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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2018, the External Review Team was empaneled to conduct a comprehensive review of the Office of Community, Equity, and Diversity, including its direct reporting units. The External Review Team received self-study reports prior to the campus visit and conducted onsite focus group conversations September 12–13. Our charge was to review and assess “1) the department’s self-studies; 2) the department’s strengths and opportunities; 3) how well the department is meeting best practices as compared to the national context; 4) its budget utilization; and 5) its resource allocation.” This document represents our observations and recommendations and reflects information available to us at the time of this documentation. It should be weighed in conjunction with local data and evidence. In addition, institutional and organizational changes implemented subsequent to our site visit may affect the recommendations herein.

The University of Rhode Island’s sincere commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion is quite clear to the External Review Team. While the campus community observes signs of this commitment, there is a general sense that the university has yet to reach its full potential in creating the welcoming and inclusive campus community everyone desires. There is a widespread sense that the infrastructure intended to advance this work—the Office of Community, Equity, and Diversity—could be more thoughtfully considered. Principally, we did not observe a healthy, high functioning team. We observed an organization in a state of crisis and a sense among community members who participated in the review that there exists a breakdown of trust and a lack of confidence that the CED, as a whole, is optimally positioned to deliver on its core commitments. This lack of confidence may be due, in part, to the perceptible climate of mistrust and incivility among and between CED employees, and a history of little or no accountability for creating and maintaining a culture of high performance.

While there was insufficient information provided in unit self-study reports, the External Review Team received and observed enough information to determine that critical self-reflection, peer benchmarking, regular performance evaluation, and a commitment to continuous improvement is warranted. We recommend focused external reviews for every unit currently reporting to CED. In addition, there was a clear, coordinated effort to solidify the perception that a majority of campus constituents had lost faith in CED’s leader. However, since both the CED (a new organizational infrastructure) and the CDO (a woman of color) are relatively recent additions to the university, it is important that campus community members consider that the intersections of predictable resistance to organizational change, as well as the systems of power and privilege (based on race, gender, rank, etc.), may be converging to shape employee and organizational experience.

While we recommend that the CDO position continue to administratively report to the president and remain a member of the president’s cabinet, we encourage you to revisit its portfolio. In addition, we recommend immediately sunsetting the various commissions and councils, and working with the new CDO to reconstitute contemporary advisory bodies, as necessary, in a manner that complements the CDO’s and director’s work rather than competes with it.
Finally, we recommend the university accelerate its efforts to conduct regularized, comprehensive climate assessments. These periodic assessments will help develop a deeper understanding of how campus community members experience URI and will allow campus leaders to track improvement over time.

**AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, AND DIVERSITY.** While AAEOD appears to enjoy a positive reputation concerning support they provide for search processes, we observed three areas of particular concern. These are: 1) potential risk associated with the lack of a dedicated compliance officer; 2) an overly broad mission; and 3) several members of the campus community were unclear about how to report suspected violations. In addition, while assessing ethics and compliance functions was beyond the scope of this two-day review, we encourage regularized compliance reviews to ensure procedures are consistent with regulatory requirements, applicable policies, and laws. We also recommend the creation of a strategic communications plan to ensure that stakeholders are aware of their reporting obligations and the means by which such complaints should be filed.

**GENDER AND SEXUALITY CENTER.** We observed a highly collaborative GSC team, very dedicated student employees, and an ideal facility that could serve as a model for peer institutions. As staff communicated a lack of responsiveness to reported maintenance concerns, we recommend the creation and support of a facilities and technology management plan to sustain this exemplar. Low employee morale, with respect to unfavorable campus and CED relations, was palpable and we are profoundly concerned about the resulting negative impact on students and student employees. We recommend immediate redress through carefully listening to employee concerns and responding accordingly, as well as encouraging staff to be more mindful of the behavior they model for students. We also sensed considerable tension between GSC and the President’s LGBTQ Commission. This Commission, in particular, seems to have lost confidence in the center’s leadership and may be working beyond its scope to address perceived deficits. Finally, given the reported lack of collegiality, unresponsiveness, and lack of professionalism among the center’s full-time employees, we recommend immediate redress through the establishment of employee performance improvement plans and the creation of avenues for campus community members and GSC employees to pursue reconciliation.

**MULTICULTURAL STUDENT SERVICES CENTER.** Given the relatively new director, who has dramatically increased the center’s level of programming even while understaffed, it was difficult to ascertain the “state” of the MSSC. We recommend an immediate search to replace the vacant full-time assistant director position as well as a careful review and assessment of current programming.
WOMEN’S CENTER. We observed insufficient management of a model that combines a traditional women’s center with a residence hall. This has resulted in a potentially unsustainable operation, as staff reported working in a state of perpetual “crisis management.” While we recommend more careful examination, we believe URI would benefit from having the residential and dining components, currently located in the WC portfolio, transferred to the Division of Student Affairs, where these functions may be guided by content professionals. Likewise, the considerable facilities management responsibilities might be better located with subject matter experts. Additionally, we recommend a reevaluation of the administrative locations of the Bystander Intervention Program. At present, there appears to be no coordination of content, intended outcomes, or assessment. The program’s effectiveness may be enhanced through intentional alignment and coordination.

OVERALL. As mentioned above, the University of Rhode Island’s sincere commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion is quite clear, though there remains a general sense that the university has yet to reach its full potential in creating the welcoming and inclusive campus community everyone desires. The disequilibrium we observed is not uncommon in organizations that are evolving, adapting, and realigning governance structures. The commissioning of this external review signifies your willingness to evaluate your current performance and to make necessary adjustments. As you consider these recommendations and continue to create the conditions for the work of CED to thrive, we recommend careful attention to the student experience. As our focus was primarily on the structure and functioning of the CED and its reporting units, we did not leave with a clear understanding of how students are experiencing the current organizational dynamics. In addition, URI alumni perspectives might be considered, as they can attest to the university’s progress and provide historical context regarding the origin of several seemingly intractable issues.

The creation of units such as CED in and of itself does not guarantee successful outcomes. These units and their leaders need to be empowered to lead and must have consistent support from and collaboration with campus and community members.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary .................................................................................................................. 2

I. Context for the University of Rhode Island Office of Community, Equity, and Diversity .................................................................................................................. 6

II. Community, Equity, and Diversity Central Office .......................................................... 6

III. Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity, and Diversity ..................................................... 9

IV. Gender and Sexuality Center .......................................................................................... 11

V. Multicultural Student Services Center ............................................................................. 13

VI. Women’s Center ............................................................................................................. 14

VII. Summary ....................................................................................................................... 17

References ............................................................................................................................. 18
I. CONTEXT FOR THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY, EQUITY, AND DIVERSITY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

The mission of the Office of Community, Equity, and Diversity (CED) states that it “strives to create a diverse, equitable, and inclusive University in which every individual can learn, work, and thrive.” In addition, the unit’s leader is also charged with “collaborating with the Presidential Commissions and . . . diversity committees to ensure the accomplishment of the University’s strategic diversity goals.”

The vision for such a unit is to institutionalize the university’s commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) through a formal infrastructure. The unit is intended to help establish institutional priorities by way of integrative leadership; to coordinate and ensure alignment and assessment of all EDI-related efforts; and to assist the president in holding individuals and organizational units accountable for advancing the university’s shared goals.

Among a number of possible organizational configurations for the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) structure, URI’s unit is designed as a Portfolio Divisional Model (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013), characterized by an organization that includes central staff and a compendium of direct reporting units. These direct reporting units include: Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity, and Diversity; the Gender and Sexuality Center; the Multicultural Student Services Center; and the Women’s Center. The unit’s leader reports directly to the president.

II. COMMUNITY, EQUITY, AND DIVERSITY CENTRAL OFFICE

INVITED EXTERNAL REVIEW

In September 2018, the External Review Team was empaneled to conduct a comprehensive review of the Office of Community, Equity, and Diversity, including its direct reporting units. The External Review Team received self-study reports prior to the campus visit and conducted onsite focus group conversations September 12–13. Our charge was to review and assess “1) the department’s self-studies; 2) the department’s strengths and opportunities; 3) how well the department is meeting best practices as compared to the national context; 4) its budget utilization; and 5) its resource allocation.”

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

The External Review Team received and considered five self-study reports (CDE, AAEOD, GSC, MSSC, and WC) and participated in 18 scheduled meetings during our two-day site visit. Excluding CED employees, approximately 125 individuals participated in the scheduled meetings and public comment sessions. We also received and considered approximately 110 written “External Review Feedback Forms” (hand-delivered by individuals who attended focus group sessions and via email by some who did not), as well as compilations of historical and contextual information that URI community members wished to have considered herein. Participants included administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni, with staff comprising a slightly higher representation of respondents.
OBSERVATIONS

Role and Organizational Clarity
We foreground our findings with the observation that the CED design—a Portfolio Divisional Model, including units reporting directly to the president—is not well-understood throughout the university. A number of constituents are unclear about how or why units were included in the CED portfolio and there exists a significant gap between what the campus community expected of a CED unit and what they have actually experienced.

The lack of role clarity is most pronounced relative to the various commissions and councils, many of which preceded the establishment of the CED. We observed territorial conflicts where some commissions appeared to assume ownership of the domain and occasionally behaved as though they were advisory to the CDO and center directors. These power dynamics may be impeding progress.

Team and Institutional Potential
Principally, the External Review Team did not observe a healthy, high functioning team. We observed an organization in a state of crisis and a sense among community members who participated in the review that there exists a breakdown of trust and a lack of confidence that the CED, as a whole, is optimally positioned to deliver on its core commitments. Additionally, the campus community, as well as the CED team members, expressed concern that the external review process included the entire CED organization, instead of a sole focus on its organizational leadership, as many participants indicated they had requested. This resulted in most CED units providing woefully insufficient self-study reports. One unit’s self-study report was a mere four and a half pages and provided negligible insight into its operations or efficacy. Another self-study report provided general assertions such as “[Unit employees] are fully qualified for their roles and responsibilities. They are educated, thoughtful, ethical, intentional, and have the right experience . . .” without providing evidence to support or substantiate these claims. While the External Review Team was taken aback by this form of resistance, it appears to be a consequence of failure to gain buy-in on the holistic review approach, as well as a perceptible climate of incivility among and between the unit’s employees, and a history of little or no accountability for creating and maintaining a culture of high performance.

In the absence of thoughtful and robust self-studies, the External Review Team is unable to provide a high quality external review for CED at URI. We therefore strongly recommend individual comprehensive reviews for each unit currently reporting to CED to enable a thorough assessment that will satisfy the president’s objective to “understand the department’s strengths and opportunities, and how well the department is meeting best practices as compared to the national context.” While there was insufficient information provided in unit self-study reports, the External Review Team received and observed enough information to determine that critical self-reflection, peer benchmarking, and a commitment to continuous improvement is warranted. We strongly recommend a careful review of the following: employee performance; professional development; fiscal allocations, expenditures, and financial stewardship; and program goals and outcomes.
In addition, there was a clear, coordinated effort to solidify the perception that a majority of campus constituents had lost faith in CED’s leader. However, it is important to place this feedback in the proper context: approximately 125 individuals participated in the public comment sessions (at least six of these individuals attended more than one session to voice their discontent) and approximately 110 written “External Review Feedback Forms” (hand-delivered by individuals who attended focus group sessions and via email by some who did not) were submitted to the External Review Team. Participants included administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni, with staff comprising a slightly higher representation of respondents.

Moreover, since both the CED (a new organizational infrastructure) and the CDO (a woman of color) are relatively recent additions to the university, it is important that campus community members consider that the intersections of predictable resistance to organizational change, as well as the systems of power and privilege (based on race, gender, rank, etc.), may be converging to shape employee and organizational experience (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Stewart & Valian, 2018; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) While we recommend the CDO continue to be situated in the president’s cabinet, we recommend that you revisit and reconsider their portfolio, especially with regard to the following: Should the CDO/CED continue to have direct reporting units? If so, which units and why? What is the rationale for this structural alignment?

Prior to initiating a recruitment for a new CDO, consult the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) Standards of Professional Practice for Chief Diversity Officers (Worthington, Stanley, & Lewis, 2014) and invest time in creating a context for success (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013, p. 148). Reeducate the campus community about the role, responsibilities, and authority of the CDO; describe how other units and leaders will need to evolve to accommodate the role of the CDO; and work with the new leader to co-create success indicators. If CED continues to have direct reporting units, we recommend thorough rebranding for clarity that each unit is affiliated with the division. Likewise, a coherent communications strategy for the division will help the campus community understand the contributions and impact of the entire division.

2) A multiphasic external review process for every unit currently reporting to the CED to inform your future decision-making. Prioritize reviews in the following order:
   a. Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity, and Diversity
   b. Women’s Center
   c. Gender and Sexuality Center
   d. Multicultural Student Services Center

Allow these findings to help inform your decisions regarding the optimal organizational alignment. Should you choose to adopt this approach, it will require a structured process led by an individual (separate from the participating organizations) specifically dedicated to serve as project manager, data manager, and facilitator.
Regardless of future organizational location of these units, for their employees we, strongly recommend immediate and regularized performance reviews, individual professional development plans, support for participation in their respective professional associations to remain abreast of best practices, and accountability to ensure sustained high performance.

3) Immediately discharge the various commissions and councils, and reconstitute new advisory bodies, as necessary, in a manner that complements the CDO’s and center directors’ work rather than competes with it. Ideally, these advisory bodies, structured to have staggered term limits, should provide counsel to senior leadership through the CDO. It should be understood that they are not oversight bodies and do not direct the work of the CDO or center directors. While their mission may simply state that they exist to provide counsel, it may be prudent to “charge” the group with specific advisory efforts annually (e.g. explore and advise on ways to better engage the local community in university diversity efforts).

4) We recommend the university accelerate its efforts to conduct regularized, comprehensive climate assessments. These periodic assessments will help develop a deeper understanding of how campus community members experience URI and will allow campus leaders to track improvement over time.

REPORTING UNITS
The following observations are informed by information shared during the site visit, incomplete unit self-study reports, and information emailed to the External Review Team up to two weeks after the campus visit. We reiterate that an individual external review for each unit is warranted so the campus community may better understand each unit’s strengths and opportunities for improvement. Our qualified observations are detailed below.

III. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, AND DIVERSITY

The Office of Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity and Diversity (AAEOD) ensures the university’s commitment and responsibility to foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive working and learning community. The AAEOD unit employs only three full-time staff. In 2005, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights established a Resolution Agreement with the previous URI president to stabilize AAEOD, primarily focused upon the need to hire a compliance coordinator to properly manage compliance functions charged to AAOED. This unit originally reported to the president but was realigned to report to the associate vice president and CDO upon the creation of CED.

OBSERVATIONS
Organizational Alignment
Several community members, including individuals employed within AAEOD, believe the unit is not properly situated within CED. As a result, professional relationships are tense and may be impeding the delivery of high quality support services.
AAEOD appears to enjoy a positive reputation in regard to support they provide for search processes. It also seems that the basic Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity functions are well managed by the unit, with assistance from outside vendors who develop annual affirmative action plans and annual reviews of hiring outcomes. Outsourcing the development of annual affirmative action plans is a common practice for AAEOD units.

**Staffing Levels and Areas of Responsibility**

We observed three areas of particular concern. First, we view the lack of a dedicated compliance officer within AAEOD as a potential risk due to the many compliance obligations, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, Title IX, Title VI, Title VII, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. These functions require content-specific proficiency and demand full-time attention and oversight. Subsuming these functions under another position poses unnecessary risk and in certain instances may pose a conflict of interest.

Second, the mission of the AAEOD seems overly broad and its “programmatic functions” appear to be uncoordinated with campus units performing similar functions. For example, it is not typical to include “Diversity” in the operational titles of affirmative action/compliance offices. While the rules and regulations enforced by these units enhance diversity outcomes (e.g. hiring), these rules are fundamentally compliance-based: they must be followed to meet the requirements of federal regulations that undergird these functions. Including “Diversity” in the unit’s title may be contributing to mission creep and overlap/competition with other campus units that focus on programmatically building inclusive campus communities.

One example of this is the overlap and duplication of programmatic work related to Title IX, with regard to violence prevention. There appears to be no intentional coordination regarding the content and delivery of information for the various violence prevention programs sponsored separately in the Department of Athletics, the Gender and Sexuality Center, the Women’s Center, and the AAEOD.

Third, several members of the campus community were unclear about how to report suspected violations.

**Regularized Compliance Reviews**

While assessing ethics and compliance functions was beyond the scope of this two-day review, we encourage regularized compliance reviews, as a best practice, to ensure procedures are consistent with regulatory and organizational requirements, as well as with applicable policies and laws.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1) Conduct an external review of the AAEOD unit. We recommend specific attention to: optimal staffing levels; areas of responsibility within its purview; review of employee core competencies for functional responsibilities; review of overlapping functions; and determining the most appropriate campus reporting structure.

2) Conduct an immediate review of the effectiveness of compliance functions. Regularize compliance reviews as a best practice going forward.
3) Conduct immediate and annual performance reviews for all AAEOD employees, including review of position descriptions and the establishment of performance expectations. AAEOD employees must develop professional development plans and be accountable for meeting performance goals.

4) Develop a strategic communications plan to ensure that stakeholders, at all levels, are frequently reminded of their reporting obligations and the means by which to file such complaints.

IV. GENDER AND SEXUALITY CENTER

The mission of the Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC) is to “allow students, faculty, and staff to explore and affirm their multiple and intersecting identities, especially surrounding gender and sexuality.” The center’s self-report lacked detail, organization, and quality, and reflected minimal effort from employees who had been directed by the campus administration to perform a critical self-assessment. On a positive note, the self-study report does explore and acknowledge the intentionality undertaken by the institution to build and maintain an intersectional, student-centered learning environment uniquely dedicated to diversity of gender and sexuality. This effort aligns the mission of the center with CED and the university overall.

OBSERVATIONS

Facility and Facilities Management Plan
The GSC presents a welcoming environment, accessible and open to the campus community for programming, resources, training, and additional services. The space allows for collaborative programming, small gatherings, individual meetings, attention to staffing and storage, as well as future planning.

The GSC facility is an investment in and demonstration of institutional commitment to the success of all people with diverse genders and sexualities. The facility is a model for peer institutions, though there were staff reports of broken and/or outdated equipment and inadequate technical support. The center would benefit from having a facility and technology management plan.

Internal Operations and Funding Structure
GSC staff reported that they operate through a collective decision-making strategy, specifically noting a strong team dynamic and a community decision-making process around programming and evaluations. In addition, they reported participating in an internal program evaluation process. However, we were unclear about consistency, frequency, and methodology.

Student employees open the GSC in the morning independently, serve as receptionists, and participate in program design and implementation. They are proud of the space and their impact, and several have worked at the GSC for a number of years. Notably, the students are frequently in the center alone, without the benefit of support and supervision from full-time employees. Given the GSC’s hours of 9 a.m. – 9 p.m. most weekdays, all staff reported the need for at least one additional support position.
During our site visit, GSC staff reported a collaborative model and produced new supporting documentation highlighting more than 40 programs co-sponsored with campus and community partners. Data provided by the GSC staff indicate an increase in center visitation (1,345 visitors during the 2017-2018 academic year). Recurring signature programs such as Safe Zone have demonstrated success, and the tracking of GSC room reservations indicates a trend of increased collaboration.

It was reported that GSC funding is allocated through Housing and Residence Life based on a previous institutional alignment. GSC staff felt strongly that their funding should flow through the center’s administrative reporting unit.

**Role Clarity between Center and President’s Commission**
Center employees raised questions and concerns regarding the overlapping mission, vision, and purpose of the center with the President’s LGBTQ Commission. The latter seems to have been established with the best of intentions; however, with the development of various campus centers and ultimately the CED led by a CDO, it is necessary to revisit these structures to resolve tensions regarding boundaries and responsibilities. While members of the commission may be firmly committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion, career content professionals specifically hired and charged to lead institutional growth and transformation could greatly improve outcomes.

**Campus Outreach and Engagement**
Campus community members expressed concerns regarding perceived lack of collegiality, responsiveness, and professionalism among the center’s full-time employees. Many noted that the unit leaders are often absent or casually late to campus programs, even those hosted by their own unit. These concerns appeared to be broadly shared among those who participated in the review.

**Climate Assessment and Improvement**
The level of employee dissatisfaction was palpable and we are profoundly concerned about the resulting perceptible negative impact on students and student employees.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
1) Conduct an external review of the GSC. We recommend specific attention to: employee performance; resource and staffing concerns; funding source and sufficiency; and revisiting the campus reporting structure. The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals is ideally suited to help identify external reviewers.

2) Conduct immediate and annual performance reviews for all GSC employees including review of position descriptions and the establishment of performance expectations. GSC employees must develop a professional development plan and be accountable for meeting performance goals.

3) Immediately discharge the President’s LGBTQ Commission and reconstitute a new advisory body, if necessary, in a manner that complements the CDO’s and director’s work rather than competes with it. GSC employees must be understood as campus
experts, leaders, and advisors for all students, staff, faculty, and administrators. The President’s LGBTQ Commission, in particular, appears to be in conflict with the office formally charged to lead this university effort.

4) Pending external review notwithstanding, GSC employees should enhance the outreach and profile of the GSC to promote better collaboration across campus. Publicity and other center communications must be timelier.

5) Develop a facilities management plan to support future infrastructure and technology needs of the GSC.

V. MULTICULTURAL STUDENT SERVICES CENTER

The stated mission of the Multicultural Student Services Center (MSSC) is to “engage students, faculty, staff, administrators, and other allies in creating and sustaining a campus culture in which diverse persons, organizations, and groups can learn and develop to their greatest potential, and participate in society to their maximum ability.” The unit has experienced a recent leadership transition after having had the benefit of a long-serving director. The current director has occupied the position for approximately 14 months.

OBSERVATIONS

Review and Revise Unit Mission
Formerly an entity within the Division of Student Affairs, the focus of the unit is almost entirely on student support services, though its mission articulates broader reach. This points to a need for the MSSC to revisit its mission and vision statements to ensure congruence with its actual role and functions. Following this review, the unit’s engagement strategies and website should be reconciled accordingly.

Programmatically, the MSSC administers extensive events that attract sizable student audiences. Data indicates that the MSSC supports approximately 27 multicultural student organizations, most of which are undergraduate.

Center usage data indicate that students utilize the MSSC meeting space extensively, with more than 900 visitors* over a three month period. There is speculation that the recent usage increase is due, in part, to multicultural student organizations reportedly being encouraged to relocate their offices from the Memorial Student Union to the MSSC. Regardless, these data suggest that the facility and its services are deemed important by these users. The center’s work would benefit from routine assessments to better understand programmatic and organizational impacts.

Staffing and Management Strategy
The MSSC is currently staffed with only two full-time employees: the director and the fiscal clerk. For reasons unknown to the External Review Team, the assistant director position has remained vacant for several months, and we were informed that the corresponding salary savings

*It is unclear as to whether these are “unique” visitors or if individuals may have been counted more than once.
from the vacant position had been redirected to increase programming. The director reported that he routinely works more than 40 hours per week to staff the building and support these programs. This administrative arrangement requires examination and remedy.

**Facility Maintenance**
The self-study report indicates that the MSSC facility is in need of structural updates, including technology systems, building repairs, and routine maintenance.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
1) Conduct an external review of the MSSC. We recommend specific attention to: mission clarification; creating a culture of assessment and data-informed programming; appropriate level of staffing and funding; and facility usage.

2) Conduct immediate and annual performance reviews for all MSSC employees including review of position descriptions and establishment of performance expectations. MSSC employees must develop professional development plans and be accountable for meeting performance goals.

3) Immediately initiate the search to hire a full-time assistant director, if not already in progress.

4) After careful review and assessment of current programming, we recommend programs—existing and new—be aligned to support shared student learning outcomes.

**VI. WOMEN’S CENTER**
The mission of the Women’s Center (WC) is to “provide an empowering space which promotes social justice for every member of the community, regardless of gender, gender identity, body, ability, sexual orientation, race, spirituality, and ethnicity.”

**OBSERVATIONS**

**Mission Renewal**
The WC was established in the early 1970s and was led by its founding director through late 2016. The unit’s mission has not been reaffirmed or revised despite recent leadership changes and a new landscape for the work of campus-based women’s resource centers.

The center’s self-report lacked detail, organization, and quality, and reflected minimal effort from employees who had been directed by the campus administration to perform a critical self-assessment. However, in review of the limited self-study reports for the center and its three program areas—Violence Prevention and Advocacy Services (VPAS), Women’s Center Residential Program (WDRP), and Women’s Center Residential Dining Services (WCRDS)—and in light of information shared and observed through the site visit, we found insufficient management of a model that combines a traditional women’s center with a residence hall. This has resulted in a potentially unsustainable operation, as staff reported working in a state of perpetual “crisis management.”
The WC staff refers to the center as URI’s “best kept secret,” acknowledging that many on campus remain unfamiliar with the services and resource available. Notably, neither the WCRDS program nor the WDRP has a stated mission or purpose. This makes it challenging to understand whether their efforts are aligned with national standards of practice and provides no grounding for assessment of outcomes. All areas of the WC would be enhanced through benchmarking against peer programs, increasing attention to formal assessment, updating its mission and goals, and implementing a comprehensive marketing strategy.

Training, Ongoing Professional Development, and Accountability
In addition, it was noted that there exists little or no training or orientation for unit employees. This lapse is of great concern given the nature of support and resources available through the WC, the liability associated with managing a residential facility, and the center’s facilitation of violence prevention and advocacy services for the campus community.

Appropriate Levels of Staffing and Program Alignment
It was reported that two of the WC staff positions had been relocated within the university, leaving the director and coordinator to manage an increased workload. Self-study reports and in-person interviews highlight staff stress, inability to prioritize, irregular supervision, poor documentation, and minimal evaluation. Additionally, one of the aforementioned relocations resulted in the Bystander Intervention Program being delivered from two, independent locations. This confuses stakeholders, results in inconsistent and uncoordinated educational deliverables (which in turn dilutes critical learning outcomes), and makes it difficult to assess the campus-wide impact of programmatic interventions.

Document review reveals that prior to 2014, the WC had the full complement of staff they are now requesting (specifically, the two positions that were relocated), yet we note the absence of clear justifications for restoring these positions, as well as unit goals, outcomes, manuals, budgets, trainings, and strategic plans necessary for success.

Facility Location, Management, and Funding
It was clear that there is a positive relationship between the WC and the GSC located across the street, resulting in collaborative programming, frequent communication, student engagement, and allyship. The proximity of these two centers is a benefit, but the location at the entrance to the URI campus isolates them from the rest of the CED units.

WC staff indicated that they are comfortable with the combined center and residence hall model at URI, but that facilities challenges exist in the 13,000-square-foot space. Currently, there is no up-to-date long-term maintenance plan for the WC building, and funding is reportedly not readily accessible to address all renovation needs as they arise.

WC staff are reportedly managing complex budgets ranging from residents’ housing and dining to coin-operated laundry. Funding for staff, general operations, maintenance, and programming flows from a variety of sources, including student fees, campus units, historic grant/state funds, supplemental funding from the dean of students, and even coin-operated laundry.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1) It was reported that the WC and its functions recently undertook a comprehensive review, though we were unclear as to whether those findings were sufficient or adopted. If these findings are applicable and sufficient, we recommend their implementation. If this prior report is determined to be insufficient, we recommend that you conduct a more careful external review of the WC and its functions with specific attention to: mission clarification; internal organizational alignment; appropriate level of staffing; appropriate levels of funding as well as fiscal support to manage various funding streams; creating a culture of assessment and data-informed programming; and employee performance review and accountability.

2) Conduct immediate and annual performance reviews for all WC employees including review of position descriptions and performance expectations. WC employees must develop professional development plans and be accountable for meeting performance goals.

3) Develop WC operations manual detailing WC management, staff expectations, training resources/orientation materials, key programming, and strategic plan.

4) Reevaluate the administrative locations of the Bystander Intervention Program. At present, there appears to be no coordination of content, intended outcomes, or assessment. The program’s effectiveness may be enhanced through intentional alignment and coordination.

5) While we recommend more careful examination, we believe URI would benefit from having the residential and dining components, currently located in the WC portfolio, transferred to the Division of Student Affairs, where these functions may be guided by content professionals. Likewise, the considerable facilities management responsibilities might be better located with subject matter experts. Both of these functions require expertise and substantial time allocation. If these responsibilities are realigned, it would free up time for WC employees to devote to the center’s core mission. If it is determined that these components should remain in the WC, we recommend exploring a formal Memorandum of Understanding with Residential Life, Dining, and Facilities/Grounds detailing fiduciary responsibilities, including but not limited to building maintenance, fiscal accountability, and reporting relationships.
VII. SUMMARY

The University of Rhode Island’s sincere commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion is quite clear to the External Review Team. While the campus community observes signs of this commitment, there is a general sense that the university has yet to reach its full potential in creating the welcoming and inclusive campus community everyone desires.

URI is fortunate to have so many faculty, staff, and students who are eager to help advance its shared goals. These champions are among those who participated in the external review out of a desire to help the university achieve demonstrable progress. The disequilibrium we observed is not uncommon in organizations that are evolving, adapting, and realigning governance structures. The commissioning of this external review signifies your willingness to evaluate your current performance and to make necessary adjustments.

As you consider these recommendations and continue to create the conditions for the work of CED to thrive, we recommend careful attention to the student experience. As our focus was primarily on the structure and functioning of the CED and its reporting units, we did not leave with a clear understanding of how students are experiencing the current organizational and institutional dynamics. In addition, URI alumni perspectives might be considered, as they can attest to the university’s progress and also provide historical context regarding the origin of several seemingly intractable issues.

The creation of units such as CED in and of itself does not guarantee successful outcomes. These units and their leaders need to be empowered to lead and must have consistent support from and collaboration with campus and community members.
REFERENCES


