Response to having classes on Veterans Day for the URI Academic Calendar Fall 2020

Choice is **Election Day** or **Veterans Day**

Hello Dr. Meenach,

Thank you for reaching out to the URI Student Veterans Organization. We understand your dilemma. After discussing with our members and other Student Veterans. We feel that having class on Veterans Day would be unfortunate and we would penalized for observing our cultural heritage.

According to the US Census the current Veterans population as of 2017 was 18.2 million. Of all those Veterans, some dating back to WWII, less than a third have a bachelor’s degree or higher.\(^1\) We make this point because even if it is an excused absence, we will have lost the opportunity to learn. We will be one day behind our peers. Higher education is not an obligation that is a debt to Veterans, it is an opportunity given to a demographic of highly skilled and experienced women and men who deserve the same opportunity given to every scholar on campus.

Veterans are active members of their local community who volunteer on Veterans Day. We participate in bands, speak at schools, march in parades, and represent the honor and memory of the Veterans before us. Some are still in the military serving in the National Guard or Reserves. Some are members of a veteran service organization like the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, or the Disabled Veterans of America. Veterans Day is more than just a holiday or a free meal. We remember the empty chair and place setting. We give thanks to the end of past wars and pray for the future of those still serving.

\(^1\) [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk)
Veterans Day is observed not only on campus but all throughout our country and in small communities. The students are not the only Veterans on campus either. The bus drivers, staff services, administration, and faculty includes Veterans as well. These individuals will not be able to support their Veteran communities if they have to work. This systemically affects not only the students but also the staff.

Civic duty is a great thing to promote and we applaud the effort to encourage young adults to vote. The student population at URI is 17,974 of which 46.1% are considered out-of-state.² A little over 8,000 of those students would have to file absentee ballots. Of the remaining in-state student population an estimated 3,000 would actually vote. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, the past 2018 midterm election estimated 31% of eligible young voters, age 18-29, voted. Another thing to consider is the RI polling place hours from 7am to 8pm for all cities with the exception of one on Election Day.³ Time management is an important skill to master. If a student, staff, or faculty is having a difficult time voting in a 13 hour window, we are sure they could request an exception from the University of Rhode Island to perform their civic duty.

What we say and how we say it has a power to influence others. But words are meaningless without the action to back it. A holiday without celebration is hollow gesture. Please consider the broader impression that holding classes on Veterans Day would have to other schools and students.

Being a few of the 65,470 Veterans and family who live in the Ocean State, we believe all Rhode Islanders should have time on Veterans Day to honor and respect those who have served and those who are still serving. We believe that it would set a poor precedence for the flagship public university of the State of Rhode Island to hold classes on Veterans Day Fall 2020

² https://www.uri.edu/about/facts/
³ https://vote.sos.ri.gov/ovr/info/polling_place_hours
or any other year following. We are observing our military heritage that honors our commitment to returning warriors.