a bachelor's degree in English language and literature from the University of Chicago. Her scholarship focuses on the literacies, learning, and identities of young people as they compose across contexts and within multiple modalities, particularly in technology-enhanced environments. Her most recent research was in informal learning environments, including a youth media lab in rural Utah, a teen space in a public library in Hartford, Conn., and a drop-in digital media lab in a public high school on Chicago's West Side. \*Former faculty member of the College of Health Sciences



**ANNEMARIE VACCARO\***  
*Professor, College Student Personnel*  
Annemarie Vaccaro earned a Ph.D. in higher education administration and a master's degree in sociology from the University of Denver, a master's degree in student affairs from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and a bachelor's degree in social sciences from Castleton State College. Her scholarship focuses on inclusion and social justice in higher education. She has received a number of professional awards for her work including: 2018 NASPA Pillar of the Profession Recognition; 2017 NASPA George D. Kuh Award for Outstanding Contribution to Literature; and 2010 ACHE Alex Charter's Research Award.

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"Bridging Providence" oil painting by Anthony Tomaselli, 2020

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