

University of Rhode Island

Honors Program Review

Site Visit March 27 & 28, 2023

Submitted by:

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Honors Program Evaluation and Review Report

Executive Summary

We believe that a transformative *Honors Institute at URI* could be built with the well-established and widely-renowned *Honors Colloquium* as its center and foundation. The *Honors Colloquium* is an absolutely unique and justly celebrated crown jewel for the University of Rhode Island, but its potential as a locus for public, celebrated, and metamorphic teaching and learning is relatively untapped. The *Honors Colloquium* brings some of URI's best students and faculty into contact with some of the most revolutionary thinkers of our time, and it addresses some of the grand challenges that are facing all of us. If the power of the *Honors Colloquium* can be wedded to the intentionally structured but widely inclusive learning that is at the center of a well-built *Honors Program* through its unique and challenging curriculum, then URI will be able to establish an educational environment that is specially tailored to enhance the learning of its best students. An *Honors Institute at URI* could be a novel, exciting, and "tip of the spear" Honors unit that could quickly propel the University of Rhode Island to the forefront of innovation in Honors. The steps to achieve that transformation would be:

- Bring together the leadership stakeholders at URI to cement support for the *Honors Institute*.
- Establish a Fundraising and Development campaign to name both the *Honors Institute* and the *Honors Colloquium* (as well as other Honors components).
- Alter the flow of budgetary funding from the central administration so that Honors becomes a resource opportunity for the campus (instead of a cost center, as it is now).
- Retain the current leadership for Honors but condense the three part-time Associate Director positions into a single full-time position.
- Devise methods to raise the visible profile of Honors as the "crown jewel of learning excellence" on the URI campus.
- Establish an Honors Faculty on the URI campus (similar to the status of Graduate Faculty) who are charged with the oversight and governance of Honors.
- Establish a two-tier admissions process for Honors by adding formal admission to the Honors Institute during a student's second year.
- Rework the Honors curriculum so that it contains Honors offerings across all four baccalaureate years that are measurably "broader, deeper, and more complex" than other learning environments at URI.
- Develop a comprehensive assessment plan for Honors learning.
- Develop stable advising protocols, including an electronic degree audit, for the new Honors curriculum.
- Provide appropriate administrative support for Honors, particularly for the support of the Honors Colloquium and the enhanced Honors budgetary processes.
- Rely on the expertise of seasoned National Collegiate Honors Council individuals to help shape all the above-described processes by bringing that expertise to the URI campus on a regular basis.

Honors Program Evaluation and Review Report

Process of the Review

Dr. Douglass Sullivan-González, of the University of Mississippi, and Dr. Greg Lanier of The University of New Mexico, were invited to conduct a review of the Honors Program at the University of Rhode Island by Dr. Karen de Bruin, Director of the University of Rhode Island Honors Program. After agreeing on the dates for the on-campus site visit, Drs. Sullivan-González and Lanier received an extensive and highly detailed Self-Study of the URI Honors Program. The Site Visit occurred on March 27 & 28, 2023.

Dr. Douglass Sullivan-González served as the dean of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College (SMBHC) at the University of Mississippi from 2003 to 2021. During his tenure as dean, the SMBHC grew from 375 students to more than 1700 and he raised more than \$35 million with three Chancellors for the SMBHC's program and endowment. Sullivan-González co-authored the 2019 article on "The Value Added of Honors Programs in Recruitment, Retention, and Student Success: Impacts of the Honors College at the University of Mississippi." Sullivan-González served as the Co-Chair of the National Collegiate Honors Council's Assessment and Evaluation Committee in 2013-2014 and was a member of that committee from 2012 to 2021. Sullivan-González is an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor in Honors education and has reviewed programs at Purdue University, Syracuse University, and the College of New Jersey.

Dr. Greg Lanier has served as the Dean of University College and the Director of the Kugelman Honors Program at The University of West Florida and as the Dean of the Honors College at the University of New Mexico. Dr. Lanier has served as the President of the National Collegiate Honors Council and is one of that governing body's Past-Presidents as well as a member of the Charter Class of NCHC Fellows, is a co-Chair of the NCHC Assessment and Evaluation Committee, is a co-author of the NCHC monograph, A Practical Handbook for Honors Program and Honors College Evaluation and Assessment, is a former co-Chair and current member of the NCHC Finance Committee, and is the former President of both the Southern Regional and Florida Honors Councils, is an author and presenter of numerous articles and presentations on Honors education. Dr Lanier is an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor with extensive experience in Honors education, having reviewed and evaluated nearly 30 Honors units during his career.

The contents of this report reflect the findings of two days of meetings with administrators, faculty and students, augmented by the information contained in the documents obtained prior to and during the visit. While on the URI campus, Drs. Sullivan-González and Lanier met with:

- President Marc Parlange
- Provost Barbara Wolfe
- Honors Director Karen de Bruin
- Jeannette Riley, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences; Christy Ashley, Associate Dean, College of Business; Becky Sartini, Associate Dean, College of Environment and Life Sciences; Deborah Reibe, Interim Dean, College of Health Sciences; Paula Bontempi, Dean, Graduate School of Oceanography; Anthony Marchese, Dean, College of Engineering
- Lil O'Rourke, President, URI Foundation
- Dean Libutti, Associate Vice President for Enrollment and Student Success
- Cynthia Bonn, Dean of Admission
- Kathleen Maher, Director, Office of National Fellowships and Academic Opportunities
- Jill Doerner, Associate Director, Honors; Smita Ramnarain, Associate Director, Honors; Katie McIntyre, Associate Director, Honors
- Andrew Simmons, Assistant Director and Pre-Health Professions Advisor, Honors

- Donald DeHayes, Provost Emeritus; Richard McIntyre, Professor, Economics; Leonard Kahn, Chair, Physics; Cheryl Foster, Professor, Political Science
- Anna Blake, Program Coordinator, Honors
- Melissa Stevens, Specialist, Honors
- Honors students: Luke Meunier '26; Lohith Chatragadda '26; Stephen Coutu '24; Hollie Johnson '24.
- Non-Honors Student Eric Bickford '24

Narrative Summary

It is our considered opinion that the Honors Program at the University of Rhode Island stands at the edge of an amazing and exciting transformation, and that the changes achieved by Honors could have ripple effects that launch the University of Rhode Island toward the highest tier of institutions in the Northeast. The responsibility for choosing to take that step lies clearly at the top—with the President, the Provost, and the College Deans—since it will take the support of the collective leadership at URI to effect the transformation. Surprisingly, however, this transformation can be accomplished without a large infusion of new funding into the Honors landscape. We believe that the necessary and fundamental support, in terms of both funding and general enthusiasm for Honors, already exists at the University of Rhode Island. That said, our primary finding is that the many wonderful and substantial pieces of Honors at URI have never been assembled into a coherent, intentionally designed, and effective structure that will deeply benefit both the Honors students who chose to attend URI as well as the entire University of Rhode Island campus and community. The path that we believe will lead to that brave new world begins with the establishment of an *Honors Institute at URI* that houses both the Honors *Colloquium* and the Honors *Program*.

As Shakespeare tells us that “There is a tide in the affairs of men / Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.” That tide is lapping at the shores of the University of Rhode Island even now, and this is the time. An *Honors Institute at URI* could be built with the well-established and widely-renowned *Honors Colloquium* as its center and foundation. The *Honors Colloquium* is an absolutely unique and justly celebrated crown jewel for the University of Rhode Island. The *Honors Colloquium* brings the surrounding community to the URI campus, it brings some of URI’s best students and faculty into contact with some of the most revolutionary thinkers of our time, and it brings forth the best solutions to some of the grand challenges that are facing all of us. If the power of the *Honors Colloquium* can be wedded to the intentionally structured but widely inclusive learning that is at the center of a well-built *Honors Program* through its unique and challenging curriculum, then URI will be able to establish an educational environment that is specially tailored to enhance the learning of its best students. In terms of the overall Honors landscape in the nation, we envision the *Honors Institute at URI* to be a hybrid structure that blends aspects of an Honors College with those of an Honors Program. The result could be a novel, exciting, and cutting-edge Honors unit that could quickly propel The University of Rhode Island to the forefront of innovation in Honors.

As we report in the **Recommendations** section below, it appears to us “that the funds that flow toward Honors activities on the URI campus are most likely adequate . . . to deliver the enhanced mission” of a transformational *Honors Institute*. The fiscal challenge will be to restructure the budgetary flows so that the benefits to Honors and to the University of Rhode Island are stable, transparent, and reliable. That said, URI should nevertheless begin restructuring its priorities so that the *Honors Institute at URI* can be widely regarded as a funding opportunity that can benefit any and all other units on the URI campus. It is our collective experience that the investment of what is from an institutional perspective a truly trivial amount of funding will result in tremendous immediate returns especially in the recruitment, retention, and quality of the top-level students that URI desires to attract. Further, it is reasonable to expect that an investment of energy in and attention to Honors now will result in significant long-term returns to the institution by raising its academic profile, by attracting a portion of the large

number of high-achieving students who are available in the wider area but do not choose to attend URI, and by increasing the amount of annual giving to URI. Some institutions that are similar to URI report that Honors alumni give back at a rate that is three times greater than the rest of the alumni population. For those reasons, we strongly urge the President and Provost of the University of Rhode Island to make the strategic investments and structural changes that will create one of the most vital and viable aspects of its campus, the institutional crown jewel called the *Honors Institute at URI*.

If the decision is made to create the *Honors Institute at URI*, there will be six aspects crucial to that endeavor:

1. A top-to-bottom reformation of the Honors curriculum.
2. A complete overhaul of the Honors budget processes (which might be the “tip of the spear” for budget reform in general at URI).
3. The creation of a comprehensive Fundraising and Development strategy for Honors that will take advantage of the transformational naming opportunities that will arise from the *Honors Institute at URI*.
4. Alterations and expansions of the Honors recruitment strategies and the admission processes for Honors.
5. Development of the Honors Leadership and the on-campus Honors pedagogy to begin the incorporation of cutting-edge Honors educational experiences.
6. The enhancement of the visual and symbolic profile of Honors at URI.

We will briefly address each of those areas in order before providing an analysis using the nationally normed review paradigm developed by the National Collegiate Honors Council. Recommendations will conclude the analysis.

The New Honors Curriculum.

In general, we think that the current Honors curriculum on the URI campus is too strongly “captured” by General Education requirements, and that structure hampers the effectiveness and appeal of Honors to students who want to move quickly into completing the requirements for their chosen major. That lack of appeal is felt most strongly by those Honors students who are pursuing degrees in the STEM programs or professional programs like Nursing or Business or Engineering. Carefully designed Honors educational experiences enhance the students’ knowledge and skills in three areas at the vast majority of institutions. First, there is a broadening vector that depends heavily on interdisciplinary learning (in practice, this is probably the most widespread of all Honors activity in the country), and these experiences are often integrated into courses that satisfy both General Education requirements and Honors requirements. The second common vector in Honors is often referred to as “deepening:” it is a series of experiences that give a student extensive experience in the chosen major or discipline and is frequently capped by a significant research/creative activity component. Nearly every student we spoke to, no matter the major, was dissatisfied with the options for Honors experiences once they had progressed a term or two into their major courses. That dissatisfaction could be morphed into an area for great potential development if the proper curricular structure can be built. The final vector is “complexity.” There is a wide range of possibilities in this area, but they can all be more or less grouped as “active learning” enhancements that force students to go well beyond the fundamental educational tasks of remembering and understanding. We noted some activity occurring in the Honors classes at URI, but it is not widespread and strategically integrated into a coherent curriculum.. Finally, although the students reported that Honors courses tend to be quite interesting and enjoyable, they could not identify a coherent educational purpose that guided their experiences in Honors classes other than small class sizes and like-minded students around them who enjoy a discussion-based form of learning. That perception alone suggests that the curriculum needs refocusing and revision.

To that end, we here suggest that URI at large begin a series of conversations designed to discover what the purpose of Honors should be and how it can be interwoven into the extant fabric of the Honors Colloquium. Whatever the method or format, it is imperative that URI have a frank and campus-wide discussion of the purpose and focus of learning for its Honors students. There are a number of

potential foci for Honors, ranging from Global Leadership to Community Activism to Sustainability; the specific focus for Honors at URI should emerge from the culture that is unique to URI and central to the long-term impact of the Honors Colloquium. It will be a great benefit if the President or Provost would take the lead in initiating that conversation so that the campus can come to a clear and widespread understanding of what the role of an Honors Institute on the campus should be, and how all of the students who come through the Honors experience are exposed to and eventually epitomize the knowledge, skills, and values that are central to the URI mission. In the “Recommendations” sections we will sketch out a tentative curricular structure that might serve.

The Budget Process

As we report below, the “process by which funds flow from the central administration out to the units that are engaged in Honors activity is at best obscure, and at the worst—which is probably the case—impenetrably labyrinthine and byzantine.” Although we repeatedly asked about the budget that supports Honors at URI and how it is ultimately determined, we never received a definitive answer. There seem to be a number of casual arrangements that may have been determined in the past, but there does not seem to be a crisp and definitive accounting of the funding for Honors at URI. That points to an infrastructure challenge for Honors that is simply crippling. Like every other academic unit, Honors must have control of its own budget to determine its destiny.

The good news, however, is that the funding that does flow toward Honors is probably substantial, once an accurate accounting system for Honors can be devised and implemented. From our admittedly limited perspective, it appears that an allocation of at least \$100,000/annum supports the Honors Colloquium, although not all of that flows directly to Honors. Further there is as well a substantial amount of funding that flows through the College of Arts and Sciences and supports Honors sections of general education classes. Those two examples are laudable and suggest health, but in practice the current “flow-through” funding structure places Honors in the beggar’s position, like Blanche Dubois, dependent on the “kindness of strangers” for its daily sustenance.

Thus the first task for URI in this area will be to establish a true baseline for Honors funding by congregating all of the costs expended for any activity that falls under the Honors umbrella (i.e. the support for the Honors administration as it currently exists in its quarters in Lippitt Hall, plus all costs for all Honors classes of any kind), plus all costs for non-scheduled Honors activity (capstone projects, directed studies, service learning, etc.). Once that number is known, the URI budget as a whole should be restructured so that all of those funds flow directly to Honors, and then Honors in turn redirects them out to Honors activities as appropriate. When this structure is achieved, it will create the campus-wide perception that Honors is a “resource opportunity” for the other units on the campus, not an unwelcome and irritating cost center (the perception now).

Once the total amount of funding for Honors has been identified, we suggest that URI employ a fairly simple formula that will give an accurate sense of an institution’s financial commitment to Honors: the sum total of administrative/teaching/operational dollars (but no scholarship dollars) that Honors receives (allocated annually as part of the institution’s recurring budget) divided by the total number of students in the program. Nationally, that formula yields a number that can be benchmarked as follows: an allocation of \$900/student indicates a *minimally* funded program—one that is barely functional and often struggling. At the other end of the spectrum, Cadillac Honors Programs and Colleges enjoy as much as \$2,500 - \$3,000/student. Anything below the \$900 threshold can be considered to be a severely underfunded or “tin cup” type of program. We encourage the University of Rhode Island to, over time, bring its support for Honors into the “Cadillac” category as soon as is feasible, and let us hopefully prompt that shift by pointing out how small of an investment that could be. The average annual cost of just one faculty line is around \$150,000 once salary, fringe benefits and other costs are factored in; the current active Honors population at URI seems to be about 1,000. Thus sending the proceeds of just one faculty line to Honors could increase the support for Honors by \$150/student.

Fundraising and Development

We strongly encourage the President of URI and the President of the URI Foundation to begin devising ways to highlight the many successes of Honors in its “selling” of the university to potential donors. The shift to an Honors Institute that is anchored by the widely renowned and highly successful Honors Colloquium will provide ready-made naming opportunities for donors of great means. Beyond those, there are many opportunities for donors to support excellence in general and to give funds that support intelligent, and highly motivated students. Potential donors may also be interested in smaller donations for specific projects, including scholarships for experiential learning, international travel, and undergraduate research. In that effort, the development of the Honors alumni should receive specific attention, since on some campuses it has been shown that Honors alumni give back to the institution at three times the rate of the general student population.

Recruiting and Admissions

Although this statement may ruffle some feathers, we think that the current process for admitting students into the Honors Program at URI is problematic. As it stands now, the office of Enrollment and Student Success makes the decisions as to which students are admitted to Honors—not the Honors office. As we report below, that method is well outside the best practices in Honors education nationally and also has the undesirable effect of actually reducing the commitment of students to Honors education. When students are more or less “drafted” into Honors because they fit a “test and GPA” profile, they most often take one or at best two Honors classes (often because their parents are pushing them to do so) but then quickly disappear because they decide that Honors offers nothing that interests them or helps them in their pursuit of their major. Because we are quite familiar with the challenges created by that structure, it was not at all a surprise to see that the completion rate for Honors at URI is dismally low: only 8%.

It would be best, in our opinion, to establish a two-tier process for admission into the *Honors Institute* as plans move forward. Given the long-standing process that is already in place, and the centrality that process has in the Office of Enrollment’s recruiting efforts, we suggest that URI establish a firm distinction between students who are “*Honors Eligible*” and those students who are fully admitted to the *Honors Institute at URI*—who could be called (and this is just an example), “*Presidential Honors Scholars*.” This would allow the Office of Enrollment to continue the practice of recruiting students using their current practices, and Enrollment would continue to code students entering the University of Rhode Island as “Honors Eligible” or not. Any student designated as Honors Eligible would be allowed to register for the core Honors Sustainability class (to be described in the discussion on **Honors Curriculum** below) and perhaps one or two other Honors courses during their first year at URI. But in order to gain the designation of Presidential Honors Scholar and be thereby admitted to the *Honors Institute at URI*, a student would need to formally apply to the Honors Institute by no later than the second term of residence at URI. Further details about the admissions process can be found below.

Leadership and Pedagogy

When Honors is working well on a campus, there is only one other office that has anything like the reach and scope of the interface that characterizes Honors: the office of the institution’s President or Chancellor. As many involved in Honors education have long observed, a properly functioning Honors program operates most like a complete “mini-institution” housed inside the institution as a whole. Honors interfaces not only with all of the academic units and departments on campus on a daily basis in order to deliver its curriculum and serve its many students, but it also regularly interfaces with the Offices of Admission, Housing and Residential Life, Student Affairs, Service Learning, Financial Aid, Alumni Affairs, International Education, Grants and Research, Institutional Outreach, and Institutional Advancement and Development. Finding the leader who has this skill to manage those many, many tasks can often be problematic.

Happily, we believe that Honors at URI is already in capable hands. Dr. Karen de Bruin, the newly appointed Honors Director, is energetic, politic, enthusiastic, capable, and highly regarded across the campus. We think that she is clearly the Honors leader for the foreseeable future. That said, we recognize that Dr. de Bruin does not have a much experience with Honors administrative or Honors

educational practice. We therefore think that Dr. de Bruin would greatly benefit if she were to receive intensive and long-term coaching from seasoned Honors professionals. Also, Dr. de Bruin would also benefit greatly from the development opportunities that are offered by the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) and from the Northeast Regional Honors Council (NRHC). At a bare minimum, Dr. de Bruin should attend the NCHC and NRHC conferences each year. Best would be for URI to retain one or two individuals to semi-formally mentor Dr. de Bruin.

Moreover, even though we recognize that our time and therefore understanding of the lay of the land on the URI campus is limited, we did not receive the impression that there is a wealth of Honors knowledge or best practices in the institution at large. We therefore suggest that the University of Rhode Island's faculty at large could greatly benefit from the lessons that could be offered by seasoned Honors professionals. It was clear to us that the URI faculty in general are quite enthusiastic about Honors, but it was also clear that the URI faculty in general did not have solid and workable ideas about crafting Honors classes and other forms of Honors learning environments. We were, frankly, dismayed that the URI students reported that Honors classes were on the whole simply small classes with lots of discussion. There is far, far more to Honors pedagogy than small classes. Therefore, we hope that URI will commit to hosting, at least once a term, Honors course and pedagogy development workshops for the next few years. It will be crucial to the long-term success of the Honors Institute to have at its center a wide, inclusive, and exciting series of classes that propel the Honors students toward success, but the structure of such isn't an apparent given. As with Dr. de Bruin, we think that the faculty at URI who will be involved in delivering the Honors courses could use some long-term and intensive coaching.

Visibility and Profile

Immediate steps should be taken to raise the visibility of Honors on the URI campus and beyond. Although the Honors space in Lippitt Hall is generally warm and welcoming, there is nothing outside the building that trumpets the presence of an Honors Program. The Honors Program should be the "flagship" of the academic units and should articulate the excellences it seeks to cultivate. Honors Programs aspire to raise the intellectual and cultural caliber of the entire campus, not solely the selected Honors students. Although the general perception on the URI campus is that the Honors Program should move forward, the Honors Program needs a much more prominent visual profile to do so. Unless one knows exactly what to look for and where to look for it, it is a bit of a challenge to identify the Honors activity on the URI campus. But even knowing where to look, we did not see the prominent signage and other forms of visibility (banners, tee shirts, hoodies, prominent references in all administrative buildings and the libraries, etc.) that abound elsewhere and signal the pride of place that Honors should have on campus. And even though nearly everyone at URI is familiar with it, the same lack of visibility haunts the Honors Colloquium. We therefore strongly recommend that steps be taken to raise the "brand visibility" of Honors on the URI campus and beyond.

Analysis of Strengths and Concerns

Strengths

There are many strengths of the Honors Program at URI University of Rhode Island, and not all will be mentioned here. But those points that stand out are:

- The Honors Colloquium, obviously, one of URI's central crown jewels.
- The arrival of a new President who might be willing to place Honors at the center of a new vision for URI.
- The Office of National Fellowships and Academic Opportunities, which provides singularly successful opportunities for URI's top students.
- The Pre-Health Professions Advising Program.
- Lots of passion and support for the Honors mission from many quarters of the institution.
- A new, energetic, focused, and extremely capable Director of Honors.

- The location of the University of Rhode Island, at the heart of so many opportunities of all kinds afforded by the Northeast.

Areas of Concern

The above statements notwithstanding, there are some areas of significant concern and some challenges that face the Honors Program at the University of Rhode Island at this time.

- There is an absolute and overriding need to revise the flow of budgetary resources so that Honors not only enjoys true control over the funds that drive its mission but also for the sake of true transparency. Since its inception, URI has operated its Honors Program on what could most optimistically be called “casual contracting,” with no protocols or processes that establish long-term stability. The budgetary flow at URI needs to be altered so that Honors becomes a resource opportunity for the campus, not a cost center. The good news is that the overall flow of funds towards Honors at the present time is most likely enough to support the mission of an Honors Institute.
- As stated above, there is a need to rework and refocus the Honors curriculum. The students consistently reported that there are very, very few truly Honors classroom experiences beyond the early years, and that lack of opportunities directly contributes to the very high attrition rate in Honors. The development of a broader curricular paradigm would bring the advantage of incorporating a wider range of faculty who would be involved in the teaching of Honors classes, and that by itself is a desired good.
- As the Honors curriculum changes, there will come an overriding need for Honors to gain appropriate control over all facets of the Honors curriculum, especially regarding the selection of Honors faculty and the scheduling of Honors courses. The Honors Program simply cannot flourish if it finds itself continually at the mercy of faculty and department chairs who may provide some of what Honors needs, but perhaps not always exactly what the Honors Program needs to have taught at the specific time it needs to be taught. Some of us refer to this as the “horse-trading” aspect of Honors. The Honors Director needs to be in nearly constant contact with the colleges, departments, and faculty who form the core of the Honors stakeholders on the campus. This is a primary reason why all funding for Honors must flow through the Honors unit since that will give the Honors Director something to negotiate with when the Honors curriculum is scheduled each term.
- There is a need to integrate active learning strategies and interdisciplinary studies into the Honors curriculum in a purposeful and coherent manner. Even though the Honors classes seem to provide opportunities for a significant amount of discussion, it is not clear that other active learning strategies common to Honors courses elsewhere are being widely used. A small class with active and committed students does not make an Honors educational experience, especially on a campus where many classes are already in the less than 25 students range. We think that there is a pressing need at URI to support faculty who are interested in developing innovative and transformational classroom pedagogies for the Honors curriculum.
- Currently, there are no full ride scholarships offered directly by and through the Honors Program to help recruit students to the URI campus, and that is very unusual for an Honors Program at a state’s flagship university.
- Efforts need to be made to broaden participation in Honors from the professional programs.

- A comprehensive Assessment Plan with very specific Student Learning Outcomes for Honors needs to be developed.

Analysis Using the NCHC Program Review Instrument

(Full rubric for this instrument attached as Appendix A)

Section 1

Honors Mission, Strategic Plan, and Assessment

1.1 The program has mission statement or charter document that includes the objectives of honors.

Finding: **Developing.** The current published Mission Statement for Honors, “*The mission of the Honors Program is to develop and maintain an interdisciplinary intellectual community; to stimulate intellectual excitement for all participants; to inspire and enhance critical, creative, and integrative thinking; and to foster opportunities to broaden intellectual development,*” is a generic statement that omits the central heart of Honors activity on the URI campus, the renowned “Honors Colloquium.” We would strongly suggest that a new mission statement for Honors be crafted that is centered on a reorganized and very prominent **Honors Institute** that would highlight the URI commitment to Big Thinking as is presented on its webpage: “As a major research university defined by innovation and big thinking, URI offers its undergraduate, graduate, and professional students distinctive educational opportunities designed to meet the global challenges of today’s world and the rapidly evolving needs of tomorrow. That’s why we’re here.” The Honors Colloquium is in many ways the epitome of “Big Thinking,” and a prominent build around that concept could transform the focus the mission and vision not only of Honors but of URI in general.

1.2 The honors mission statement is consistent with the institution’s mission.

Finding: **Developing.** As above.

1.3 The program has a strategic plan, approved by the institution if appropriate, that guides resource allocation.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** Currently, no strategic plan for Honors exists, and the last document that considered the state of Honors at URI is dated 2005, nearly two decades ago. The goal to create a strategic plan for Honors by June of 2023 is laudable, but a bit hasty. We would rather recommend a complete overhaul of the future of Honors be completed by December of 2023.

1.4 The program’s strategic plan is periodically reviewed and revised.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** As above.

1.5 The program engages in continuous “closed-loop” assessment and evaluation.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** Currently, there is no assessment or evaluation of either the Honors Program or the Honors Colloquium.

1.6 Qualified peers regularly and periodically review the program.

Finding: **Developing.** This is the very first review of the URI Honors Program to be

conducted by NCHC reviewers, and is thus a good step forward. In the future, the Honors Program should be added to the regular rotation of Academic Program Reviews.

1.7 The program is open to the need for change in order to maintain its distinctive position of offering exceptional and enhanced educational opportunities to honors students.

Finding: **Proficient.** The University of Rhode Island is currently undergoing a period of extensive change and transition. The President, the Provost, and the Honors Director are all relatively new in their positions, and the need for extensive change seems to be acknowledged widely and is very much in the wind. This transition moment offers an ideal context for the extensive changes, realignments, and reallocations that will be suggested in this report. As Shakespeare puts it, "There is a tide in the affairs of men / Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune." The University of Rhode Island is on the margin of such a tide, one that can lift all of the boats on the URI campus. If the opportunities detailed in this report can be seized and actualized, an **Honors Institute at URI** will raise the entire institution to undreamt-of heights.

Section 2

Enrollment Management and Scholarships

2.1 The program has clear and effective recruitment strategies and practices.

Finding: **Developing.** The Honors Program and the Pre-Health staff are active in a number of on-campus recruiting activities, including Open Houses and "Evenings with Honors" held in conjunction with the Office of Admissions. While those activities are laudable, there does not seem to be any active outreach by the Honors Programs. At the national level, it is fairly standard for Honors personnel to be intensely involved (alongside the Admissions recruiters) in High School visits, College fairs, and the like.

2.2 A clearly articulated set of admission criteria (e.g., GPA, test scores, a written essay, satisfactory progress, etc.) identifies the targeted student population served by the Honors program.

Finding: **Developing.** The current Honors admission process is as follows: "High school students are automatically invited to join the Honors Program if they have a weighted recalculated high school GPA of 3.8 or weighted recalculated high school GPA of 3.6 and a combined SAT score of 1300 or higher or an ACT composite score of 27 or higher. Weighted recalculated high school GPAs are determined by the Office of Admissions and once students meet the eligibility requirements, they receive an official letter of invitation from the Honors Program Director (sent by Admissions)." This method of passive admissions works against the interests of Honors and results in both a very poor yield and very poor commitment to Honors. Roughly 1,000 students out of the 1,500 students invited enroll as Honors students yielding only (one-third of the total incoming class, a number that is WAY too high), 66% (nationally, that number is over 90% and can reach as high as 98%). Further the commitment by students to pursue Honors experiences suffers a precipitous drop-off with only 8% of the incoming Honors class completing the Honors curriculum during their baccalaureate experience. The Self-Study states that the

admission criteria and recruitment strategies will change in the future; suggestions to those ends will appear later in this document.

2.3 The program identifies enrollment management strategies aligned with institution's overall objectives.

Finding: **Developing.** It was very clear to us that the Office of Enrollment Management is extremely interested in maintaining a strong hand in the Honors Admissions process since the number of Honors students invited by and admitted to URI is critical to the overall URI admissions yield. There are, however, much more effective methods to strengthen both the partnership between Honors and Enrollment Management available, and we would encourage all parties to consider the suggestions offered later in this document.

2.4 The program clearly specifies retention and probation policies and requirements.

Finding: **Developing.** The published retention policy for Honors at URI states that students must "must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.40 or higher" to continue in the program; further, Honors students are expected to take at least one Honors class/term during their time at URI. There is also a path for reinstatement for those who find that their GPA fall below 3.4. Those criteria follow national standards, but unfortunately, the "current enrollment management software does not allow us to easily track which students are actively pursuing and/or abandoning the Honors program." That must change. If NCAA athletes at URI can be tracked (and they are), so can Honors students.

2.5 The program clearly specifies the requirements needed for satisfactory completion.

Finding: **Proficient.** The published completion policies are clear, exact, and widely accessible on both the website and printed materials. But as will be discussed later in this document, a completion threshold of only 18 credits in Honors falls well short of national practices commonly found at flagship state universities (27 to 33 credits).

2.6 When honors scholarships are available, the honors scholarship policies and processes promote student success and align with the enrollment management strategies.

Finding: **Proficient.** There are a number of scholarships and awards that are available to Honors Students at URI, some controlled by Honors and some controlled by Pre-health. That said, it appears to us that the vast bulk of those scholarships and awards are bestowed on Honors Students after they are admitted and become active in the program. The missing piece are recruiting scholarships that can be used by the Honors Program to strengthen and shape the incoming class each year.

2.7 When honors scholarships are available, the honors scholarship policies and processes align with Honors program scholarship and financial aid protocols.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** As above.

2.8 When appropriate, two-year and four-year programs have articulation agreements by which honors graduates from two-year programs who meet

previously agreed-upon requirements are accepted into four-year honors programs.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** There are no Honors articulation agreements with local 2-year institutions to be found at URI.

2.9 When applicable, articulation agreements are based on clearly delineated SLOs offering exceptional and enhanced educational opportunities to honors students.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** As above.

Section 3

Administrative Structures

3.1 The place of honors in the administrative structure of the institution is appropriate to the mission and functions of the program.

Finding: **Developing.** At URI, the Honors Program reports to the Provost, as is proper, but it does not have the fully mature and established integration into the daily administrative life at URI that is common elsewhere. We share the deep concerns about the representational issues delineated in the Self Study. At a bare minimum, immediate steps should be taken to better position the Honors presence at the Dean's level, in all Budgetary processes and negotiations, and in the Admissions processes. Further and more detailed suggestions will be offered later in this document.

3.2 The honors director reports to the chief academic officer of the institution.

Finding: Both **Proficient** and **Undeveloped.** The Honors Director reports, as is proper, directly to the Provost, and it is clear that Honors has historically benefited greatly from the Provost's support. However, the Honors Director does not share the same authority and position as the College Deans (in a number of areas), and that will continue to create operational challenges for Honors. As we will strongly suggest below, when Honors at URI assumes its natural and appropriate status as an Honors Institute, the leader of that unit (still titled the Director of Honors) should be elevated to the decanal level and seen as the leader of an important academic unit at URI.

3.3 The honors program is a permanent, stable, and highly regarded academic unit that contributes to a lasting tradition of excellence.

Finding: As above, both **Proficient** and **Undeveloped.** There is no doubt that the Honors Colloquium speaker series is a highly regarded event that contributes greatly to the tradition of academic excellence at URI. In many ways, the Honors Colloquium should be the core around which most of an Honors Institute at URI could be constructed. Currently, although the Honors Colloquium brings extensive visibility and excitement to the campus, to these outsiders it seemed to be only tangentially linked to the learning, research, service, and leadership activities that are at the heart of the baccalaureate experience for an Honors student. In our opinion, the goal for Honors at URI should be to craft teaching and learning experiences around the Honors Colloquium for Honors Student and Honors faculty as a hallmark

feature. Further, the Honors Curriculum at URI should look to scaffold in-class, out-of-class, and extracurricular experiences that provide an absolutely unique and deeply enriching environment for URI's best and brightest students. The challenge will be converting what is now one of URI's absolute "crown jewels" into a more active, impactful, and sustained (from the student experience viewpoint) teaching and learning environment. As has often been said about a thriving Honors program, Honors works best and elevates the university the most when it is not just a crown jewel, but also the "tip of the spear" that forms the cutting edge of innovation on campus in teaching/learning, research, and service.

Section 4

Curriculum

4.1 The program offers carefully designed educational experiences that meet the needs and abilities of the undergraduate students it serves.

Finding: **Developing.** Currently, Honors Students at URI must complete the following:

- One Honors course at the 100/200 level
- One Honors Colloquium course (HPR 2XX)
- One Honors course at the 300/400 level
- One Elective Honors Course at any level
- One Honors project - HPR 401
- One Honors course at the 400-level, either HPR 411 or HPR 412 OR one Honors project—HPR 402 (HPR 402 is for those students who choose to do a six-credit, full academic year Honors Project)

Although there seems to be a historic call for Honors courses to "include one or more of the following criteria: interdisciplinary approach to the subject matter, emphasis on developing critical thinking, reading, and writing skills, project-based learning, work with primary sources rather than textbooks, more emphasis on cooperative learning, and providing a core content area to a primarily competency-based course," there seem to be very few parameters that govern the design and delivery of Honors course, and even fewer parameters that shape the overall structure of Honors learning at URI. Part of the problem stems no doubt from a complete lack of assessment practices (to be addressed later), and part of the problem no doubt stems from the haphazard fashion by which Honors courses are offered each year. Further, there is no overarching sense of what an Honors faculty should be or should do, and that contributes to our sense that the current Honors curriculum is a scatter gun approach, at best. The good news is that Honors courses at URI are regularly offered; the bad news is that that there is no discernable purpose for an Honors curriculum at present. This deficiency was broadly noted in the Self Study and seems to have been one of the impetuses for this Program Review. The "New Directions" appendix in the Self-Study is a good start to a thorough curricular overhaul, and further discussion of curricular options will be found later in this document.

4.2 The honors curriculum purposefully aligns with and enhances the mission of the honors program.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** We agree with the Self Study: "It is our opinion that the Honors Program is not purposefully aligned with its mission nor with the institutional mission."

4.3 The curricular design leads to a mastery of identified learning outcomes.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** Again we agree with the Self Study: “program does not currently have clearly defined programmatic learning outcomes.”

4.4 The pedagogic practices of the program are based on clearly identified learning outcomes.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** As above.

4.5 The honors program exercises considerable control over the honors curriculum.

Finding: **Developing.** The Honors Program has limited control over its course offerings, and all too often finds itself at the mercy of the goodwill of the other units on campus. Part of this difficulty stems from the system of budgetary support for Honors; some of the difficulty stems from a context in which commitments to Honors teaching have been casual arrangements at best. At most institutions, the Honors Director or Dean has the final and exclusive say over all of the choices that lead to the delivery of Honors classes (faculty, times, locations, etc.).

4.6 The program offers specialized active learning courses, seminars, and colloquia.

Finding: **Both Proficient and Developing.** Clearly, the Honors Colloquium class is one of URI's great strengths and signature opportunities, although relatively few Honors students actually take the course (that must change). Further, the small class size and close interaction between faculty and students are some of the program's strengths. We were, however, disappointed not to discover a greater spread and utilization of the active learning strategies that are common in Honors elsewhere. When we pushed both students and faculty as to what makes Honors classes at URI different from non-Honors classes, too often we only heard that it was “small classes and lots of discussion.” But that descriptor also applies to nearly any upper-level program or major-specific required course (which the students freely admitted). We encourage those engaged with Honors to explore the many pedagogical options that have been developed and championed by NCHC as URI explores a new direction for Honors.

4.7 The program offers class-based experiential learning opportunities.

Finding: **Developing.** There seem to be sporadic forays into active learning opportunities for Honors Students on the URI campus, but they are not consistently or intentionally integrated into the program. The Honors Project, which serves as the Honors Capstone experience, is a good opportunity, but one that does not impact the majority of Honors student at URI since only 8% of any Honors class takes the capstone and thereby finishes the Honors curriculum.

4.8 The program offers undergraduate research or other independent-study options.

Finding: **Developing.** As above.

4.9 The program promotes internships, service learning, and field experiences when appropriate.

Finding: **Developing.** As above.

4.10 The program requirements constitute a substantial portion of the participants' undergraduate work.

Finding: **Developing.** Typically across the land, Honors students complete 20% to 25% of their studies within an Honors context, which at URI translates to 24 to 30 credit hours. The Associates-level completion requirements call for 12 credit hours of Honors work (20%), and the Baccalaureate-level requirements call for 24 credit hours (also 20%). As was stated above, the current requirement of 18 credit hours is just too low. We therefore urge URI to consider broadening its curriculum and increasing the number of required hours. The development of courses/opportunities with the Honors pedagogic vectors of deepening (normally in the major) and complexity (normally Honors-specific courses) would be a solid and efficient way of redressing this infelicity. In addition, we have reservations about the proposed scaffolding of Honors certificates (one for the completion of 12 Honors credits, one for the completion of 18 Honors credits, and one for the completion of 30 Honors credits). National best practices call for only one completion paradigm.

4.11 The curriculum is designed so that honors requirements can, when appropriate, also satisfy general education requirements, major or disciplinary requirements, and pre-professional or professional training requirements.

Finding: **Developing.** In general, the overlap of Honors courses with General Education is good. That said, there is little to no overlap with major or disciplinary requirements, especially in the crucial pre-professional areas (i.e. pre-Med). That deficiency severely impacts the trajectory of students through the Honors paradigm, and is a primary reason so few students admitted to Honors complete their Honors studies. The Honors students we interviewed almost universally reported that there simply were very few Honors options for them to take after their first two or three terms.

Section 5

Infrastructure

5.1 The program is allocated an annual budget that adequately supports the mission of the program.

Finding: **Developing.** From what we could discern from both the Self Study and from the Site Visit, the total amount of funding that supports the Honors Program at URI is probably adequate at this time. That said, the process by which funds flow from the central administration out to the units that are engaged in Honors activity is at best obscure, and at the worst—which is probably the case—impenetrably labyrinthine and byzantine. For example, the cost of delivering the Honors Colloquium is reportedly \$100,000 per year. In its annual base budget, Honors receives \$75,000 to support the Colloquium, and the shortfall is covered by contributions of \$25,000 to \$30,000 from other units on campus (i.e. Engineering and Arts and Sciences and Business). There is simply no need for such a convoluted flow of funding. Instead of, say, hoping that a College will redirect some \$5,000 from the College budget to the Honors budget, the funds should simply flow directly to Honors. The same principle applies to the support of Honors teaching. The current practice of forcing the Honors Program to “rely on ‘loaned’ or ‘in kind’ contributions” from the colleges

is simply untenable, and places undue stress on all parties. Even worse, it creates the perception on the campus that Honors is a “cost-center” that sucks up needed resources. A far better model would be for all of the funds that are used to support Honors activity (the Colloquium, all of the Honors classes, all of the support that goes toward Honors Projects) to be allocated directly to Honors, which would then distribute those funds as best benefits Honors activities on the URI campus. That would shift the perception of Honors to becoming a “resource opportunity” on campus, and that will quickly drive other units on campus to support Honors activity since Honors would become a node for supplemental funding for the other units.

5.2 The program is allocated personnel resources that adequately support the mission of the program.

Finding: **Developing.** We believe that the current funding is adequate to support the Honors mission, if all of the Honors fund were to flow directly and completely to Honors and not through the current, byzantine funding model. National best practices call for Honors to be staffed by full-time positions, but that is not the case at URI. In specific terms, we think that support for the Honors Director should be a 100% and 12-month line allocated directly to Honors, and that the support for the Associate Directors should be treated similarly. We suggest that it would probably be best to have 1 full-time Associate Director rather than three 1/3 time Associate Directors (to buttress this assertion, we would like to report that the three current Associate Directors all reported that they felt whipsawed or stretched thin since they are by definition servants of two masters). Once these changes are made, there will probably be the wherewithal to add one more general administrative assistant to the Honors Staff. In sum, there is probably adequate funding to support the mission of Honors, but the configuration needs tweaking.

5.3 The program is allocated space for honors support staff, faculty, and administrative functions as appropriate.

Finding: **Mature.** The space in Lippitt Hall that houses Honors is appropriate and perhaps even generous given that relatively few Honors Programs or College across the nation can boast of having their own classrooms. Beyond that, the Lippitt spaces are open and welcoming, and they include a variety of spaces. The only negative that we noted was the lack of visible signage—there needs to be some type of prominent announcement that Honors occupies a place of pride and privilege on the URI campus.

5.4 The program is allocated space for honors student functions as appropriate that may include areas for an honors lounge, library, reading rooms, computer facilities, or other student-related needs.

Finding: **Mature.** The Honors space in Lippitt Hall has a welcoming and comfortable Honors Lounge in addition to its classrooms.

5.5 The program is allocated suitable, preferably prominent, space on campus that provides both access for the students and a focal point for honors activity.

Finding: **Proficient.** We think that Lippitt Hall is a suitable space for Honors on the URI campus, but as stated above, more needs to be done to make it a prominent and visible focal point for Honors and excellence.

5.6 If the honors program has a significant residential component, honors

housing is designed to meet the academic and social needs of honors students.

Finding: **N/A.** Currently there is no dedicated Honors Housing on the URI campus.

5.7 The distinction achieved by the completion of the honors requirements is publically announced and recorded.

Finding: **Mature.** The completion of Honors requirements is noted on the student's transcript and the students are also recognized by the Provost at graduation.

Section 6

Faculty Governance

6.1 The program has a standing committee or council of faculty members that is governed by a charter, constitution, or similar document.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** In general, this is an entire area that needs significant attention as the Honors Program at URI finds a new future. The documents that seem to govern Honors at URI are scattered and inconsistent, with the operational result that they are mostly ignored. And currently this neglect seems to be coming from both inside Honors and the University around Honors. We agree with the Self Study that "The current governance structure of the Honors Program is clearly inadequate and poorly defined."

6.2 The standing committee works in concert with the honors director or other administrative officer(s) and is involved in honors curriculum, governance, policy, development, and evaluation deliberations.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** As above.

6.3 The selection of committee members appropriately corresponds to the institution's principles of faculty governance.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** As above.

6.4 The composition of the committee represents the colleges and/or departments served by the program and elicits support for the program from across the campus.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** As above.

6.5 The composition of the committee includes honors student membership(s).

Finding: **Undeveloped.** As above.

6.6 The honors program exercises considerable control over the selection of Honors faculty and the scheduling of Honors courses.

Finding: **Undeveloped.** As per the Self Study: "Currently, there is no standard process for the selection of Honors faculty." This selection process can be easily redressed,

and one component of that change will be the alteration of the budget process so that Honors can be involved in the selection of courses and faculty, instead of the current situation where Honors must go, hat in hand, around the university and depend on the kindness of the colleges and departments.

6.7 The criteria for selection of honors faculty include exceptional teaching skills, the ability to provide intellectual leadership and mentoring for able students, and support for the mission of honors education

Finding: **Undeveloped.** As the above suggests, there is no method for selecting (or developing) Honors faculty to be certain that classroom practices are consistent with the program's overall goals. The act of "screening" faculty through review of course syllabi is a good step, but only a very short first step when measured against nationwide standard practices. It is crucial that the Honors Director have significant input, if not complete and final say over the selection and scheduling of the Honors courses. We would strongly encourage URI to consider creating a program of professional development designed to engage URI's best and most energetic teachers in Honors pedagogy.

Section 7

Student Services and Co-Curricular Programs

7.1 Honors students receive honors-related academic advising from qualified faculty and/or staff.

Finding: **Mature.** The Honors Students at URI enjoy consistent, purposeful, and professional advising, offered to them by nearly everyone in the Honors offices. The Honors students are happy with the attention and care afforded to them by Honors; their only major concern, and the fault here lies with the Honors curriculum and not the advising staff or mechanisms, that there are simply very, very few Honors options for them to consider once they are mostly done with general education and are primarily taking classes that are required by their major.

7.2 The program offers extracurricular activities that purposefully enhance the honors curriculum.

Finding: **Proficient to Developing.** Once again, the Honors Colloquium emerges as a primary vehicle that drives much of the Honors activity on the URI campus. The Honors Colloquium affords many opportunities for students to interact with such luminaries as Coretta Scott King, Pete Seeger, Jessica Valenti, Christopher Reeves, Geraldine Brooks, Bob Cousy and many others. But what is a strength can also be a drawback if not handled correctly; we regret to report that many Honors students don't take advantage of the opportunities. In fact, not one of the students we interviewed reported attending any Honors Colloquium event. That is a defect that can easily be corrected, and we strongly encourage URI to create a new Honors curriculum that places participation in the Colloquium firmly at the center. Beyond that, the addition of Melissa Stevens to the Honors staff should jumpstart the extracurricular components of the Honors Program; her mentorship and support of the Honors Student Advisory Council and the Honors Ambassador Committee should pay off handsomely.

7.3 There is a standing student-level committee or organization that is governed by a charter, constitution, or similar document.

Finding: **Developing.** The Honors Student Advisory Council, which was at one time active, has been revived and looks to become a great addition to the Honors landscape at URI given time.

7.4 The student-level committee or organization has as much autonomy as possible but is assured a voice in the governance and direction of the honors program – i.e., directly advises the honors director/dean.

Finding: **To be Decided.** As stated above, the Honors Student Advisory Council is just getting underway again.

7.5 The student-level committee or organization helps maintain excellence in the program through appropriate and focused activities.

Finding: **To be Decided.** As above.

7.6 The program provides priority enrollment for active honors students in recognition of scheduling difficulties caused by the need to satisfy both honors and major program(s) requirements.

Finding: **Mature.** Honors students at URI who are in good standing and making progress toward completing the Honors requirements enjoy priority registration.

7.7 The program promotes and supports participation in regional and national conferences, Honors Semesters, and international programs.

Finding: **Proficient.** Although the COVID years put a distinct damper on things, URI Honor students participate in many Honors societies, in international programs and are increasing participation in the national Honors conferences.

7.8 If the honors program has a significant residential component, the residential life functions are designed to meet the academic and social needs of honors students.

Finding: **N/A.** There is no residential Honors component at URI.

Section 8

Excellence and Innovation

8.1 The program provides a locus of visible and highly reputed activity across the campus.

Finding: **Mature and Developing.** Once again, the Honors Colloquium shines as it provides a locus for visible and highly reputed intellectual activity on the URI campus. In addition, the annual Honors research poster event raises the Honors profile. But beyond those powerful tools, there is little to no trumpeting of the Honors program as an academic node on the URI campus. There is no exterior signage anywhere that signals Honors, nor are there any Honors posters, banners, or apparel visible across the campus. That is very unusual and needs to be addressed. We encourage URI to begin altering that state by creating an Honors Institute that would house both the Colloquium and the Program in a prominent place at URI. Further, a

tighter integration of the Colloquium into the program's requirements and daily student life will also increase visibility and prestige. Lastly, we encourage URI to develop a specific Honors Institute logo that can be deployed at any and all Honors events, particularly at the Colloquium. The success of the Office of National Fellowships and Academic Opportunities also increases the prestige of Honors at URI, as does the Pre-Health Advising Office.

8.2 The program exemplifies highly reputed standards and models of excellence for students and faculty across the campus.

Finding: **Proficient.** All of the pedagogic materials reviewed, as well as the testimony of faculty, students, staff, and administrators reflect high standards and a consistent focus on excellence. The only drawback in this area is the low completion rate for the program. Since only 80 or so students complete the program (out of the 1000+ who start), much of that excellence is going for naught.

8.3 The program serves as a laboratory within which faculty feel welcome to experiment with new subjects, approaches, and pedagogies.

Finding: **Proficient.** The Honors Colloquium is almost by definition and design an experimental approach to teaching and learning, and it thus provides a central locus that can drive Honors innovation across the campus. Beyond the Colloquium, there are a number of courses that offer experimental learning opportunities, but those seem to us to be inconsistent and sporadic rather than ingrained and intentional. Clearly, URI has the ability to let Honors be a campus leader in this area, and we believe that the new focus that will come with the shift to an Honors Institute with a new curriculum will enhance that activity.

8.4 Innovative efforts in curriculum and pedagogical design that were developed in honors become institutionalized across the campus.

Finding: **Proficient.** As above.

Recommendations

The Position of Honors at the University of Rhode Island

An Honors Institute at URI

Currently, there are two distinct but only loosely related components that form Honors at URI: The **Honors Colloquium**, and the **Honors Program**. The **Honors Colloquium** is clearly a time-honored, high-profile, and powerful component of the intellectual and academic landscape at URI; it is a crown jewel and should be supported and continued at all costs. The **Honors Program**, which at its center is the academic curriculum taken by URI Honors students, also enjoys a number of great strengths and advantages, including strong buy-in from the URI faculty at large. However, those two entities are not tightly intertwined (as they should be), and, further, the history of the Honors Program at URI suggests that it developed discontinuously through fits and starts, with little attention paid to overall structures that reflect a deliberate design with coherent and interlocking parts (one faculty member went so far as to describe the URI Honors Program as “a Frankenstein”). Now would be the time to establish an overarching structure that would bring coherence, purpose, and probably great renown to Honors at URI. We therefore strongly suggest that, as the first and very public step in this transformation, that the President of URI announce the formation of *The Honors Institute at URI*, which would consolidate all of the Honors activity at URI under a single, significant, and very high profile academic unit that would enhance not only the prestige of the **Honors Colloquium**, but also create the appropriate budgetary, governance, curricular, and fundraising/development structures that would enhance not only Honors but the entire URI campus.

Components and Structure of The Honors Institute at URI

We envision that the **Honors Colloquium** would be at the core of the new **Honors Institute**. The Honors Colloquium is a crown jewel program that has long enhanced URI, but we believe that its power and impact could be enhanced. Our primary concern with the Honors Colloquium at this time is that it rests far too heavily on the shoulders of the faculty chosen to lead the program in a given year. Those brave souls who have served as Honors Colloquium Coordinators and have shouldered the burden report how stimulating, satisfying and simply wonderful the experience of leading an Honors Colloquium can be, but they also report that doing so comes at the cost of devoting an inordinate amount of time, personal energy, and other resources to the project. A robust and well-staffed Honors Institute would provide a solid infrastructure that would not only ease some of the burden currently borne by the faculty, but also establish a historical locus for the many processes required to mount the Honors Colloquium.

We also envision that the **Honors Program** would provide the curricular and academic core of the new **Honors Institute**. Further, we would like to see a much, much tighter and more prominent link between the Honors Colloquium and the academic requirements of the Honors Program. Although the Honors Colloquium class is offered regularly, it is only one option among many and many, if not most, if the Honors students do not take it (we must report with great regret that none of the Honors students we spoke to at URI had taken the Colloquium course, and only a very few had even attended a Colloquium lecture). Given the prominence, the uniqueness, and the interdisciplinary stretch of the Colloquium and its attendant course, we believe that it should be the cornerstone of the Honors Curriculum and required without exception for all Honors students. Further, since the Honors Colloquium would become a crucial and central component of the Honors curriculum, housing both entities within the same administrative unit would provide maximal interaction and interrelation of both parts.

Beyond the Colloquium and the Program, the **Honors Institute** should also house the very successful **Office of National Fellowships and Academic Opportunities** and the equally successful **Pre-Health Professions Advising Program**. Beyond those, we encourage the University of Rhode Island to consider whether other similar units might be brought into the **Honors Institute** structure.

Nationally, it is common that **Offices of Undergraduate Research** reside under the Honors umbrella at flagship or R-1 institutions since those Honors students need to complete a research/creative activity capstone project to complete the Honors requirements. Sometimes the Study Abroad offices and the office that supports Service Learning are also housed in the Honors unit if the Honors requirements require international learning or service, but those choices are best left up to the institution as it uses the Honors unit to reflect its unique culture and mission.

Leadership of The Honors Institute at URI

We suggest that the leader of the *Honors Institute at URI* could be a **Director**, but—whatever the title—it will be absolutely critical that the leader of the Honors Institute at URI should hold a position in the overall administrative structure that makes her/him the equivalent of a College Dean at URI. As was stated above, currently the “Honors Director does not share the same authority and position as the College Deans (in a number of areas), and that does and will continue to create operational challenges for Honors.” If URI embraces the creation of an *Honors Institute*, then the leader of that unit must be elevated to the decanal level and regarded widely across the campus as the leader of an important, unique, and highly impactful academic unit at URI. There tend to be three major vectors that define the position of the lead Honors administrator on any campus: 1) duties related to Honors enrollment management, 2) duties related to Honors student support services, and 3) duties related to delivering the program of study known as the Honors curriculum. At URI, there will be a fourth vector: duties related to delivering the Honors Colloquium. In the current configuration of Honors at URI, we cannot see how the Director can deliver a key undergraduate curriculum since the director has little to no interaction with the academic deans or department chairs. The key curricular duties and responsibilities that must be discharged by an Honors Director include curricular revision and oversight, extensive faculty development and faculty recruitment, and the delivery and oversight of a coherent curriculum. Therefore, the Honors Director needs to be a respected and included voice in any and all discussions that involve the Deans and the Colleges as they discharge their tasks of academic delivery and resource allocation. Beyond that primary responsibility are the tasks of developing/revising recruitment, admissions, and scholarship deployment strategies for Honors, overseeing the proper advisement of a significant cohort of Honors students as well as overseeing any other units that might be housed in the Honors Institute.

Budget and Infrastructure for the Honors Institute at URI

The Budget Allocation Process

From what we could discern from our review of the submitted materials and our time on the URI campus, it appears to us that the funds that flow toward Honors activities on the URI campus are most likely adequate to deliver the current mission, and perhaps even adequate to deliver the enhanced mission of transforming into an *Honors Institute*. However, as we stated above, “the process by which funds flow from the central administration out to the units that are engaged in Honors activity is at best obscure, and at the worst—which is probably the case—impenetrably labyrinthine and byzantine.” We therefore strongly suggest that all monies that support any activities that occur under the auspices of the Honors Institute be allocated directly to the Honors Institute and then redirected by Honors out to the various units on campus. That laundry list of funding should include any and all support for the Honors Colloquium, any and all support for Honors classes of any type (including mentorship/supervision of Honors projects), funds for marketing, recruiting in general, “raising the flag” for Honors, for Honors Advising, and for any and all efforts that support services and activities for Honors students. Nationally, Honors units work best when they are considered to be “pass-through” opportunities for funding that can flow to any unit on the campus. The worst situation is the state in which URI now finds itself: it is a “tin cup” program that depends extensively on the largess of the units around it. We were therefore not at all surprised to learn that the surrounding units, especially the Colleges, regard Honors at URI as a “cost center” that they feel they must support with the shirt of their backs—but only when and if they can. This shift to “Honors-

first” funding would provide critical and notable benefits for the two central Honors endeavors at URI: The Honors Colloquium and the Honors Curriculum. As we stated above, if all funds destined for the Honors Colloquium were allocated to the Honors Institute first, and then redistributed out to the Colleges and/or other units as appropriate, it would enhance the stability of the Colloquium and decrease the stress the present system now imposes on those delivering the series. But the benefit to the Colloquium pales next to the many benefits that would course toward the Honors curriculum should such a change be enacted.

An Honors curriculum cannot be developed or even function without exemplary teaching. Pure and simple, the delivery of unique and challenging Honors classes is the core Honors mission. At most institutions nationwide, the Honors Director negotiates Honors teaching assignments, but that is presently not the case at the University of Rhode Island. We received the distinct impression that the predominate mode of crafting the schedule of Honors courses for a given term is simply to accept whatever teachers and classes that the Colleges were willing to offer, and then to supplement those offerings by hiring part-time faculty to “plug the holes” so to speak. Neither of those is a national best practice, and neither of those should ever occur at a state’s flagship institution. The assignment of the best undergraduate teachers on campus to deliver classes to the best undergraduate students on that campus comprises the absolute backbone of the Honors experience. Therefore, URI must develop a mechanism that gives to the Honors Director substantial say over who teaches which Honors courses offered at which times (all three of those components, the “who” teaches, the “what” gets taught and the days and times the classes are offered are absolutely critical to the health of an Honors curriculum). Nationally, the most common method of achieving that goals is that the Honors Director receives an annual budget allocation that is used to “buy” Honors teaching. And even though we all know that there are huge disparities in the salary costs for faculty across a campus (the College of Business faculty obviously command a much more handsome salary than do the faculty members in the Department of Philosophy), it is best not to complicate the world with various shades of compensation. What works the best is for the Honors Director to be able to negotiate with the College Deans as a group (just one of the many reasons for the Honors Director to be included in the Council of Deans), and then that group collectively agrees on an amount that would support the delivery of a typical 3 credit hour Honors class. And when it is time to build the Honors course schedule for the next term, the Honors director has the wherewithal to influence the slate of courses, teachers, and times (in consultation and conjunction, of course, with the impacted Deans and Department Chairs).

This method also has the advantage of transparency since all the budget transfers that go out to the various colleges and departments can be tracked on an annual basis which provides a clear and accurate account of the true cost of delivering the Honors curriculum. And there is a major secondary benefit as well; since the funds that flow from Honors out to the departments are not coming from the central source, they are most often not “tagged” for a specific purpose like salary dollars would be, and so the dollars that a department receives from Honors can be used for whatever purpose the Department Chair deems most appropriate. In practice, the Honors “buy-out” funds are most commonly used to hire replacement adjunct teachers, but on most campuses there are a number of units, particularly in those areas that are equipment or supply intensive (not just the hard sciences that so often struggle with laboratory upkeep, but units like Art and Theatre as well), that are very happy to exchange faculty teaching time for equipment (or even travel) funds.

To close this section, we repeat that it appears to us that the funds that currently flow toward Honors activities on the URI campus are most likely adequate to support the new iteration, the Honors Institute. What cannot continue is the casual and ad hoc system currently in place. To be realistic, at some point in the future it will be necessary to increase the funding that flows toward Honors, and so we would like to close this section with a general statement about the cost effectiveness of investing in Honors. According to the information published on its website, the University of Rhode Island has an annual budget of nearly \$1 billion/year. Therefore, from an institutional perspective, the investment of even a single faculty line’s worth of proceeds is a fairly

trivial expenditure, especially given the huge returns in retention, prestige, visibility, and donor giving that Honors pays in the long run. We strongly suggest that the University of Rhode Island bear in mind how cost-effective Honors has always proven itself to be across the nation.

Visibility

Immediate effort must be expended to make the Honors Program far more visible and readily identifiable far and wide across URI campus. External signage, banners, shirts, development of an Honors logo, etc. are all ways of increasing the visibility of Honors and will begin to signal that Honors is a central and crucial URI endeavor. It should be extremely simple to jumpstart this effort by tailoring the upcoming Honors Colloquium materials to trumpet the new Honors Institute at URI. Development of an Honors Logo and Honors signage should be considered mission critical tasks.

Honors Faculty and Honors Governance

As with the current state of funding of the Honors Program at URI, the selection and integration of URI faculty into Honors teaching has historically been ad hoc and casual. The annual call for faculty to suggest new Honors courses is a good start, but it is only that—a start.

First and foremost, URI should develop a formal mechanism for selecting Honors Faculty. The analogy in this area, which is simple and obvious, is the mechanism for selecting Graduate Faculty. As Item 6.7 in the NCHC Program Review instrument states, “The criteria for selection of Honors faculty include exceptional teaching skills, the ability to provide intellectual leadership and mentoring for able students, and support for the mission of Honors education.” Even though many faculty are extremely good teachers of the undergraduates in their fields, that doesn’t always translate into the ability to devise and deliver an excellent learning environment for Honors students. One easy way to start would be to invite appropriate individuals from the National Collegiate Honors Council to come to the URI campus and offer one or more workshops on the successful development of Honors classes. Those faculty who complete the workshop and subsequently offer a successful Honors class would be the first ones on the URI campus to be officially designated as “Honors Faculty.” Down the road, and especially if the Honors Institute at URI becomes a reality, then an NCHC-led Faculty Development Workshop should become an event held every term on the URI campus.

Once a critical mass of Honors Faculty at URI has been established (probably 7 to 10, but they should come from as many Colleges as possible, not just Arts and Sciences or Environment and Life Sciences), those individuals should be invited to form an official URI Honors Advisory Council and develop a charter so that it can work “in concert with the Honors director or other administrative officer(s) and is involved in honors curriculum, governance, policy, development, and evaluation deliberations.”

Admissions

Establish a two-tier process for admission into the ***Honors Institute***. Given the long-standing process that is already in place, and the centrality that process has in the Office of Enrollment’s recruiting efforts, we suggest that URI establish a firm distinction between students who are “***Honors Eligible***” and those students who are fully admitted to the ***Honors Institute at URI***—who could be called (and this is just an example), “***Presidential Honors Scholars***.” The Office of Enrollment would continue the practice of recruiting students using their current practices, and Enrollment would continue to code students entering the University of Rhode Island as “Honors Eligible” or not. Any student designated as Honors Eligible would be allowed to register for the core Honors Sustainability class (to be described in the discussion on ***Honors Curriculum***) and perhaps one or two other Honors courses during their first year at URI. But to gain the designation of Presidential Honors Scholar and be thereby admitted to the ***Honors Institute at URI***, a student would need to formally apply to the Honors Institute by no later than the second term of residence at URI.

Students who are designated as ***Honors Eligible*** would have these tangible benefits during their first year, but only their first year, at URI:

1. Priority registration
2. Access to Honors Advising
3. Access to the Honors spaces in Lippitt Hall
4. Access to the Honors core class, sustainability
5. Access to other 100-level Honors classes

Students who become ***Presidential Honors Scholars*** would have these tangible benefits during their remaining time at URI:

1. Priority registration
2. Access to Honors Advising
3. Access to the Honors spaces in Lippitt Hall
4. Access to the Honors Colloquium class
5. Access to all Honors classes offered at URI, regardless of level
6. Access to all Honors student success initiatives and offerings

This two-tier process would also bring with it the additional benefit of Honors enrollment predictability since we would expect that nearly every student admitted to the Honors Institute would be strongly encouraged (or perhaps required) to take the Honors Colloquium class during their second year at URI. Additionally, this process would probably increase the commitment to Honors since the primary benefit of being an Honors student, priority registration, would disappear unless the student actively commits to Honors education by taking the Honors Colloquium and other classes.

Curriculum

As we stated above, the establishment of the ***Honors Institute at URI*** provides the opportunity for Honors to develop a unique, cutting-edge, and innovative Honors curriculum centered on the long-standing success of the ***Honors Colloquium***. A long-term aspect of this process should be a continuing and campus-wide conversation of what features and aspects of Honors education at the University of Rhode Island are essential, possible, effective, and doable in order to find a unique and attractive focus for the Honors curriculum. This is not and should not be an easy or quick conversation; on many campuses the identification of the core skills and outcomes that define a graduating Honors student can take a year or more. Shaping a curriculum that meets those outcomes can take even more time. But if consensus can be reached about the specificity of the Honors focus, the curricular skeleton outlined below can be shaped so that each and every student who graduates from the Honors Program at URI will have had a more or less common sense of educational enhancements. This paradigm we propose as a starting point for this conversation is as follows:

Year 1

Fall or Spring: The “Onboarding Course”

Equity and Sustainability in New England

3

This course would incorporate many of the goals of the proposed “Imagining Sustainable, Equitable Societies” sketched out in the “New Directions” section of the Self Study. We suggest two modifications to that proposal. 1) The course should, like the “Discover Chicago” Honors course at DePaul University, include a substantial “off-campus” learning component. In this way the course would take immediate advantage of URI’s location, “at the heart of so many opportunities of all kinds afforded by the Northeast.” 2) The course should allow the participation of a wide range of URI full-time faculty, each of whom could tailor a section of the course to her/his disciplinary strength. To propose some examples, a member of the Environmental & Natural Resources Economics department could fashion, say, a section that has at its heart the biological and economic dynamics of Narragansett Bay. A faculty member from

the Department of English could focus on the literature of equity and sustainability, a faculty member from the College of Engineering could focus on sustainable construction techniques, and a faculty member from Nursing could focus a course on the impacts of thanatology. In short, there could be a wide variety of versions and emphases in this course, and each of these courses would have substantial and engaging experiential learning components. Both of those factors will drive students toward participation in Honors.

Fall or Spring: Honors Sections of General Education required courses

3 - 6

These courses are already offered regularly on the URI campus. We would only encourage that the range of these offerings be increased so that there are always 2-3 courses offered in each of URI's General Education areas, save for the "Grand Challenges" overlay. We therefore encourage the development of Honors sections of widely required general education courses, like Introduction to Psychology, Calculus, General Biology, General Chemistry, etc.

Year 2

Fall or Spring: The Honors Colloquium Course

3

This course would be the gateway or entry course for students who are formally accepted into the *Honors Institute*, and we recommend that any student admitted into the *Honors Institute* take the course during their second year. Students who transfer to URI, or who are "late entries" into Honors at URI should take the course as soon as possible. This would be the core and signature Honors course offering at URI, and it should quickly create community for Honors students who are all involved in the same learning experience. This course should always satisfy the "Grand Challenge" general education requirement. Further, this course should also involve the Colloquium's guest speakers in the actual Honors class meetings as much as possible.

Fall or Spring: Honors Sections of General Education required courses

3 - 6

As above

Year 3

Fall or Spring: Honors sections of Major or College-specific "Gateway" courses

3 - 6

This would be an Honors version of a course that is both required broadly by a major program (or even a College in some cases), as well as being a course that is fairly early on in the course sequence for the program. Examples might be a "Fundamentals of Management" course in Business or "Classroom Management" in Education or Electronics 1 in Electrical Engineering. The goal here is to blend the Honors educational environment into classes that are central to the Honors student's chosen major. This would be a chance for URI to develop courses along the NCHC "deepening" vector: courses that give a student extensive experience in the chosen major or discipline, often through research or experiential learning projects, and very frequently leads to the capstone activity of a significant research/creative activity component

Fall or Spring: Honors by Contract courses

3 - 6

The opportunity for Honors students to "convert" any class they are taking into an experience that can be counted for Honors credit is quite common across the nation. At flagship universities like URI, this opportunity is limited to upper-division courses (which works well since Honors students are often quite deep into their major studies by their third year). A brief sketch of "Honors by Contract" possibilities appears below:

Honors by Contract Courses

Many, many possibilities exist for these courses, but Honors by Contract courses should not be burdensome to the faculty. Therefore, Honors by Contract courses should address

two or more of the strategies listed below that enhance and deepen the regular course objectives (this is by no means an all-inclusive or exhaustive list):

- Special or extra research paper
- Interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research
- Formal presentation
- Experiential learning project
- Journal writing
- Special or extra research project
- Critical analysis of the course design
- Teach a segment of the course to the other students
- Special or extra project (group or individual)
- Internship
- Service learning component

Year 4

Fall or Spring: The Honors Project (or other capstone)

3 – 6

From the Self-study: “The Honors Project provides a capstone research, scholarly and creative experience for students completing the Honors Program. It offers our talented and motivated undergraduate students the opportunity for independent, distinguished research and creative work that is oftentimes not available until graduate studies. This project is done under the guidance of both a faculty sponsor and the Associate Director for Honors Projects and culminates in a presentation at the annual Honors Project Conference.

Fall or Spring: Other Honors Courses, Electives or Experiences (as appropriate)

3 – 6

Completion of 30 credit hours of Honors courses would fulfill the requirements for a Baccalaureate degree enhanced with an Honors certificate or similar designation.

Fundraising and Alumni Development

The Honors Institute and the Honors Colloquium provide an ideal nexus for fundraising opportunities. Pursue these opportunities now.

1. Name the Institute >> The XXX Honors Institute
2. Name the Colloquium >> The XXX Honors Colloquium. Depending upon the size of the gift, the Colloquium name could be permanent, or honor a different donor each year.
3. Name scholarships for Honors students >> XXX Honors Scholars in the Honors Institute
4. Name high-profile experiential learning courses that capture the public's imagination around the Honors Institutes critical outcomes (i.e., sustainability, leadership, community-based research). Name a competitive grant for a faculty person to develop a high-profile course with the expectation that the course is taught within the calendar year of the award. Pursue a named gift that annually challenges Honors students to compete at the end of the 2nd year or beginning of the third year for an extraordinary Honors experience locally or globally. Or pursue a named gift for that annually challenges Honors students to compete for startup funds for an entrepreneurial idea that promises significant returns for the greater business community.
5. Cultivate immediately a parents' Honors club to support key activities throughout the year.
6. Establish a leadership council among key graduates of the Honors Program since the commencement of the Honors Program to commit to an annual support drive.
7. Work with your alumni association to develop a coded group of those who graduated through the Honors program or took key classes during their time at URI. Build alumni circles in key cities of Honors graduates to continue their Honors experience with the current Director and to strengthen their tie to URI.

We strongly suggest that appeals for those gifts be made at each and every Honors Colloquium session offered during the 2023-2024 academic year. Further, we strongly suggest that URI immediately invite an appropriate individual from the National Collegiate Honors Council to come to its campus for 1 or 2 days to work with the President, the Provost, the Foundation President (and staff), and the Honors Director (and staff) so that those individuals can better understand the very unique way Honors units best behave and can be used in fundraising endeavors. Honors can be a hugely attractive node for substantial gifts, but the methods and routes that result in giving to Honors are not at all similar to the traditional methods and routes most often used by Offices of Development nationwide. One or two days of training with someone who has secured major gifts for Honors would most likely pay off very handsomely.

Administrative support

When functioning properly, an Honors Program acts in all ways like any other Department or Program, but with a number of other administrative outreach duties as well (Admissions and Recruitment, to Student Affairs, to Residential Life, etc.), and so it is crucial that Honors have an Administrative support position that can help with the overall business process workload (tracking honors students, admissions to the Presidential Honors Scholars, and correspondence with alums). At least one full-time position should be added to the Honors staffing immediately while the three part-time Associate deans positions converge to a singular, full-time Associate dean position

Advising

Protocols for advising Honors students need to be clarified, codified, and consistently applied across the campuses. The Directors do a wonderful job, but the students reported some unevenness in this area. At many institutions it is common for all Honors students to be advised by the Honors staff for at least their first two years with "supplemental" Honors advising occurring during the entire time the students are also receiving advising from their major department.

Assessment

A comprehensive Assessment Plan for Honors should be developed, and that plan must include more specific Student Learning Outcomes for the Honors curriculum as well as mechanisms to gather and analyze both direct and indirect data about Honors learning and the effectiveness of the program so that a culture of constant improvement can be established.

NCHC Workshops and support

At least once per academic year, or perhaps more often as the suggested changes are implemented, experts in Honors curriculum or pedagogy or assessment from the National Collegiate Honors Council should be brought to the URI campus to offer faculty development workshops in Honors active learning or other Honors activities. These workshops need to be directed first at faculty teaching in or interested in teaching in Honors, but they should also be available for other faculty, providing a resource on teaching for all faculty at URI.

Honors Workshops and support

Further faculty development workshops that focus on Honors pedagogy need to be devised and offered regularly. As the new Honors curriculum is being developed, URI should offer at least one Honors development workshop each term for the foreseeable future.

Long-term support

At least one NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor should be brought back to campus to monitor progress and provide assistance to the Honors Director at least once per academic year or as needed.