URI Online Program Development Handbook

Overview

This handbook outlines the process of developing, launching, and maintaining an online program at the University of Rhode Island (URI). URI Online (URIO) works in close collaboration with departments, faculty, and campus partners to ensure programs are academically rigorous, accessible, and competitive in the online marketplace.

The handbook provides:

- Step-by-step guidance on program planning, approval, and launch
- Roles and responsibilities of Program Directors, Faculty Developers, and URI Online
- Regulatory and accreditation requirements
- Resources and contacts for ongoing support

The URI Online Program Development Process

There are five phases to the URIO Online Program Development Process:

1. Call for Proposals

2. Program Design

3. Course Design and Development

4. Marketing and Enrollment

5. Program Launch & Continuous Improvement

For an alternative view of the program development process, view the interactive Program Development Course developed in Rise.

Phase 1: Call for Proposals

To maintain focus and quality, URI Online will release an annual Program **Call for Proposals** identifying **priority market areas** based on workforce demand analyses (e.g., data analytics, sustainability, healthcare innovation, education leadership). Colleges may submit proposals for new or substantially redesigned degrees, certificates, or stackable credentials aligned with these areas.

Prior to submitting a proposal, the Program Director, Department Chair, and/or Dean and/or Associate Dean should schedule a meeting with Heather Sharpes-Smith , *Executive Director of URI Online*, to explore the program idea, define goals, identify target audience, and develop a tentative timeline.

Dean and CBO approval is required as part of the program proposal.

Timeline and Cycle

Each annual Call for Proposal follows a standardized timeline. This predictable cadence allows colleges to plan, allocate resources, and coordinate with marketing and admissions teams.

View the [timeline for programs planning for a Fall 2027 launch](#).

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Criterion	Description
Market Demand	Documented regional/national demand, competitor scan
Distinctiveness & Differentiation	Program's unique value proposition within URI, peer set, industry partnerships
Financial Viability	Projected enrollment, revenue, and resource plan
Institutional Alignment	Alignment with institutional priorities and strategic goals
College Commitment	Faculty engagement, budget co-investment, sustainability plan
Online/Hybrid Readiness	Instructional design capacity, modality flexibility

Funding and Resource Model

Selected proposals will receive URI Online seed funding for program development, covering instructional design, faculty development and pre-launch marketing.

Quality Assurance and Readiness

Programs selected for launch must meet defined readiness standards covering instructional design, accessibility, and learner support. URI Online's instructional design team will apply frameworks such as Quality Matters to ensure academic rigor and consistency across modalities.

Proposal Acceptance

Upon acceptance, the Program Director and/or Department Chair, Associate Dean or Dean, will meet with the core URI Online Leadership team to provide an overview of the next steps in the process.

Institutional Logistics

- Clarify the programmatic calendar model ([7-week accelerated](#), [14-week](#)) and [modality](#)
- Identify [curriculum planning](#), institutional governance, and [regulatory requirements](#) including geographic and international student restrictions
- Develop tentative program development milestones and launch timeline
- Articulate program goals and measures of success
- Identify next steps for [Program and Curriculum (Legislative) Approval](#) and [Program Design](#)

Budget, Enrollment, and Marketing

- Outline the process of developing budget and enrollment forecasting models and alignment with the Budget Impact Statement process.
- Discuss next steps in identifying marketing strategies and planning for program website development
- Task program leadership with identifying potential industry partnerships, transfer pathways, and scholarship opportunities
- Ensure alignment between admission criteria, program requirements, University operations and systems, target audience, and job market

Program and Course Design

- Review the URIO Instructional Design [course development process](#), timeline, and expectations

Phase 2: Program Design and Approval

Program Planning

> ***Key URIO Contacts:*** Heather Sharpes-Smith , Jacqueline Hodges
>
> ***Other roles involved in this phase:*** *Program Director*

Key considerations for this phase include:

- 12-month timeline from idea to launch
- Programs should be designed with cohesion, outcomes alignment, long-term course carousel planning, market demand, and sustainability
- Programs must meet all regulatory and accreditation requirements and curriculum (legislative) approval timelines
- Program Directors and Faculty Developers must ensure they understand the roles and responsibilities of program management, ongoing compliance, and course development

Prior to a program going live on URI's website or being marketed through other mechanisms, **curriculum changes must be approved by the Faculty Senate** through the URI curriculum process:

- **Proposal Forms**: Program proposal (Kuali), assessment plan, library impact statement, budget impact statement
- **Departmental Review**: Faculty review, if required by department
- **Assessment Review**: Review of program map and assessment plan
- **College Curriculum Committee**: Review at the college level
- **Graduate Council / Gen Ed Committee**: As applicable
- **Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee**: Advance to Senate agendas
- **Faculty Senate Approval**: Final campus-level approval
- **President Approval:** Certificate and degree programs
- **Board of Trustees**: Degree programs, BOT meets quarterly
- **Catalog Inclusion**: All legislation must be approved by May for inclusion in the following academic year's catalog

Once the program and courses are approved **by Faculty Senate**, **course design and development** begins. In addition, programs should begin **marketing and enrollment** efforts.

Phase 3: Course Design and Development

Course Design

Key URIO Contacts: *Joannah Portman-Daley* , *Joanna Nagelhout*

Other roles involved in this phase: *Faculty Developers, Program Director*

During this phase, the Program Director and Faculty Developers will work with the URIO Instructional Design (ID) team to review the design process, set course development timelines based on the **course carousel** identified in the Program Development Proposal, and create high quality, QM approved master course shells. A **master course shell** includes the approved learning outcomes, course structure, instructional materials, assessments, and accessibility elements, and serves as the template for all instructors teaching the course.

Online Teaching Qualification

All Faculty must be [qualified to teach online](#) prior to beginning the course development process. There are four paths to qualification as an URI Online instructor:

- Completion of [URI's Online Pedagogy Course](#)
- Certificate of training in online teaching from a national organization such as OLC or QM, and demonstrated competency in URI's learning management system, Brightspace.
- Certificate of training in online teaching from another regionally accredited higher education institution, and demonstrated competency in Brightspace.
- Faculty can submit one of their Brightspace courses to the QM peer review process. If they score above 85%, they "test out" of training.

Program directors should contact Joannah Portman-Daley as soon as they are aware that a faculty developer needs qualification.

Course Design

Using a student-centered approach that incorporates the unique needs and requirements of online learners, URIO uses the [Quality Matters (QM) Rubric Standards](#) as guidelines for designing new online

courses and as a strategy for improving existing courses. Instructional Designers will lead faculty through the design process to ensure that their courses meet QM standards.

All courses must achieve a QM review score of 85% or higher in order to launch.

Course development typically occurs in the semester prior to launch and **all courses must have a completed QM Review one month prior** to the course start date.

Instructional Design Support and Course Development Process

In conjunction with the URIO ID Team, Faculty Developers will determine the best course development option and professional development pathway and will receive seed funding to support their work.

URI Online master courses follow a standardized course design and build process led by an Instructional Designer (ID). This process reduces faculty workload related to course build and technical implementation, allowing faculty to focus on subject-matter expertise. Faculty are responsible for all subject-matter content development, while the ID builds the course in Brightspace and ensures ADA compliance and adherence to Quality Matters standards. Faculty may optionally build course components in collaboration with the ID, if they so choose.

New Online Master Course *A new course build that has never been offered in the online format*	Seed Funding = $2,500
Faculty Responsibility	**Instructional Designer (ID) Responsibility**
- Meet with ID for initial course consultation; discuss best practices of online course design and brainstorm interactive component ideas - Complete course map and syllabus - Provide course content, such as: - Discussion prompts & rubric - Assignment instructions & rubrics - Quiz questions & answers - Meet weekly/biweekly with ID to provide feedback/answer ID questions - Complete subject-matter expert pages in the course including: Start Here, weekly overviews, positioning statements, etc. - Approve final course design before QM review	- Meet with faculty for initial course consultation - Provide feedback to faculty regarding course map, outcomes and syllabus - Design and build course modules and course components using faculty content - Set all release dates and due dates - Ensure course content is ADA compliant and fully accessible - Meet weekly/biweekly with faculty for questions and feedback - Ensure course meets QM standards - Submit for QM review

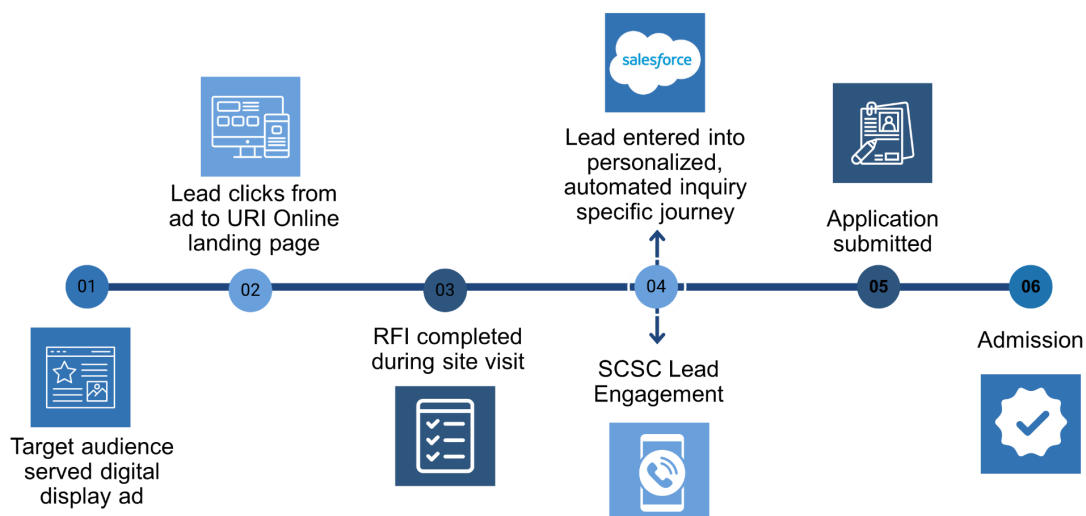| Transitioned Online Master Course *The transition of an existing online course from 14 weeks to 7 weeks, or vice versa*	Seed Funding = $1,500
Faculty Responsibility	**Instructional Designer (ID) Responsibility**
- Meet with ID for review of existing course structure and content; discuss transition best practices - Identify transitioned course changes, including structure, alignment, updates, and additions - Complete transitioned course map and syllabus to ensure alignment and structure - Provide transitioned course components such as: discussion prompts, assignment instructions, quiz questions/answers, rubrics - Revise subject-matter expert pages including: Start Here, weekly overviews, positioning statements, etc. - Meet with ID as needed to provide feedback/answer ID questions - Approve final course design before QM review	- Meet with faculty for initial course consultation - Provide feedback to faculty regarding revised course map, outcomes and syllabus - Design and build course modules and course components - Set all release dates and due dates - Ensure course content is ADA compliant and fully accessible - Meet with faculty as needed for questions and feedback - Ensure course meets QM standards - Submit for QM review
Refreshed Online Master Course *Significant course updates to an existing online course*	Seed Funding = $500
Faculty Responsibility	**Instructional Designer (ID) Responsibility**
- Meet with ID for review of existing Master Course structure and content - Identify any course updates to learning outcomes, content, and assessments - Complete revised course map, if needed, to ensure alignment of refreshed components - Provide revised course components, if needed, such as: syllabus, discussion prompts, assignment instructions, quiz questions/answers, rubrics - Revise subject-matter expert pages, if needed, including: Start Here, weekly overviews, positioning statements, etc. - Approve final course design before QM review	- Meet with faculty for initial course consultation - Provide feedback to faculty regarding course updates - Revise course modules and course components to include any updates - Set all release dates and due dates - Ensure course content is ADA compliant and fully accessible - Meet with faculty as needed for questions and feedback - Ensure course meets QM standards - Submit for QM review

Phase 4: Marketing and Enrollment

Key URIO Contacts: Jenn McWeeney , Marissa Micheletti

Other roles involved in this phase: *Program Director*

Once legislative approvals are obtained, the Program Director should begin working with **URIO Operations and Marketing** in order to:

- Develop and deploy the program website, ensuring inclusion of compliance (NC-SARA) required disclosures, and associated Request for Information (RFI) form(s)
- Implement lead generation strategies, including internal marketing campaigns (to current URI students) and identified print and/or digital media strategies, that target the appropriate program audience
- Connect with industry partners and solidify transfer pathways and scholarship opportunities
- In partnership with URIO Operations, collaborate with the Graduate School or Undergraduate Admission, whichever is applicable, on application development and deployment
- Foster lead management and enrollment conversion in alliance with the URIO Student Contact Support Center (SCSC)
- Identify anticipated student support needs and strategies from inquiry through graduation.

The Lead Journey Overview

01 — Target audience served digital display ad

02 — Lead clicks from ad to URI Online landing page

03 — RFI completed during site visit

04 — Lead entered into personalized, automated inquiry specific journey / SCSC Lead Engagement

05 — Application submitted

06 — Admission

Phase 5: Program Launch and Continuous Improvement

Key URIO Contacts: Jenn McWeeney , Jacqueline Hodges , Joannah Portman-Daley , Marissa Micheletti

Other roles involved in this phase: *Program Director, Faculty Developers*

Program Launch

In preparation for the launch of the program, URIO will:

- Confirm that the application is live and that students can apply to the program
- Optimize conversion through ongoing engagement with students as they move through the lead pipeline from inquiry to enrollment
- Onboard students for successful matriculation by ensuring they are fully set up with required technology and have access to institutional policies, procedures, and support systems
- Verify students can register for courses in eCampus
- Support faculty in ensuring that their Brightspace courses are active and available to students when the term begins

Continuous Improvement

To support enrollment growth, address challenges, and foster new opportunities, URIO will work with the Program Director to:

- Collect and share data on enrollment, persistence, and graduation
- Assess impact of marketing and communications strategies on the lead pipeline and review program design and admission criteria alignment with market feedback
- Develop annual Program Plans to communicate program metrics and set goals for upcoming academic year
- Collaborate with SLOAA on assessment plans
- Participate in institutional program review cycles
- Update courses through QM review every 3 years
- Use findings for continuous improvement

Roles & Responsibilities

College and Departmental Responsibilities

The College will support the development, implementation, and ongoing operation of the program by providing:

- A dedicated program director to oversee the program
- Advising and student academic support as needed
- Course scheduling to ensure continuity of courses for students
- Staffing and hiring for all courses
- Program compliance certification (if required)

If a program is deemed necessary to be suspended or closed, the college will ensure a proper teach-out is offered for current and admitted students, including students matriculating in stackable programs.

Program Director Responsibilities

Program Directors provide leadership for the planning, development, and ongoing success of URI Online programs. They serve as the central point of contact between faculty, URI Online, and administration, ensuring quality, compliance, and program integrity.

For programs that receive a seed grant award from URIO, Program Directors will receive a stipend to support the program development process.

Course Development:

- Mentor, motivate, and support faculty developers, serving as a role model
- Hire and onboard faculty, ensure credentialing happens as soon as possible so faculty have access to training
- Ensure all faculty complete required online pedagogy and design training
- Track course development progress and enforce timelines
- Ensure courses align with program learning outcomes
- Provide content-related feedback on all courses
- Complete any design work left unfinished by faculty to maintain program continuity
- Ensure all master courses achieve Quality Matters (QM) approval
- Communicate faculty and course changes to administration and URI Online

- Ensure teaching faculty import and activate courses each term
- [Submit a request](#) for any major course update and identify an appropriately trained faculty member to make the updates. *Major revisions need to undergo another QM review to ensure quality remains intact.*

Program Administration & Compliance:

In addition to course and program development, Program Directors manage administrative and compliance tasks to ensure programs operate smoothly.

- [Compliance:](#) Programs must ensure compliance with state and Federal regulations, licensure boards, URI policies, calendars, and applicable regulations.
- Hiring: Program Directors work in collaboration with their Department Chair to schedule and hire faculty to teach.
- Monitor Program Performance and Sustainability: Review regular enrollment reports to ensure current and projected enrollments are suitable for the program.
- In partnership with the Department Chair, provide URIO with projected enrollments and course carousels annually.
- Best Practices: Program Directors should support faculty with using established strategies for providing timely student feedback through course delivery and ensure adherence to published deadlines for posting grades in eCampus.
- Admission Process: Review applications and make recommendations for admission decisions in Slate, where applicable.
- Readmission Process *(UG only)*: Review and approve applications for admission in accordance with the College's established procedures.
- Provide (either direct or oversight of delegated) academic advising to students, to include, but not limited to, communication, approvals, and management of required student forms and credit audits as required by institutional processes.
- Scheduling & eCampus:
    - Except for general education courses, which are scheduled through URIO, programs are responsible for ensuring classes are scheduled in eCampus prior to registration opening.
    - Any changes to scheduling must be submitted by program leadership.
- Course Approval & Prerequisites:
    - Courses must follow the curriculum guidelines outlined by Faculty Senate.

Faculty Developers

- Complete required qualification training(s)
- Work with instructional designers through one of the [course development processes](#)
- Complete course development and pass QM at least one month in advance of launch

Online Teaching Faculty

- Be qualified to teach online
- Import and personalize the Brightspace master shell
- Set or update all release dates and due dates
- [Activate Brightspace course site](#)

URI Online

- Provide market research, analysis of market demand, student demographics, and the competitive landscape to validate program potential
- Support program and course development through the use of seed funding
- Ensure high-quality courses and programs through a collaborative instructional design process and Quality Matters review
- Provide program oversight and regular communication to faculty, CBOs, and the Dean's Office regarding areas such as data points in program performance, federal regulatory compliance, professional licensure compliance, mid-year reports relating to program budgets, an annual comprehensive program report, and other relevant performance-related communication to ensure the sustainability and growth of programs and make recommendations for adjustments if necessary
- Support marketing, communications, recruitment, conversion, and retention efforts
- Provide student support services from inquiry through graduation
- Support continuous improvement efforts through program monitoring, evaluation, and reporting

Regulatory & Accreditation Requirements

Visit [Federal, State, and Accreditation regulations for online programs and courses](#) for more detailed information regarding accreditation and regulation requirements.

NECHE Standards

All **online programs** must demonstrate:

- Academic rigor comparable to face-to-face programs.
- Effective evaluation and use of results for continuous improvement.
- Qualified faculty with adequate support.
- Strong student support and academic services.
- Integrity of online learning offerings.

All programs must provide, and update as needed, URIO with program learning objectives and goals (included on assessment plans) that will be posted on the program website.

All **online courses** must support [regular and substantive](#) faculty-student and student-student interaction.

All courses that have gone through the URIO Instructional Design process and meet the [Quality Matters](#) standards will be designed to meet this requirement.

All online instructors must be qualified to teach online.

NC-SARA Compliance

- Depending on professional licensure or state board requirements, URI may enroll students from 49 states plus DC and some territories; California is allowed under separate rules.
- Programs with internships or professional licensure requirements must consult URI Online for guidance on compliance prior to marketing a program or accepting students.
- In collaboration with college leadership and URIO, Program Directors are responsible for submitting, **prior to marketing a program**, a [list of states](#) where their curriculum meets the educational requirements that lead to professional licensure.
  - URI cannot accept students from states that are not certified to lead to professional licensure unless a student submits an attestation form prior to admission.
  - Programs cannot be marketed in states that are not approved.

- Program Directors are required to confirm approved states annually in order to continue to market in and accept students from other states.
- Program Directors must notify URIO of any changes to state requirements.
- The list of approved states must be included on the program website and be included on [URI Online's SARA information page](#).
- The department must ensure that up-to-date direct disclosures are provided to students at the time of application and prior to enrollment.
- If faculty are part of the admission process, they must be aware of these regulations and only recommend acceptance of students from approved states.
- URI must report enrollment by state annually.
- ***Questions? Contact*** Jacqueline Hodges

Program Suspensions and Closures

- If a department or college chooses to suspend or close a program, students who are currently enrolled or have been admitted prior to the time of notification of a suspension or closure must be provided the opportunity to complete the program based on the initially anticipated program timeline.
- A teach-out is required for all:
    - Currently enrolled students, both singularly matriculating in the program as well as students using the program as credit into a stackable credential.
    - Students who have been admitted and have not started their first term, both directly to a program or to a stackable program with the intention of using the program for credit (as confirmed in the stackable application), prior to a department's official notification of a suspension.
    - Applicants who have already paid a non-refundable application fee and are awaiting an admission decision specifically for the program or to a stackable program with the intention of using the program for credit (as confirmed in the stackable application), prior to a department's official notification of a suspension.
- ***Questions? Contact*** Jenn McWeeney