April 5, 2013

To Members of the University Community,

We are grateful that an alarming, and to some a terrifying, experience in Kingston yesterday ended with all members of our community safe and sound. A threatening statement believed to have been made in a lecture hall caused about 300 students to flee the auditorium, an entire building evacuated, an emergency alert system activated, and a University campus put in lock down mode for nearly three hours.

We appreciate the swift and professional response of the University of Rhode Island, South Kingstown, Charlestown, and Rhode Island State Police with its K-9 unit. The cooperation among these forces was exemplary, along with the response and assistance from the URI Emergency Medical Services (EMS), URI Emergency Management, South Kingstown EMS; North Kingstown, Narragansett and Westerly Police and the Kingston Fire Department.

Although the investigation continues with the State Police, we have been reassured that at no time was anyone in danger. At no point was a gun or a gunman found on the campus.

We know students may be upset and understand that this incident was very tense and emotional for many. Our Dean of Students, Chief Diversity Officer, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, and Provost were on site all day with students and others who were directly affected at the Chafee Social Science Center. Several faculty members stepped up in extraordinary ways to ensure the safety of our students and to provide support and encouragement. Both health and counseling services staff are on alert for any student needing support. The URI Counseling Center is open daily for students looking for ways to cope with and understand such events. URI’s Health Services is also open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

We will accommodate students who have been through this stressful day by asking faculty to be understanding and flexible in regard to student assignments in the next few days.

Today, URI Police will be conducting hourly walk-throughs of Chafee Hall.

We believe we had a good and timely response, but we will engage in an after-action assessment of our overall effectiveness and responsiveness today.
Our Emergency Alert System was activated within minutes of the police notification, alerting the campus community via email, phone, and text. Social media postings by URI were also a vital source of public information for students and members of the community. The URI website received an unprecedented amount of traffic and was mostly inaccessible for a short period of time but that service slowdown was immediately addressed. We will examine all of these tools as part of the comprehensive assessment.

The University is safe and again, I want to commend our outstanding public safety operation led by Major Baker. We thank everyone for their response and cooperation.

Sincerely,

David M. Dooley