A Note from the Department Chair, Professor Brian Krueger

In my final year as the URI Political Science Department Chair, I find myself indulging in some introspection. But the more I reminisce, what really stands out is how bright our future looks.

To be sure, our department and especially our students face ample challenges. The State of Rhode Island ranks in the bottom quintile nationally in funding higher education on a per capita and per student basis, now providing just a tenth of URI's annual operating budget. Students have never been under more financial pressure. At the same time, the political culture from which they derive has been dangerously corroded, with few opportunities to have sober debates about today’s most important issues. Disagreeing with mutual respect, listening with the intention to learn about others, and an openness to new ideas and evidence seems quaint, weak or worse, a betrayal to your political tribe.

We need URI Political Science now more than ever. With a recognition of value differences, and a demand for evidence and reason, the professors of the Political Science Department challenge student understanding of the political world. Faculty both teach and model the international relations concept of comity.

Many beloved Political Science professors have retired over the past several years. Those that work in Washburn Hall and the Tucker House today owe much to this venerable group; they built a sound vessel that we now take in new directions. And this is not Plato’s ship of fools. Our new hires are an exceptional bunch that have brought new perspectives, backgrounds and expertise to the department. Recently hired Professors Katrin Jomaa, Aaron Ley, Christopher Parker, Ashlea Rundlett, and Brendan Mark will lead our department into the middle of the century.

During the past 6 years, about 400 URI undergraduate and 100 graduate students became new alumni after earning their BA, MA and MPA degree from the Political Science Department. Last year we had the largest incoming class of first year undergraduate Political Science students this century. We are frontline witnesses to a political re-awakening among young people.

This newsletter highlights a handful of the newest department initiatives and profiles several current students and recent alumni. They come from varied backgrounds, hold diverse political views, but all share aspirations to make meaningful change in the world. Their stories are often moving, and you will hear these told in their own words.

Finally, this newsletter will give an update on the health of the incomparable Emeritus Professor Al Killilea. Al inspired generations of students to look beyond themselves for meaning in his legendary political theory courses, was among the first faculty members to receive the URI Foundation’s Teaching Excellence Award when it was established in the 1970s, published widely on political philosophy with a special interest in mortality, co-founded the John Hazen White Sr Center for Ethics and Public Service, built the Mentor Tutor Internship Program (MTI) and shepherded many talented students through their successful Truman Scholarship applications. Today, Al continues to serve as one of the two URI Ombuds.

I wish you all the very best in the New Year and go Rhody!
New MA Program in International Relations

Professor Marc Hutchison

We are excited to report that we just launched a new graduate program. The brand new MA in International Relations is designed to accommodate part-time and full-time students who will specialize in either diplomacy, international development, or global peace studies.

The MA in International Relations degree program leverages the strengths of our excellent international politics faculty and reflects the demands of the changing marketplace for employers in an increasingly globalized world. The new MA program also utilizes two important campus resources: the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies and the Naval War College Internship program. For the first time ever the MA will formally offer courses through the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies, which represents a critical component of the updated program in the area of global peace studies. The Nonviolence Center offers various enrichment events including international speakers, global forums, nonviolence training, international experiential learning, and their acclaimed International Nonviolence Summer Institute. The MA program also takes advantage of the Naval War College Internship program by offering regular research internships for our graduate students. These resources offer further experiential learning opportunities to our graduate students that are becoming increasingly important for future career prospects. We expect to confer degrees on our first cohort of IR MA graduates in spring of 2019.

Meet Current Student Bridget Hall

What about URI attracted you to the University?

Because of URI’s size, I knew that I would have smaller classes, be able to meet more of my classmates throughout the University, participate in multiple extracurricular activities, and make personal connections with my professors. Further, since Rhode Island is such a small state, I assumed the URI Political Science Department would interact in a unique way with our state government and our state and federal representatives. This assumption has proven true, and I have been able to meet with, speak to, and work with people at all levels of Rhode Island's state government, as well as our representatives in the federal government.

What has been your favorite class?

My favorite class in Political Science was Professor Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz's Public Policy course. This course focused on how public policy is developed and utilized in the state and federal context, and was taught as a small, seminar style course my sophomore year. As part of this course, my classmates and I were assigned a current issue facing the state of Rhode Island, and were tasked to develop a policy brief addressing this issue. At the end of the semester, we presented our final recommendations to members of the Rhode Island State Legislature.

How would you describe working with the professors here in the department?

The professors in the Political Science Department have been truly integral in shaping my experience at URI. They have been unfailingly passionate, intelligent and inspirational in their instruction, and have consistently been positive and incredibly helpful. I have worked with several Political Science professors on their research projects, and consider myself very lucky to have them as my professional and academic mentors. The Political Science faculty also honored me with a David Warren Scholarship, which provided direct financial support to me from the donations given to the URI Foundation.

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A Message from Al Killilea

Greetings to all of my former students. Since retiring, I miss every one of you; I even miss those infernal one-page papers and oral exams. I write now in an uncomfortably self-interested quest. I have polycystic kidney disease and I need someone to donate a kidney to me. It’s an impossible gift to ask of a friend or a stranger and yet I have to ask. If you or someone you know would consider making this priceless donation, please contact my wife, Mary Ann, at (401) 396-6858 or at maryann.killilea@gmail.com. She can give you information about what becoming a kidney donor involves. You can also go to the websites for the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) or Mass. General Hospital Transplant Clinic. You do not have to be a perfect match to make it possible for me to get a kidney since a donated kidney allows me to be included in a chain of donors and recipients.

Thank you for just reading this request. I realize there are a multitude of reasons why people can’t become an organ donor. Please know that everyone that studied with me in Washburn is dear to me and I wish each of you happiness and a continued thirst for learning and justice.

Meet Recent Alum Harry Kazianis (BA 2011)

Harry Kazianis graduated from URI as a double major in Political Science and History. He is presently the Director of Defense Studies at the Center for the National Interest. He also serves as the Executive Editor of their in-house publication, The National Interest, which is the most widely read online international affairs publication. Harry previously served on the foreign policy team for the 2016 presidential campaign of Senator Ted Cruz, managed the foreign policy communications efforts of the Heritage Foundation, and served as Editor-In-Chief of the Tokyo-based The Diplomat.

When did you know that you wanted to major in Political Science?

When I was very young I would dream of empires, wars of years past, and of important world leaders that I read about in old history books found lying around the house. When I was 14 I was hired to shelve books at the Providence Public Library and instead of completing my work I often found an abandoned stairwell and read every international affairs book or magazine I could—Henry Kissinger’s Diplomacy, Foreign Policy and Foreign Affairs or bound volumes of Jane’s Fighting Ships were my childhood favorites. My dream was to write just one important op-ed or article on foreign policy.

How did URI prepare you for working as the Executive Editor of The National Interest magazine?

Quite simply it was that URI never gave up on me. I dropped out of school in the summer of 2000 due to personal troubles—I was bullied as a child and lacked the confidence to feel I could ever make it in Washington, D.C. to pursue my dreams of working in the foreign policy community. It took many years but the 2008 financial crisis caused me to completely rethink my professional future. I finally got the guts to come back, as I was embarrassed that I quit on my education. I reached out to Professor Gerry Tyler—she remembered me after all those years and encouraged me to return and told me that it was not too late. When I came back I was challenged with tough professors who demanded the best from me and for that I am forever grateful.

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What do you think is the biggest misconception about majoring in Political Science?

I think the biggest misconceptions about Political Science are that it is an easy major and all Political Science majors are going to run for office or are only in the major to prepare for law school. My classmates and I are interested in effecting change at all levels of society, and are learning how to understand the systems that govern the world. We’re not just watching the news, debating current events, or checking a box on the road to our real goals, but engaging in rigorous and intellectually rewarding social science education and training.

What are your career and educational goals after you graduate from URI?

I came in sure that I would attend law school, and am now graduating with plans to pursue a career in cultural resource management and public history. I would advise all Political Science students to keep themselves open to everything the major has to offer. I hope to be able to work within the government or non-profit sector to preserve and promote historical sites in New England to enable future generations to learn about our history through experiencing the material aspects of New England’s culture foundations.

Meet Current Student Laeticia Soro

Can you tell me a bit about your life prior to attending URI?

My life is a miracle. Born and raised in a West African country, I experienced great atrocities as a survivor of two civil wars in the Ivory Coast. I lived in bushes with animals, ate leaves and seeds to survive, and drank water from rivers polluted with dead bodies. I slept under trees, between rocks, next to the unfortunate dead. In 2014, I moved to the United States, leaving everything behind me. Today I’m here as an asylee. I moved with the hope of finding peace and pursuing my dream of achieving higher education. I am thankful that this nation is helping me pursue my educational goal of being the first in my family to enter college.

What aspects of URI attracted you to the University?

When I was applying for college, my dream was to attend American University in Washington, DC. I got accepted there. However, nothing during the entire process stood out to me like the Talent Development Program at the University of Rhode Island. I knew that I wanted a reliable support team. I needed a place that would suit my unique background, and simultaneously satisfy my thirst for education. TD was a perfect fit for me; URI was where I needed to be.

What has been your favorite parts of being a Political Science major?

My favorite class so far was Introduction to International Politics (PSC116G) with Professor Marc Hutchison. For an introduction course, it was an outstanding intro class, the professor was dynamic and that course strengthen my desire to focus on international politics.

The Political Science Department here at URI is rich and full of amazing professors. I took my first PSC class afraid that language would be an obstacle to my successful completion of the course. I was afraid of not being able to adapt to a new system and a new language. As a matter of fact, I failed my first exam. Concerned, I approached my professor almost in tears looking for help. The professor took my concern with so much consideration that I was shocked. She immediately started a study section to help students like me.

Professors in this department advocate for me. This year I received the Eric F. Kumpf Memorial Scholarship, which is

Laeticia Soro and Professor Marc Hutchison
An Internship that Makes a Difference

Professor Nicolai N. Petro

For a number of years URI has been invited to submit the names of some of our best Political Science students to become interns at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport. In 2015, I was asked to supervise the internship program here at URI.

The War College aptly defines itself as the “Home of Thought” for the United States Navy. It educates the leaders that define the future Navy as well as the national security of the United States. Since its opening in 1885, it has graduated more than 50,000 students, including at least 300 of today’s active duty admirals, generals, and senior executive service leaders.

Interns at the U.S. Naval War College typically help professors with their research and with the organization of conferences that are held there throughout the year. A few have been asked to assist in the preparation of course syllabi, been provided security clearance, and even to co-author original research. Some students have used it as a launching pad for positions in public service, either in Rhode Island or in Washington, D.C. The participation of our undergraduates has been so well received that we are now encouraging graduate students in our new M.A. in International Relations to apply.

War College interns get to interact daily with personnel from all branches of the U.S. military and with their counterparts visiting from other countries. In addition, many U.S. diplomats, intelligence officers, and senior civil servants are seconded there to study national security issues. Interns are also regularly invited to attend the “Lectures of Opportunity,” which bring prominent national and international visitors to the College.

URI Political Science students who have gone through this program stress both the value of the personal contacts they make, and of being able to apply their academic skills directly to current international issues. Many have told me that having this opportunity to observe the national security making process from the inside helped them in their choice of future careers and study.

Harry Kazianis

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What advice would you give to a Political Science student interested in a career in foreign policy?

What I have encountered in this field is that those who ‘make it’ all seem to have a similar formula for success. This is what I tell any of my interns: They must prepare to work harder than their peers, putting in countless hours of study to be the best at what they do. You don’t need to be the smartest, you just have to want it more than the person next to you. They must be completely obsessed with their topic of study. Try to publish, even in small newspapers, websites, anywhere to be honest. You should find your voice and build a foundation of work that people recognize and respect.

What do you think has been the most surprising aspect of the Trump Administration’s foreign policy?

That possibility of a war—preemptive, preventive or accidental—with North Korea truly has added many grays to my hairline and left me sleepless many nights. During the 2016 campaign, Trump seemed to promote a more realist and less interventionist foreign policy approach. However, with bellicose rhetoric coming from both sides, but more importantly, the idea that Pyongyang is not deterrable repeated by H.R. McMaster and others, I fear the Trump Administration is actively contemplating the possibility of regime change. And considering the fact that North Korea, while an economic basket case, is stocked full of weapons of mass destruction, I fear what may come in the next few months.
Meet Recent Alum Margaret ‘Meg’ Frost (BA 2011, MA 2017)

Born and raised in South Kingstown, Rhode Island, Meg was an Honors student pursuing degrees in Political Science and Spanish with minor concentrations in Economics and International Relations. As a student she studied in Spain, interned with the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. and at the United States Naval War College in Newport, RI. Meg was a Truman Scholarship Finalist and won the U.S. Department of State’s Fulbright award to study in Colombia.

I see that you have several majors and minors; why did you choose to make Political Science one?

After taking the intro-level U.S. and international politics classes at URI, I was hooked. I enjoyed learning the specifics of theories and applying them to current events, I relished the impassioned attitudes of professors and fellow students alike, and for the first time, I was presented with plausible, concrete academic and professional ideas for the future. When one studies Political Science, one is studying a live, relevant science and obtaining a useful degree that one can be utilized to do most anything.

How did you prepare for the Fulbright application and the prestigious Fulbright fellowship in Colombia after you won the award?

To say it was a team effort would be an understatement. The Political Science Department provided comprehensive knowledge of post-conflict dynamics in Colombia. The Department of Modern and Classical Languages imparted deep linguistic and cultural knowledge. Kathleen Maher spent endless nights editing multiple scholarship essays, and overall, assisting me in getting to know my own story. All of these groups worked tirelessly with me to build my academic knowledge and self-confidence. They instilled and re-instilled the idea that I shouldn’t think twice about applying for national opportunities that I thought I had no chance of getting.

What was your life like right after you graduated from URI?

After graduating from URI, I participated in the Kingian Nonviolence training course at URI’s Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies. Then I moved to Medellín, Colombia. It was a busy, fulfilling whirlwind year. In Colombia, I taught English at a university and traveled to major cities co-conducting nonviolence trainings. I then moved to Madrid, Spain, where I took classes in human rights law and governance studies. After a summer back in RI spent working on Block Island, I started an internship in Geneva, Switzerland, at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, working on torture, extrajudicial authority, and election violence. Then, I ended up in the URI Master’s program.

What are you doing now?

I just started my first year in the Political Science Ph.D. program at Vanderbilt University with a full scholarship – couldn’t stay away from school! As my first semester is drawing to a close, I am already working on projects concerning the attitudinal effects of natural disasters, drug-trafficking routes in Mexico, and armed non-state group participation in politics.

Professionally, where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Time will tell, but hopefully teaching and doing research at a university somewhere. I would like to keep my research policy-relevant and, hopefully, impactful. I’d like to share research findings with governments and non-profit organizations to answer important questions facing humanity.
Real Jobs Rhode Island
Professors Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, Skye Leedahl, and Aaron Ley

If you have been following the health of Rhode Island’s economy, then you have no doubt heard about the Department of Labor and Training’s program called Real Jobs Rhode Island. It promises to align workforce and economic development needs by ensuring that employers can find the talent they need to thrive by offering targeted training for Rhode Island workers. What you probably have not heard about is the team of Political Scientists working to make this program a success.

In 2015, Rhode Island’s Department of Labor and Training (DLT) contracted Professors Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, Skye Leedahl, and Aaron Ley to evaluate the DLT’s new workforce development program, “Real Jobs Rhode Island.” Formal program evaluations have become an increasingly common way of determining whether government programs are performing as intended. If program evaluations discover improvements that can be made during the process of policy implementation, then implementation can be modified to better achieve policy outcomes. As part of their evaluation, Professors Pearson-Merkowitz, Leedahl, and Ley have been traveling throughout Rhode Island meeting with the industry partnerships that have been granted funds for workforce development and the public managers at DLT who are responsible for overseeing the program.

What they have found is that jobs in the 21st century require a high degree of technical training and cognitive leadership skills. Neither of which is currently offered in combination—educational and training programs largely train for either technical skills or management/leadership/cognitive skills. The challenge is training individuals who are able to lead, manage, and think as well as innovate and utilize technical aspects of work in the modern workforce. This is true from manufacturing to arts and culture. However, innovating new training programs to address either of these deficits is an experimental and difficult process. But also an essential one. The report from this team will be made available in 2018.

Meet Current Student Zoe Mitchell

Can you tell me a bit about your experiences prior to attending URI?

I come from a small family and have lived throughout New England, but spent most of my childhood in Newport, RI. I moved to Westport, MA for high school when my mother, who is a minister, was appointed to the Methodist church there. After spending seven years in Westport, my family moved back to Rhode Island to serve a large church in Hope. I transferred to URI after leaving my first university and spending two years out of school working and figuring out what I wanted to study.

Why did you choose Political Science as a major?

It was something that I was always passionate about, but never really thought about pursing until I looked into the major at URI and saw all that you could learn and do as a Political Science major. I also thoroughly believe that Political Scientists are going to play a huge role in solving major local, national and global problems, which may already have technical solutions, but need someone to facilitate those solutions; I want to be one of the people in such a role.

What has been your favorite class in Political Science?

All of my Political Science courses have been amazing, but my favorite class has been Politics of China with Professor Xu. Professor Xu was able to blend Chinese history and politics in a way that was extremely attainable, despite the fact that you were dealing with hundreds of years of history and a very complex political and bureaucratic system. I think it is very clear that all the professors in the Political Science Department are enthusiastic about their work and invested in their students’ success.

Every year, fewer than 100 students nationwide win the Boren Study Abroad Scholarship from the U.S. National Security Education Program. Tell me about your experience applying for and winning this award?

Like you said, less than 100 students nationwide win the Boren Scholarship, so while I worked extremely hard putting together a competitive application, I never actually thought I would be chosen. Then when I was, it was a complete surprise and I was immensely grateful and excited to be a part of such an exclusive and talented cohort. The application process itself is pretty dense. You continued on page 8
We Need Your Help

Please consider making a gift to one of the targeted Political Science endowments below or make a gift to the College of Arts and Sciences Excellence Fund.

A&S Excellence Fund: Provides undergraduate student need and merit-based scholarships and opportunities for career-focused experiences such as off-campus internships and experience-based and service learning projects, undergraduate research, study abroad, and participation in professional conferences. Support the College of Arts and Sciences Excellence Fund: urifoundation.org/artssciencesfund

Alfred G. Killilea Endowment in Political Science: Funds an endowed Professorship in Al’s name that supports faculty research and professional development. The Alfred G. Killilea Endowment in Political Science rotates across the department faculty, with recipients having used it to accomplish field work outside the U.S., support student research assistants, attend academic conferences, and purchase specialized analytics software. The department routinely uses this Professorship to recruit the best new faculty, helping to carrying on the tradition of departmental faculty excellence. www.urifoundation.org/killileafund

Timothy M. Hennessey Family Scholarship: Funds student scholarships for those with financial need in our MPA program. This is our newest scholarship, founded in loving memory of Professor Tim Hennessey. www.urifoundation.org/hennesseyscholarshipfund

Laeticia Soro

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funded by generous donors to URI, because professors in the department fought for me. They go hard for their students. Nothing is more comforting than going through my daily academic responsibilities knowing that I have people who got my back.

What are your long term plans after you graduate from URI?

My dream career is working with the United Nations. I want to be an advocate for human rights, especially in African countries where poverty has taken hold and populations remain unaware of their own rights. I am particularly interested in working with children. It pains me that some children grow up in war zones, making it difficult for them to fully enjoy their childhood and experience a more peaceful side of the world. Those children deserve better, and by creating opportunities for them we can help end the violence.

Zoe Mitchell

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have two essays to write, but are not given that many words to introduce yourself, explain your national security argument, and why you should be chosen. I had to get good at being concise.

I understand you are in Morocco for the Boren. What has your experience been like?

My experience in Morocco has been incredible. I have gotten the chance to not only spend a significant amount of time in the classroom learning Arabic and the Moroccan dialect, but also have had the opportunity to travel throughout the country and see many different communities. It amazes me that each new place I visit in Morocco has its own feeling and vibe. The biggest change I have made in my thinking about Morocco, and the North African region in general, is how important it is to make the distinction between the Middle East and North Africa. I think we sometimes make the mistake of grouping both regions together, calling it MENA and so on, but being here and talking to professors and locals it is clear that, while there are many similarities, there are some big differences between North Africa and the Middle East and we need to change the way we talk and write about the region to reflect that.