

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Students, Board of Governors
of the

University of Rhode Island

Kingston, RI

By

An Evaluation Team representing the Commission
On Institutions of Higher Education

of the

New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Prepared after study of the institution's
self-evaluation report and a visit to the campus,
October 22-25, 2017

The members of the visiting team:

Chairperson: Dr. Susan J. Hunter, President, the University of Maine

- Dr. David K. Campbell, Professor of Physics and Electrical and Computer Engineering, Boston University
- Dr. Jennifer Ann Dickinson, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Vermont
- Mr. John Michael Gower, Executive Vice President of Finance and Administration, Rutgers University
- Ms. Joyce McConnell, Provost, West Virginia University
- Dr. Karen L. Pennington, Vice President Student Development, Montclair State University
- Dr. Michael Stevenson, Professor of Psychology, University of Southern Maine
- Dr. Martha L.A. Stassen, Assistant Provost for Assessment and Educational Effectiveness, University of Massachusetts Amherst
- Dr. Barbara Prudhomme White, Associate Professor & Faculty Fellow for CIHE/NEASC, Provost's office, & Executive Director of Undergraduate Programs, University of New Hampshire

This report represents the views of the evaluation committee as interpreted by the Chairperson. Its content is based on the committee's evaluation of the institution with respect to the Commission's criteria for accreditation. It is a confidential document in which all comments are made in good faith. The report is prepared both as an educational service to the institution and to assist the Commission in making a decision about the institution's accreditation status.

Introduction

The CIHE Evaluation Team that visited the University of Rhode Island 22-25 October 2017 for a comprehensive evaluation was impressed with the preparations made for our visit and the candid and open exchange of information we had with all members of the University community. The materials provided online and in the workroom fully met the team's expectations. The self-study was an accurate representation of the work that had occurred since the last comprehensive evaluation.

Extensive meetings occurred in one-on-one or small group format with representatives and leaders from all areas within the University of Rhode Island (URI) including students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Meetings were held with the President, Provost, other members of the senior leadership team, the Commissioner of Post-Secondary Education, members of the Council of Postsecondary Education, the academic Deans, Faculty Senate leadership, Faculty Union leadership and Graduate Council representatives. The team met with representatives of major campus planning committees, i.e., the Joint Committee on Academic Planning, the Strategic Budget and Planning Committee, the Academic Program Review Committee and the Learning Outcomes Oversight and General Education Assessment Committee. Sessions were held with the Office of Community, Equity and Diversity, and with faculty, staff and students to discuss campus efforts to achieve equity and diversity.

The team toured the Kingston campus and two members conducted visits to the Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies and the Rhode Island Nursing Education Center in Providence. Two other team members visited the Narragansett Bay campus and the Graduate School of Oceanography.

The team found a vibrant and engaged community with very attractive facilities. The Kingston campus has added nine new buildings and performed major renovations on six others since 2007. According to Sightlines, the University has averaged \$71 million in capital investments annually, with 54% invested in new space and 46% in existing space. The University is to be commended on such significant capital improvements in a ten-year period.

STANDARD 1: MISSION AND PURPOSES

The institution's mission and purposes are appropriate to higher education, consistent with its charter or other operating authority, and implemented in a manner that complies with the Standards of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. The institution's mission gives direction to its activities and provides a basis for the assessment and enhancement of the institution's effectiveness.

The mission statement of the University of Rhode Island has been revised several times throughout its history, but has remained true to its founding purposes as defined in the enabling legislation of 1896 General Laws of Rhode Island (RIGL) 16-32-3.

The current Mission Statement was last revised in 2005 with broad stakeholder input, endorsed by the Faculty Senate, approved by the President and adopted by the (former) Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education in January 2006.

The Statement reads:

The University of Rhode Island is the State's public learner-centered research university. We are a community joined in a common quest for knowledge. The University is committed to enriching the lives of its students through its land, sea and urban grant traditions. URI is the only public institution in Rhode Island offering undergraduate, graduate and professional students the distinctive educational opportunities of a major research university. Our undergraduate, graduate and professional education, research and outreach serve Rhode Island and beyond. Students, faculty and alumni are united in one common purpose: to learn and lead together. Embracing Rhode Island's heritage of independent thought, we value:

- *Creativity and Scholarship*
- *Diversity, Fairness, and Respect*
- *Engaged Learning and Civic Involvement*
- *Intellectual and Ethical Leadership*

The mission statement is displayed on the University's website and found in the University Catalog. It reflects its identity as Rhode Island's land and sea grant research university. The colleges and some other units within the University have their own mission statements that align with that of the institution.

The role of the University as a research-based institution with a defined land and sea grant tradition and an urban university identity is explicit, as is its mission to serve the State in undergraduate, graduate and professional education, research and outreach. It recognizes the overarching connectedness and contributions of its students, faculty, staff and alumni in achieving its goals.

In 2010, the President presented his Transformational Goals for the 21st Century, four goals that more clearly define the path forward for the University of Rhode Island and create focal points for development activities. The goals focus on learning outside the classroom and use of technology, increasing the prominence and impact of research, scholarship and creative work, preparing students for success in an increasingly globalized economy, and building a University community that values and embraces diversity and equity.

Since the last CIHE review, URI has adopted two Academic Strategic Plans. *Charting Our Path to the Future* was in effect from 2010-2015 and contained six key goals. Its successor, *Innovation with Impact: Shaping the Future of URI, 2016-2021*, builds upon its predecessor with additional focus on innovation and its outcomes. These Academic Strategic Plans and the mission statement are guides for resource allocation, especially as it relates to reinvestment in faculty positions and new academic program creation.

The Academic Strategic Plan, which is the University's strategic plan, was created to be a finer-grained reflection of the mission statement and directs work across the University. Central is

Academic Affairs, but the Divisions of Administration and Finance, Research and Economic Development and Student Affairs all obtain focus and direction from the plan.

The budget creation process requires alignment with the plan and, in building a case for resources, including faculty positions, deans must demonstrate how the position aligns with demand, advances student success and enhances research and scholarship. Proposals for new programs are vetted by the Joint Committee on Academic Programs with the main criterion being how the programs advance the University's mission and goals.

The 2007 CIHE-NEASC comprehensive review noted that access was an element lacking in the mission statement but embraced by the University. The current self-study makes references to a commitment to ensuring access, which is still not explicitly reflected in the mission statement. This should be addressed during the mission statement revision prior to the next Academic Strategic Planning effort projected to occur at the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year.

STANDARD 2: PLANNING AND EVALUATION

The institution undertakes planning and evaluation to accomplish and improve the achievement of its mission and purposes. It identifies its planning and evaluation priorities and pursues them effectively. The institution demonstrates its success in strategic, academic, financial, and other resource planning and the evaluation of its educational effectiveness.

The University of Rhode Island has implemented significant planning and evaluation procedures in response to the 2007 CIHE-NEASC review that extend across the university and encompass the breadth of university portfolios. The planning efforts engage a broad representation of the campus community and the critical linkage between strategic planning and resource allocation is recognized.

Planning

In response to a concern in the 2007 CIHE-NEASC report regarding a perceived weakness with respect to strategic planning, URI initiated a significant effort to improve its strategic planning. A draft document prepared by the Provost and circulated to the University community led to the formation of the Joint Committee on Academic Planning (JCAP), formally established April 19, 2010, with the responsibility of creating and updating an Academic Strategic Plan (ASP). The committee currently consists of 22 senior academic leaders, members of the Faculty Senate, and undergraduate and graduate student representatives and meets monthly during the academic year. JCAP monitors progress on the ASP and is primarily responsible to the full campus community for updates/revisions of the ASP on a five-year cycle. The first formal ASP, covering the period 2010-2015, was approved in 2009 ("Charting our Path to the Future: Toward a Renewed Culture of Achievement"). The current strategic plan—"Innovation with Impact: Shaping the Future of URI"—developed in 2015 covers the period 2016-2021. The six explicit goals of the current plan include: 1) Enhance student success; 2) Expand research, scholarship, and creative work; 3) Grow a global presence; 4) Embrace diversity and social justice; 5) Streamline processes to improve effectiveness; and 6) Implement a bold advancement agenda. Under each goal are a series of detailed tactics and specific actions designed to achieve the goal. This level of detail provides a very useful roadmap for specific actions to be taken by units and individuals and

hence enhances the likelihood of achieving the goals. Full details of the activities of the JCAP are well documented on publicly available websites. One particularly significant activity is the annual academic summit, held in January (during intersession), at which a substantial number of faculty attend; in 2017, there were approximately 275. These summits serve as means both to re-emphasize to the community aspects of the current ASP and to anticipate developing trends for future ASPs, the next of which will be developed in 2020.

In addition to this central strategic planning document, URI has a number of other institution-wide plans, including its Master Plan (developed in 2000 and continually revised with regular review meetings through the work of the Master Plan Review Team (MPRT)). The minutes of the meetings of this group are also publicly available on the website. In addition, there are academic and technology plans (also implemented on a five-year basis), and a financial plan, which is developed annually. No timetables were given for enrollment and development plans. Beyond the institution-wide plans, there are planning documents for major units, including capital improvement, space planning, student affairs, and administration and finance. The individual colleges and departments are also required to develop planning documents, which are listed on the website. The completeness of these overlapping planning documents and the easy accessibility to all constituencies speak well to the care and transparency devoted to planning at the URI.

Importantly, the manner in which the planning processes are carried out, based on shared governance and collaboration, was described in detail in the self-study. The current strategic plan was developed through a fifteen-month collaborative process, beginning in the fall of 2014 and led by the JCAP. In revising the ASP for 2015, the JCAP first reviewed the prior ASP to see which elements remained relevant for the new plan and then surveyed the external environment for developments and arising challenges that could require changes in the new plan, which was developed in draft form over this period. The JCAP called an Academic Summit, held in January 2015, open to all faculty and invited staff and administrators; roughly 225 individuals attended. In April 2015, a Student Summit was held, in which roughly 60 students participated. The responses from these two summits were incorporated into the second draft of the new ASP. In mid-2015, the JCAP organized, in consort with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, ten task forces to work on specific aspects of the ASP, which was then refined by the JCAP between August and October 2015, a period that included soliciting and including feedback from the faculty senate, which approved the goals of the plan at their October meeting. These details are presented to support the team's view that the central strategic planning process at URI is collaborative, open, and transparent, with opportunities for input from all constituencies.

The self-study provides an informative section on "linking strategic planning with resource allocation." Although there is considerable overlap with budgetary matters (**Standard 7: Institutional Resources**), the committee has chosen to discuss it here as well, since it is directly tied with the successful implementation of the ASP. A Strategic Budgeting and Planning Council (SBPC), formed in 2010 and consisting of 22 members appointed by the President, meets monthly to assure that the ASP guides resource allocations and financial investments involving any new funding. The SBPC handles requests from all major divisions of the University. All non-contractual requests for new funding from the operating budget must be vetted by the SBPC, which requires detailed written submissions and in-person presentations from units before voting on the priorities. The SBPC then recommends its priorities to the President, who decides on which to implement based on available resources. Within each of the major divisions of the

University, there is an analogous process in which subunits propose initiatives consistent with the ASP; there is a standard template, available on the website, to provide guidance and consistency in this process. The budgeting process is annual but with projections for subsequent years to provide a budget horizon for all units. The team commends the thoroughness, consistency, and transparency in this strategic budgeting process, as well as its linkage to the ASP.

A few illustrative examples of the outcomes resulting from following the close linkage of the ASP and SBPC include the replacement of 300 faculty (of roughly 700 total), the addition of 60 new faculty positions, a cluster hire of faculty in the area of big data, an increase in the student retention rate of 7%, and the addition of 50 new teaching assistant (TA) positions.

The self-study also provides a discussion of planning for capital projects, which has also been significantly revised in response to the 2007 CIHE-NEASC evaluation. The development of a readily accessible planning and design website allows transparent access to the procedure for approving major capital projects (those costing more than \$ 1 million). The procedure involves the appropriate level of review, including the involvement of the Master Plan Review Team (MPRT) and the SBPC, which makes recommendations for the priority of new projects which, after the approval by the President and his Senior Leadership team, are then added to the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The proposal, is then submitted to the Board of Education, then the Governor, and then the legislature. This lengthy approval process, necessary in a state institution, complicates the development of new capital projects, but the internal URI review procedures seem transparent and thorough. In 2017, to further improve strategic capital planning, the Division of Administration and Finance added a Director of Capital Planning and Real Estate Development, to strengthen the link between the CIP and the ASP.

As acknowledged in the self-study, URI seems well aware of some remaining challenges in planning at all levels. The SBPC is working to develop further its ability to respond to emerging needs of individual campus units while dealing with evolving external circumstances and financial mandates. Internally, to improve the equity and transparency and reduce the variation among units of all planning requests, the SBPC is requiring of all units detailed descriptions of the process by which the request was generated. In 2016, the SBPC initiated efforts to improve the process for developing capital projects and to impose an annual deadline for forwarding its recommendations to the Senior Leadership team.

Another clear challenge, common to nearly all universities, is deferred maintenance on facilities. URI has an Asset Protection Plan, developed by the Division of Administration and Finance, with input from the University community, including faculty, staff, and students. The asset protection process led to a request for \$12.5 million in funding for FY 2016, of which \$7.7 was approved by the State.

Evaluation

The self-study highlights the substantial changes in evaluation since the 2007 CIHE-NEASC review. Among these is an evaluation progress report available on the outcomes measurement page of the Provost's Academic Planning website. It provides a narrative description and quantitative measures of progress toward each of the six goals in the ASP and is updated on an annual basis. The presentation of the data is dense, to say the least, but with sufficient zooming it can be made legible.

At the department level, the Academic Program review (see **Standard 4: Academic Program**) consists of a three-level procedure, with annual reporting of data to departments and colleges, a standardized internal biennial survey of data, and comprehensive self-studies with external review performed every six years. The extent to which this procedure is followed by all units varies, as is discussed in more detail in Standard 4. Specific professional units requiring external accreditation are evaluated as required by the appropriate external evaluators.

Full-time faculty are represented by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and are evaluated under guidelines in the AAUP contract first entered into in November 1972 and subsequently updated. Both part-time faculty and graduate student assistants have agreements that govern supervision and teaching evaluations. The central campus system for student and financial administration and human resources—eCampus, available on the website-- assists in evaluations through its report manager and query function. In addition to the information available on the outcomes measurement page, information of progress and evaluation is provided by the Provost's News and Notes website, again a readily accessible and transparent source of information to the whole URI community.

Apart from the use of internal data, administrators at URI regularly review reports from external sources—such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and others and compare their own Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with those of their peers to seek out best practices. As an example, the recently created position of Vice-Provost for Enrollment Management has provided increased focus on, and improved use of, student and enrollment data.

The team agrees with the assessment in the self-study that credits the improved use of planning, evaluation, and metrics with the substantial progress made in retention rates, graduation rates, the quality of entering students, the diversity of students, faculty, and staff, and the globalization and contemporizing of the curriculum.

A developing challenge is a new (August 2016) Rhode Island “performance-based funding” law which mandates that beginning in 2019 the State’s higher educational institutions must demonstrate proof of progress in the three priority areas of graduation rates, production of graduates in high-wage/high-demand fields, and the achievement of an institution’s goal as articulated in the ASP and mission statements. Failure to meet these performance goals will lead to mandated redirection of funding toward improvement in deficient areas. Attention to the second of these areas has the potential of moving resources from the humanities to STEM-related areas and is something that should be carefully monitored. The team’s concern in this area was lessened by the news that it is likely the different state institutions will be allowed to add some of their own performance goals, based on their unique responsibilities. In addition to this legislation, the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (OPC) emphasized four key areas: obtainment of a larger number of post-secondary degrees by Rhode Island students, increased access and affordability of higher education, greater impact of higher education on economic development, and increased institutional effectiveness. Although these requirements are closely aligned with part of the URI ASP, documenting them will put additional pressure on the units responsible for evaluation.

STANDARD 3: ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE

The institution has a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission and purposes and supports institutional effectiveness and integrity. Through its organizational design and governance structure, the institution creates and sustains an environment that encourages teaching, learning, service, scholarship, and where appropriate, research and creative activity. It demonstrates administrative capacity by assuring provision of support adequate for the appropriate functioning of each organizational component. The institution has sufficient independence from any other entity to be held accountable for meeting the Commission's Standards for Accreditation.

Article XII of the State Constitution gives the Rhode Island General Assembly the power to provide oversight and fund public schools in Rhode Island. The legal authority for the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education (RIBGHE), which operated from 1981-2012, is set forth in Title 16, Chapter 59 of the General Laws of the State of Rhode Island (RIGL). The Board is not directly a department of State Government but serves the State as a Public Corporation with membership appointed by the governor.

The General Assembly has used its constitutional authority twice since 2012 to reorganize the governance structure of public education, including higher education. From 1981 – 2012, governance was in the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education (RIBGHE) (RIGL) Sec.16-59). However, in 2012 the Assembly passed two measures to establish the Rhode Island Board of Education, eliminating both the RIBGHE and Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education, and consolidating them into one Board of Education.

Governing Board

In 2014, the General Assembly amended the 2012 legislation by delegating several of the Board of Education's routine management functions to presidents of State public institutions and creating two subsidiary councils of the Board: The Council for Elementary and Secondary Education (CESE) and the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE).

The Board of Education has seventeen public members, appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Rhode Island Senate. The Chairperson of the Governor's Workforce Board and Chairperson of the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation are non-voting *ex officio* members of the Board. The Governor chooses the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Board from among its public members.

To establish the Board's subsidiary councils, eight members serve on the CESE. The Chairperson of the Board also serves on the CESE. Eight members serve on the CPE, as does the Chairperson of the Board. Both the CESE and the CPE report to the full Board.

The CPE collects and maintains data on higher education's status and trends. It also engages in strategic planning. The Commissioner of Postsecondary Education, the State's higher education chief executive officer, is supervised by the CPE that serves as the employer of record for the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (OPC) and the state's higher education institutions.

The CPE is subject to Rhode Island's open meetings laws. It has extensive powers, including: appointing, evaluating and dismissing public college and university presidents, exercising fiscal

oversight over institutions of higher education, and establishing and overseeing system-wide policies in non-discrimination, affirmative action, and sexual assault and harassment. It has the responsibility to plan and oversee public properties connected with higher education. The CPE has two subcommittees: finance and facilities; and, personnel. To discharge its responsibilities, members of the subcommittees meet with officers and groups from the state's institutions to consider policies, projects, actions, and budgets.

The CPE delegates powers to presidents and provides oversight but is prohibited from interfering in daily administration. The CPE requires each institution to adhere to its distinct mission and remain within its authorized role and scope. It has power to minimize duplication and maximize efficiency across the State's public institutions. The CPE prepares and presents to the Governor an annual budget and five-year projected budget for the OPC and the state's public colleges and universities. However, final state allocations lie with the General Assembly.

From 2012-2014, under the umbrella of a Board of Education with oversight for all educational institutions, the University of Rhode Island, as the flagship, research, land and sea-grant university, had well-founded concerns about its external governance. However, since 2014, after two years of disruptive external governance reform, external governance has stabilized with the creation of the Council on Postsecondary Education and role of the Commissioner of Higher Education. Furthermore, the Commissioner has a goal to work with CPE to engage together in professional development to gain greater understanding of higher education.

The leadership of URI, the Council on Postsecondary Education, its Chair, and the Commissioner of Postsecondary Education are clearly committed to creating an effective working relationship in the best interest of URI. However, there remain significant areas of ambiguity about the role of the Commissioner and her relationship to the CPE; and, the scope of authority of each.

There is potential conflict between the interests of the CPE and Commissioner to unify the three public institutions of higher education to achieve efficiencies and seamless transferability with its interest in honoring each institution's unique mission and needs. Therefore, it is important that the CPE and Commissioner act upon an understanding that the needs of a flagship, research, land and sea-grant institution are unique, particularly given the role the State asks URI to play as a catalyst for economic growth and to prepare students for success in the new and ever-changing economy.

There also are significant issues about the scope of the CPE and the Commissioner's authority over institutional decisions. Although the CPE may not interfere with day-to-day administrative matters of the institution, all changes of position titles and appointments of vice presidents, including salaries, must be approved by the CPE. For a research university, such external approvals can create significant issues in recruiting and retaining top teaching and research talent. It also can make URI less adaptive and therefore at a disadvantage compared to its peer flagship research institutions.

Internal Governance

The President of the University of Rhode Island is the Chief Executive Officer and reports to the CPE. The CPE appoints the President to a three-year contract and its Personnel Committee

evaluates the President before the renewal of the contract. In addition, the Faculty Senate reviews and provides feedback triennially to the President.

The President has statutorily enumerated powers and duties to: create academic structures and courses of study; manage property; propose and implement the budget with the CPE's approval; and submit a management letter annually to CPE. The President and Faculty Senate jointly govern academic and curricular matters (RIGL 16-32-10). There are two shared-governance standing committees: Strategic Budget and Planning Council (SBPC) and Joint Committee on Academic Planning (JCAP). The SBPC created in 2010 advises the President on matters of budget and academic planning. SBPC members are vice presidents, presidents of undergraduate and graduate organizations, representatives from the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Council of Deans, URI Foundation, general faculty, extramural community and university staff.

A Senior Leadership Team (SLT) also supports the President. The SLT includes the vice presidents (Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Administration and Finance, Vice President for Research and Economic Development, and Vice President for Student Affairs), University of Rhode Island Foundation President, Associate Vice President for Community, Equity and Diversity and Chief Diversity Officer, Executive Director of External Relations and Communication, Director of Athletics, and Chief of Staff.

The President meets regularly with the executive committees of the Faculty Senate and AAUP, which is the collective bargaining representative for faculty. The President or Provost attends the Faculty Senate meetings where the President's report is a regular agenda item. The President often meets with student leaders and, periodically, with the Student Senate and the Graduate Student Association.

In addition to the input of the above entities, the President has an Advisory Council composed of State and national leaders. Established in 2003, the Council meets at the President's request (every six months) to provide advice and feedback.

The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, who reports to the President, is also the chief budget officer with authority and oversight of the University's academic finances. The President appoints the Provost for a three-year term, subject to administrative review by the Faculty Senate. Three vice provosts (Faculty Affairs, Academic Personnel and Budget and Enrollment Management); the deans (colleges and libraries); the Chief Information Officer (CIO); and the Special Assistant to the Provost for Academic Planning report to the Provost. The Director of Budget and Financial Planning reports to both the Provost and Vice President for Administration and Finance. The Vice President for Administration and Finance is responsible for all matters concerning University development, operation, property, physical plant, financial, personnel, labor relations, construction, security, and safety.

Chaired by the Provost, the Council of Deans represents the ten colleges and the Graduate School and meets biweekly. A search committee, governed by the faculty collective bargaining agreement, leads searches for deans. The Provost appoints the deans for three years. They report to the Provost and are evaluated by the Provost and Faculty Senate triennially.

As part of the Provost's team, the Dean of the Graduate School oversees graduate education with the cooperation of the University's Graduate Council. The University College for Academic Success (UCAS) enrolls students who have not matriculated into a degree-granting college. It

provides advising, and houses the Center for Career and Experiential Education (and Academic Enhancement Center, which provide tutoring and other support.

Deans working with department chairs or area coordinators largely manage the oversight of the academic colleges. Pursuant to 3.21.10 of the *Manual* and Collective Bargaining Agreement, chairs remain members of the collective bargaining unit. The collective bargaining agreement prescribes three-year terms and governs selection, review and compensation. Chairs make independent recommendations, to their dean, about faculty tenure, promotion and retention following an initial peer review.

The leadership structure of URI, including vice presidents deans and directors, is lean, efficient and for the most-part effective, particularly at programmatic change. URI leadership is committed to shared governance with faculty and students and this has contributed significantly to academic program reform. Although academic planning is both ongoing and successful, there remain shared academic governance concerns about UCAS, URI 101 (Planning for Academic Success), and the role of professional versus faculty advisors.

In addition, there remains insufficient alignment of academic planning with operational needs, such as Human Resources, Procurement and Travel. Although there are two internal joint governance committees, the Joint Committee on Academic Planning (JCAP) and the Strategic Budget Planning Committee (SBPC), and many other committees that have enhanced faculty, student and administrative participation in University planning and budgeting processes, there is no ongoing governing process to provide processes and support structures that meet the needs of a transforming and growing URI. Furthermore, the organizational structure, particularly of operations such as HR, Procurement, and Travel, is unnecessarily siloed and bureaucratic making it difficult to align operations with programmatic and administrative needs, and Goal 5 of the Strategic Plan outlines critical areas for improvement. It is important to acknowledge, however, that while some of the bureaucracy is imposed by the State, a great deal of it is created internally and could therefore be addressed, by URI, with leadership, organizational and governance changes. Such changes to achieve alignment are critical to achieving the goals of the Strategic Plan.

Two-way communication is an antecedent to effective organization and governance. Many administrators, faculty, staff and students acknowledged improved planning and communication. At the same time, however, others took issue with the lack of opportunities for widespread, early input in planning before plans or decisions are made. Recognizing there are instances when there is insufficient time for such input, it is important to provide opportunities for widespread, early input. Doing so will enhance operational alignment, engagement of stakeholders and ownership in decision-making.

In summary, in a relatively short time, URI has achieved positive transformation in the face of significant declines in State financial support and external governance changes. The current Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) and the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (OPC) are committed to URI's success and to building an effective working relationship with URI's leadership. Furthermore, the President and Provost's stable leadership, their appreciation for shared governance, and the significant leadership changes of operational divisions and colleges have resulted in an effective internal governance system with integrity and transparency. Some organizational restructuring has occurred as the positive transformation has

elevated research and student success. To support URI's continued transformation, it is essential that operational alignment be a priority.

STANDARD 4: THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The institution's academic programs are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes. The institution works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the academic quality and integrity of its academic programs and the credits and degrees awarded. The institution sets a standard of student achievement appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded and develops the systematic means to understand how and what students are learning and to use the evidence obtained to improve the academic program.

The University of Rhode Island offers broad undergraduate and graduate programs within eight degree-granting colleges that are consistent with the mission and purposes of the University and reflect the institution's flagship, land grant status. URI offers 92 undergraduate majors with more than 125 degree options, 62 master's degrees, 34 Ph.D.'s, and professional doctorates in Physical Therapy, Pharmacy and Nursing. Master's programs include both professional and traditional academic degrees. Several unique programs of study are offered that address current real-world challenges (e.g., Digital Forensics, Cyber Security, pharmaceutical sciences, and the DNP/PhD in nursing). The broad scope of educational programs, in both traditional (humanities, STEM) and in the above examples of timely, real-world areas of study, address the educational needs of the State and beyond.

Several buildings include exemplary technology resources and study spaces for students (e.g. Carothers Library; Beupre Science building). Further examples include the new Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies (CEPS) that targets adult learners from the broader RI community, as well the new state-of-the art Rhode Island Nursing Education Center in Providence designed to provide superior pre-professional training in multiple degree levels in nursing.

Over the last ten years, the College of Health Sciences and the Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies were created. Additionally, the George & Anne Ryan Institute for Neuroscience and the Rhode Island Nursing Education Center were created. The College of Human Science and Services was disbanded and several departments were moved to the new College of Health Sciences from the colleges of Environment and Life Sciences and Arts and Sciences, respectively. Additionally, with the disbanding of the College of Human Science and Services, the Department of Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design was moved to the College of Business Administration.

All academic requirements are clearly presented on various URI webpages and found within the Catalogue and the *Manual*. URI has established standards of English proficiency for entry into the University for all students, including international students, that adhere to accreditation expectations. Admission requirements (clearly identified online) for both undergraduate and graduate programs demonstrate that only qualified students are admitted.

Learning outcomes are determined by each program and published on department websites and linked to the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation (SLOAA) website. Faculty Senate representatives and others raised concerns regarding how the overall student learning outcomes, published in the online 2017-2018 Catalogue, did not align well with the Academic Plan, as well as with the new General Education curriculum elements. For example, there is nothing stated about demonstrating competency in working with diverse groups, understanding global concerns, or developing communication abilities across domains. Discussion with campus personnel verified an awareness that this disconnect exists among learner outcome documents and that editing efforts are being made.

Many program-level student learning outcomes are easily identified on the University's webpages and attributed to URI's "Branding Initiative"; however, several links are broken (refer to Standard #9 report). There is also clear articulation of the learning assessment strategies that have been developed, acknowledging that the revised core curriculum is too recently implemented to have yet been assessed by these procedures.

Assuring Academic Quality

New curricula development requires consultation with the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation (SLOAA) for development of an appropriate assessment plan and approval by the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC), following criteria defined in the *Manual* and with consideration to how well the new program aligns with the Academic Strategic Plan. Curricular changes are approved by the appropriate college curriculum committee and then reviewed by Faculty Senate-directed committees, including the Curriculum Affairs Committee (undergraduate programs) and the Graduate Council (graduate programs).

Policies for award of credit and transfer of credit fall within accreditation expectations. Transfer credit policies are found in the *Manual*, the Catalog, and in the Transfer Guide for Students. Student feedback from the onsite visit suggested that understanding and applying transfer credit was "easy" and accomplished by referencing the Transfer Resource Center in Roosevelt Hall or online. Credit awarded for prior experiential learning is conducted on a case-by-case basis, appears to be rare, and according to the new Dean of CEPS, is being discussed with the intention of developing improved systematic and consistent policies.

In 2011, URI implemented a systematic process of data collection that afforded departments the information needed to complete self-studies as part of the 6-year schedule of academic program reviews (APR). There are two elements of data collection completed for all departments: 1) descriptive data about the departments in an annual Central Data Report; and 2) a standardized departmental data survey completed by department chairs (Chair Survey) every two years. The third element in the APR is the self-study, which is due every 6 years. To date (2012, 2014, 2016), URI has completed three cycles of data collection for all departments (yearly and biennial) and 20 departmental APR self-studies. Thirteen self-studies are still pending for 2017, and 18 are due in 2018/19. The process of APR is overseen by an Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) comprised of representatives from the Faculty Senate, the Provost's Office, and the President's Office. A review of selected samples of APRs (e.g., Marine Affairs, Theatre, Art & Art History) provides evidence that APRC guidelines are followed and self-studies are

data-based. Programs that have external accreditation requirements are able to submit their accreditation reviews in place of a self-study.

Undergraduate Degree Programs

Undergraduate academic programs at URI are coherent in design and proceed logically from introductory to advanced material. They align with the mission and purposes of the institution and represent the array of offerings one would expect at the Land Grant, Sea Grant institution of the State. All programs require General Education courses and rigorous, in depth study of the academic discipline. Programs are designed to include natural and social sciences, humanities and professional subjects within the field of study. Major and minor requirements are published in the Catalog.

All students entering URI are first enrolled in University College for Academic Success (UCAS). This is a non-degree granting college providing an array of services for entering students including orientation, academic support and career planning. Additionally, URI 101, Planning for Academic Success, is offered to all students entering with fewer than 24 credits. The course, offered in multiple sections, applies a syllabus developed by the UCAS Dean and includes broad-reaching topics intended to ease transition to college. Topics range from information literacy to sexual assault awareness and prevention. Faculty expressed concern that URI 101, as well as possible elective credits for experiential learning primarily earned through internships, are conferred without the normal level of faculty involvement. Concerns included perceived lack of academic oversight and significant course quality variability. This was confirmed by students in an open session in which several responded both favorably and unfavorably to their URI 101 course, describing significant variability in what was covered, how well content was introduced, and by whom. The details about the course were confirmed by academic leadership who were aware of the concerns. It would be appropriate for the course to be evaluated with regard to consistency of student experience, adherence to the uniform syllabus and educational effectiveness.

General Education

The General Education plan has been substantially revised since the last comprehensive evaluation. The revision process began in 2009 with a pilot of the Grand Challenges Initiative, which supported the development of new interdisciplinary General Education courses. The new curriculum was presented in 2012, adopted by the Faculty Senate in 2014, and launched for incoming first-year students in 2016. The innovative and robust set of requirements are placed as “attributes” or “elements” in new or existing courses that are submitted for review by the Faculty Senate’s General Education Committee. The new requirements embody breadth across the sciences, arts and humanities, and also overlay skills in information literacy, global and diversity appreciation, communication skills, knowledge synthesis, inquiry-based critical thinking, and problem solving. Faculty members must submit assessment plans as part of their course proposals. Phase 1 assessment plans for the program are just beginning (AY 2017-18) by first assessing the rubrics that were developed for each element of the program.

Interviewed faculty generally embraced the new curriculum, expressing some hesitation for the major changes, and confusion in how to advise students. Student feedback confirms that the advising process has been uneven, with mixed messages and confusion about the purpose of

the requirements and the requirements themselves. Curricular sheets have been helpful when completed both sufficiently and clearly; comments from students suggest that the quality of completion varies significantly across programs. Feedback from students suggest that some “standard” of curricular sheet completion among departments would be helpful.

Graduate Degree Programs

URI’s master’s programs and number of graduates have increased over the past 10 years. Over the same time period, the number of Ph.D. programs has remained essentially constant while the number of graduates has increased. Overall graduate-level enrollment declined from 2006 to 2013 but has steadily increased since 2014, with the greatest decline in non-degree seeking students. The Graduate School, during this same time period, increased oversight regarding how many credits taken as a non-degree student could be applied to a degree program.

New programs include a Professional Science Masters (P.S.M.) in Cyber Security, an online M.S. in Dietetics, an M.S. in Medical Physics, an M.S. and Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Neurosciences, and a Doctorate in Nursing Practice (D.N.P). There are also 12 post-baccalaureate certificate programs. Development of these programs reflects the institution’s focus on programs to address real-world challenges and State needs.

Graduate degree descriptions, student learning objectives, and requirements for degree completion are published in the Catalog and on the website of each program. Review of several graduate programs demonstrate coherent and sequential plans of study, that reflect different levels of education and expertise at the certificate, minor, master’s and PhD levels. Robust experiential education is offered in most graduate programs, including, but not limited to, business and medical internships, research development and participation, global travel, artistic performance, and innovative educational simulations supported by advanced technology (e.g., Rhode Island Nursing Education Center, RINEC).

Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit

Degrees awarded by URI require a course of study typical of American higher education institutions. Most baccalaureate degrees require 120 credits; master’s degrees require a minimum of 30 credits and Ph.D. programs require satisfactory completion of coursework and a dissertation. The University’s procedures align with CIHE-NEASC’s Policy on Credits and Degrees.

The evaluation of student learning and the awarding of grades is largely the responsibility of course instructors. Course syllabi are expected to contain grading criteria.

URI’s policies on academic credit and degrees are published and include the various methods of course delivery, including traditional in-person, online, and “blended” (i.e., hybrid). Credits are awarded in accordance with accreditation standards; each credit earned includes a total of 3 hours of work described in various ways, including student presence in class, presence in the online environment, and/or an equivalent of work outside of class. Most courses offered are for 3 credits. The institution generally offers two 15-week semesters, with some variability for professional programs, J-Term/summer (e.g., J-Term = 3 weeks; summer = 5-10 weeks); however, the policy notes that the amount of work should remain consistent with the 3 hours per week of work = one credit rule. Of note, URI’s credit policy does not specifically state “a

15-week semester” as the typical length of time equivalent for a 3-credit course, although a limit on credits offered during short-term courses is explained in 8.32.10 (*URI Manual*). Policies for award of credit based on any variances from standard policy (e.g., examination equivalents, non-academic activity, etc.) are also clearly described in the *Manual*.

A review of a sample of 48 syllabi indicated, to the Team, that the expectations for course credit are stated within the syllabi. In addition, the sample syllabi reviewed included student learning outcomes and grading expectations.

URI’s online education has several quality standards built in, including a requirement that all faculty participate in an online pedagogy competency course. Online and hybrid courses are developed, reviewed and assessed using the same policies and procedures as for traditional face-to-face courses. The Office of Online Education and the Joint Committee on Distance and Online Learning recognize the challenges concerning academic integrity and continue to monitor classroom issues. Further, URI has set a goal for the next year of better ensuring student identity in online courses, addressed in the Standard 7 (Technology Resources) section of this report. Specifically, URI is moving towards a more secure and verifiable single-sign on system to access all of the institution’s web-based resources.

STANDARD 5: STUDENTS

Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve. The institution addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its students and provides a safe environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students. It endeavors to ensure the success of its students, offering the resources and services that provide them the opportunity to achieve the goals of their educational program as specified in the institutional publications. The institution’s interactions with students and prospective students are characterized by integrity.

Admissions

Despite a long-term decrease in the number of high school graduates in the region and the Northeast in general, the University of Rhode Island maintains a healthy enrollment. By using strategic data and predictive modeling effectively, the University has increased the diversity, selectivity and quality of its undergraduate student body. In the ten years since the last self-study and CIHE-NEASC visit, undergraduate enrollment has increased 18.4%, while graduate enrollment has declined 10.3%. The diversity of undergraduates has increased from 11.5% to 19.5%. As of the fall of 2016, the total student numbers were 14,801 undergraduate and 3,033 graduate students. As of the fall of 2015, 261 undergraduate and 286 graduate students were international. Students take courses at three teaching campuses as well as at satellite locations. Approximately 6,000 students live on campus and out-- of-state students make up 46. 3% of the student body.

To remain competitive in a difficult market for attracting undergraduate students (UG), the University has joined with several online strategic partners, created a virtual tour, and gathered over 40,000 views from prospective students in all 50 states and from 60 foreign countries.

These efforts have yielded strong applicant growth. The transfer student population is approximately 1/5 the size of the entering freshmen class. Transfer students report that the transfer process is orderly and purposeful. It provides a structured pathway for their entry to the University.

Regarding graduate students, as discussed in Standard 4, the Graduate School has the formal authority to admit and oversee graduate students, but it does so entirely on the recommendations from the individual programs, and hence the characteristics of the graduate student body are determined by the individual programs. That said, since the 2007 CIHE-NEASC review, the Graduate School has initiated a number of annual events designed to encourage greater communication among the graduate students themselves and the graduate faculty, including a new graduate student orientation, a TA workshop, and a Graduate Faculty Summit. In the spring of 2017, the graduate school held its first open house. The team took note of the decrease in graduate enrollment mentioned in the self-study and chose to investigate this further in discussions with the Dean of the Graduate School. One significant factor has been a substantial decrease in the enrollment in the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies (GSLIS) and, in particular, in its Master of Library Information Science (MLIS). Ten years ago, this program had over 200 students but began losing large numbers of students until it stabilized at about 100 students in 2012. There were multiple reasons for this decline, including many faculty retirements prior to 2010, institutional priorities, and national trends in MLIS, especially the emergence of online programs at other universities. But, an even more significant factor is that the enrollment data in the self-study include non-degree seeking students whose numbers have been intentionally reduced as the graduate programs move towards a stronger research focus. This fact is confirmed by the number of degrees awarded in 2016-2017 (140 PhDs and 529 Master's) versus 2005-2006 (67 PhDs and 493 Master's).

The team spoke with both representatives of the Graduate Student Association, and graduate students from the Student Leadership Council, all of whom indicated that they felt the caliber of their programs was very good. Students from the Graduate School of Oceanography expressed concerns about the difficulty in commuting to the Kingston campus (primarily, inadequate parking) for their TA responsibilities, and also felt they lacked sufficient orientation to the Kingston campus. Foreign graduate students expressed frustration with housing options, some of which required them to spend 50% of their stipends to obtain adequate, proximate housing (which they need because they rarely have cars). The plans (see Standard 7) to build additional near-campus housing for (among others) graduate students should reduce this problem in the intermediate term.

Student Services and Co-Curricular Experiences

Overall, undergraduate students (UG) report that the University provides a strong sense of community. They feel welcome and at home. The number of activities available to students is what attracted them to the University and what keeps them there. Students felt that there are tremendous opportunities available and an immense support system. They acknowledge that students need to learn to take advantage of them if they are going to work. In fact, they used the adage, "You can lead a horse to water...."

Evidence of the support systems was cited as taking place at the Academic Enhancement Center (AEC). Students noted that the center it is not only helpful to students through tutoring, but most especially beneficial because the staff help students become better learners. Other programs noted to help students succeed include:

1. The Pass Program - it assists students with success, not just academic problems, providing them a holistic vision for the future.
2. The Students First Fund is designed to help students in crisis.
3. Starfish is a positive addition to help students manage their programs.

Particularly singled out for its support of students is the Talent Development Program. Some students reported that they would not have succeeded without it and that the help it provides is critically important. The students noted that it is important because it bridges the gap to academic and social achievement in college that was created by inadequate high school preparation. Clearly, it is providing students the self-confidence they need to succeed. The University is commended for the support provided to the students and staff of the Talent Development Program.

Of particular note is that students often cited a lack of resources were a hindrance to goal achievement. For example, several students mentioned the lack of lighting in commuter parking lots and areas intersecting campus and the local community that create concerns about campus safety, especially because there is no bus service after 7 PM. While these students emphasized that they understood the University was interested in addressing problems, they also were aware that it does not always have the money available to do so. This speaks to the forthright and open communication present between administration and student leaders.

Students on the Feinstein Providence campus report that the campus was a “game changer” for them and other older students. The campus is convenient and responsive. One student noted, “Down to the janitor, it is a family. When you need something, the staff doesn’t point you in the right direction, they take you there.” Staff noted that Feinstein Providence campus students have access to the same services as the Kingston campus and, in addition, t evening hours for support, ID Cards and academic advising are provided. Because of the nature of the campus, students felt like they belonged because there are “more people my age.” In a nod to the campus marketing and tag-line, a student said he walked by the building, saw the message to “Think Big” and decided he could do it – something he had never done in his life. He plans to graduate at the end of the year.

The Nursing Education Center in Providence is an incredible facility It is more than state-- of—the-art; it is poised to educate nurses well into the 21st century. The University is commended for working with the State and other higher education institutions to make this program a reality.

Student Services at the University of Rhode Island are highlighted as being part of three different areas: Health and Well Being, Academic Support, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The University aligns student services and co-curricular experiences with the University’s mission statement as well as other goal-centered documents and has many academic and personal support resources and programs for undergraduate students. The “Cornerstones of the University”

document provides a framework for students regarding what the University values and how they are expected to act when they are members of the University community.

The Student Affairs area has committed itself to conducting comprehensive program reviews for all departments within the division. Once every five years, each department will conduct a self-study and be part of an external review. Leadership and the Student Activities areas are currently conducting assessments of student organizations and defining what it means for an organization to be effective in meeting its goals. They are taking a long-term look at what is working for students and why it is working. The Counseling and Health Center staff are preparing for reviews within the next year.

The University has improved its four- and six-year graduation rates that now stand at 52.3% and 65.6%, respectively. While lower than most of their New England state counterparts, the increases are significant. The “Take 15/Finish in 4” initiative was implemented by the institution and it is anticipated that there will be further increases in graduation rates as these cohorts grow. The “Finish What You Started” program already is seeing success with 270 individuals completing degrees they started as long as 20 years ago. The program has benefited the State as a whole and includes students who utilize the program to complete degrees started at and then conferred by other institutions.

STANDARD 6: TEACHING, LEARNING AND SCHOLARSHIP

The institution supports teaching and learning through a well-qualified faculty and academic staff, who, in structures and processes appropriate to the institution, collectively ensure the quality of instruction and support for student learning. Scholarship, research, and creative activities receive support appropriate to the institution’s mission. The institution’s faculty has primary responsibility for advancing the institution’s academic purposes through teaching, learning and scholarship.

Faculty and Staff

Since the last review, URI has hired approximately 40% of its faculty, most of the deans, and many senior leaders. This circumstance resulted from offering retirement incentives and phased retirement programs and a commitment to fill a significant number of newly created full-time, tenure track and lecturer positions. Cluster hires have facilitated the development of greater interdisciplinary efforts across the University. The influx of new personnel has also helped to build enthusiasm and facilitated greater openness to new ideas. As a result, many processes and procedures have recently changed, the results of which have yet to be assessed.

Faculty categories and definitions were updated in the 2014-2018 faculty contract and include clinical and research faculty and faculty of practice, in addition to the conventional tenure-track ranks. Numerous variations in title and rank are described in the University *Manual*. A performance-based career ladder for lecturers has been included in the current collective bargaining agreement. Procedures for selecting faculty are also included in the faculty collective bargaining agreement (Article XI).

The Data First forms indicate that 742 full-time faculty serve 16,185 FTE students (approximately 22 students per full-time faculty member). This reflects a recent increase in the number of full-time lectures and assistant professors hired under the “60 in 4” program intended

to increase new full-time faculty (between 2016 and 2019) relative to part-time faculty. Hiring 60 new full-time tenure-track faculty over 4 years will also help URI achieve and maintain its overall target student to faculty ratio (16.5:1), although differing targets have been set on a college-by-college basis.

The Data First forms also show that of 1,020 faculty and staff, 678 (~66%) hold doctoral or other terminal degrees. Among faculty, 654 of 758 (86%) hold terminal degrees. Of the 612 tenure track faculty, 288 (47%) have achieved the rank of Professor, using 2017 figures, and full-time faculty consistently teach over 70% of courses.

Between 2011 and 2017, the proportion of faculty of color has increased from 16% to 19.3%. The University's website indicates that students of color make up 23% of the undergraduate student body. Information on the Data First forms indicate that 48% of full-time faculty are female; the URI website indicates that 54.4% of undergraduates are female. The University does not officially track LGBT-identified faculty. However, diversity-focused staff can easily name a number of administrators, staff, and faculty who are open about their sexual-minority or gender nonconforming identities. Efforts to increase the diversity of faculty are now led by a new Director of the Division of Faculty and Staff Recruitment who works with hiring departments/units. URI's Multicultural Faculty Fellowship program (a post-doctoral appointment) has created a pathway for successful candidates to move into tenure track positions. Three of the five recent Fellows who participated in the program accepted a tenure track position at URI.

Graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants provide some support for student learning. Training for GTAs was re-implemented in 2015 and, by contract, GTAs are evaluated annually by their supervisors. However, GTAs with whom the team met shared their frustrations about the lack of clarity in their roles and responsibilities, inequities in workload, and the absence of training for their mentors/supervisors. An ad hoc committee recently reviewed the allocation of TAs and has made recommendations to the Provost. Particularly given that URI plans to add 50 new TA positions, it will need to follow through on its plans to refine and standardize the allocation and assessment of GTAs.

Starting salaries are informed by national data and vary by discipline, among other factors. The self-study indicates that compensation is sufficient to support a 99% year-over-year retention rate of the nearly 600 tenure-track faculty and does not include retirements.

Contract negotiations with the part-time faculty union have been ongoing for almost five years. Some members of the bargaining unit participated in the faculty open forum and a meeting with faculty union leadership. While informational pickets had apparently been planned during the visit, they were not visible to team members.

Guided by union contracts, faculty workloads are determined at the department level with approval of a dean. The Data First forms show that median teaching loads (assessed in credit hours) for lecturers are more than double the median load for tenured and tenure-track faculty. Teaching and research loads vary by department and faculty status.

The rights and responsibilities of faculty (including protection of academic freedom) are articulated in chapter 6 of the Faculty Handbook (the University *Manual*) and in contractual union agreements. There was some concern expressed about inadequate and inequitable access

to support staff, a factor that contributes to work-life imbalance leaving less time to attend to research, teaching, and service.

An electronic dossier has been developed to make faculty annual, promotion, and tenure reviews more efficient. AAUP and the Provost's office jointly conduct annual workshops that address substantive and process issues. The contracts outline the processes and procedures relevant to review and promotion. The contracts also describe the accomplishments that may be included in faculty dossiers. The University *Manual* (section 7.22.10) indicates that promotion criteria include research, teaching, and service, but these criteria are not defined further. Responsibility for weighting the relative importance of these three criteria is delegated to the faculty of departments or other units. Access to department-level documents describing specific criteria was limited to those pertaining to Business, Kinesiology, Economics, English, Pharmacy, and Human Development and Family Studies. These documents describe, often in detail, the specific quantitative and qualitative criteria which faculty are expected to meet or exceed. Deans also reported that expectations for research, teaching, and service are detailed in individual appointment letters, which are tailored to the appointees' interests and university needs. The clarity with which expectations for retention, promotion, and tenure are articulated appears to vary, in some cases considerably, by department, and these documents are neither collected centrally nor easily retrievable.

A system for reviewing lecturers (which includes course observation) and a career ladder were initiated in the AAUP contract in AY2015-16. URI is evaluating the instruments used for assessing lecturers and will use those data to improve assessment of tenure-track faculty as well.

A recurring theme through meetings during the visit suggests a need for communications planning as some faculty expressed concern that decisions (e.g., LMS selection) that impact academic program delivery are made without adequate opportunity for faculty input and that Faculty Senate committees are too often used as a mechanism for informing faculty of decisions already made, rather than including faculty as a partner in decision making. However, it was difficult to assess whether these attitudes are broadly held.

Teaching and Learning

A variety of programs and processes support the achievement of key milestones on students' pathways to graduation. For example, the Gateway to Completion project focuses on student success in gateway courses. Students have opportunities for short-term study abroad that do not require semester- or year-long commitments. Additionally, URI is offering new online programs and has expanded access to coursework online, especially in the summer.

Assessment data are collected through a variety of mechanisms including routine student ratings of instruction, faculty peer review, periodic administration of NSSE, as well as other means. NSSE results indicate that the majority of seniors (92%) report having experienced at least 1 (usually more) 'high impact practice'.

Significant investments in faculty development programs through the Office for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning are intended to encourage innovation. URI has hired two new staff to enhance professional development opportunities that help faculty implement evidence-based practices in teaching and learning. The first goal of the Information Technology Services (ITS) Strategic Plan for 2017-2021 is to "create a more connected campus community

and leverage the innovative use of collaborative technologies with the creative energy of our faculty to advance new engaging and effective modes of learning and discovery,” and, additionally, one of the President’s Transformational Goals for the 21st Century includes creating a 24/7 learning environment.

The University has a solid faculty user base for its LMS Sakai, and offers both introductory and advanced training, with established minimum qualifications for instructors in online courses. Faculty development for online course development and a student response system are also available, and a new program on blended learning is launching in spring 2018 through the Office for Advancement of Teaching and Learning (ATL). URI also offers a Quality Matters (QM) style of peer review of course sites to ensure quality. The self-study indicates that faculty development to improve teaching is on a voluntary basis, yet the overall improvement of teaching, as well as the targeting of specific innovative practices, are part of various strategic plans for the University. Approximately a quarter of the faculty voluntarily participated in short programs offered by the Faculty Development unit of ATL in AY 16-17.

The Data First forms show that most academic programs have multiple faculty with one exception, Africana Studies, which lists only one full-time faculty member and no part-time faculty. However, the respective program websites show multiple faculty affiliated with, and teaching courses in, these programs.

Internal surveys and NSSE results showed a lack of satisfaction with academic advising which led to changes in the advising system, e.g. integrating its career and experiential learning centers to increase opportunities for experiential learning and career planning; hiring 11 new professional academic advisors in 2017; and instituting a new advisor education program for anyone with advising responsibilities. The results of these changes will be assessed using the 2019 NSSE results.

Generally speaking, student access to high quality advising appears to vary by status and major. All entering students receive academic advising through University College which houses professional advisors who are affiliated with specific colleges. The caseload for each advisor is approximately 400 students. The advising model for 3rd and 4th year students varies by department along a continuum – from exclusive use of professional advisors to relying exclusively on faculty to provide academic advice for majors with advanced standing. Overall, faculty with advising assignments represent a small proportion of the faculty. URI’s advising model has been evolving over the past several years and it continues to change leaving students confused about their access to academic advising.

Professional development opportunities are available to faculty members in or through sabbatical leaves, on-campus workshops, participation in national/international conferences, teaching fellowships, and an array of offices and mechanisms (e.g., the Office for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning). In addition, The Division of Research and Economic Development, and the Council for Research, provide support for finding resources, winning and administering external funding, and dealing with regulatory issues. Issues related to patenting, licensing, and intellectual property are handled by the Research Foundation, which is also within the Division of Research and Economic Development. Offices providing access to such opportunities are not networked in any way making it difficult to assess the equity with which incentives or resources are distributed. Faculty are introduced to these offerings during new faculty orientation, however

the absence of a faculty tab on the university homepage makes accessing information about development opportunities challenging.

STANDARD 7: INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

The institution has sufficient human, financial, information, physical, and technological resources and capacity to support its mission. Through periodic evaluation, the institution demonstrates that its resources are sufficient to sustain the quality of its educational program and to support institutional improvement now and in the foreseeable future. The institution demonstrates, through verifiable internal and external evidence, its financial capacity to graduate its entering class. The institution administers its resources in an ethical manner and assures effective systems of enterprise risk management, regulatory compliance, internal controls, and contingency management.

Human Resources

The University has focused on expanding its full-time faculty in order to increase the proportion of courses taught by full-time faculty. This effort is guided by the Academic Strategic Plan and addresses high-demand areas for teaching and specific research areas that are important to the economic development of Rhode Island. In addition, faculty positions vacated through departures or retirements revert to the Provost office and may be reallocated to strategically important programs. Approximately 40% of the full-time faculty has been hired in the last ten years. To enhance the quality of teaching and research, URI has also established promotional pathways for full-time lecturers and added non-tenure-track research and clinical faculty categories. The University benchmarks incoming faculty salaries, but pay increases are governed by collective bargaining. Annual faculty training sessions offer guidance on the tenure and promotion process and criteria, as well as the preparation of electronic dossiers.

The University generally has good labor relations, although the team noted the unsettled contract with the part-time faculty unit. Ninety percent of employees are covered in one of ten collective bargaining agreements and are governed by State of Rhode Island (RI), Board of Education (BOE), and URI personnel policies. There is strong commitment to Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity and Diversity in all searches. The Human Resources Administration (HRA) unit is constrained by requirements to follow RI civil service policies and compensation standards for certain classes of employees (service, trades, clerical, etc.); this has consequences in establishing appropriate qualifications for positions as well as “bumping” by employees released by other State agencies who have seniority over a comparable URI employee. The University is seeking legislative relief to move these positions out from civil service and under the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) like other URI staff. All collective bargaining agreements, including grievance procedures, are available on the HR Administration website.

The University has identified the recruiting process as a limiting factor; the Vice President for Administration and Finance (VPAF) is leading a project to streamline HR processes that has already produced initial process maps. The University intends to reduce redundant steps and duplication of effort and to consider shared service models to consolidate processing and reduce errors. The University is also reviewing all HR policies under the CPE and will be seeking opportunities to move away from “one-size-fits-all” classifications for the three institutions

under the CPE. HRA and the Office of Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity and Diversity (AAEOD) each monitor commitments to equal opportunity, diversity, and affirmative action in faculty and staff searches, but there may be ways for the University to improve the efficiency of this monitoring.

There are regular evaluations for faculty and senior administrators in the Divisions of Academic Affairs and Research and Economic Development, but there is no evaluation system at present for other employees, unionized or not. Staff and administrators expressed frustration over the lack of a performance feedback process, and there is no opportunity for merit-based increases for non-represented staff.

Financial Resources

Financial Position

Based on data from FY2012 through FY2016, the University has maintained or improved its financial position. Total cash and investments have increased \$61.4M to \$282.0M, and the ratio of spendable cash and investments to operations rose from 0.3x to 0.4x in that period. Days cash on hand grew from 86 to 106, and the ratio of spendable cash and investments to total debt improved from 0.5x to 0.8x. These figures exclude performance from FY2017 for which financial statements were not available until after the site visit, but the Controller indicated the University's external auditors would give an unmodified opinion for that year. These figures do not include impact from a recent bond issue, part of which was for a new capital project and part for refunding existing debt. The Vice President for Administration and Finance (VPAF) indicated that the cost of borrowing was favorable and that the refunding yielded significant savings. A review of the University's ratios against those of other institutions suggests that its current credit ratings of Aa3 for Educational and General revenue bonds and A1 for Auxiliary revenue bonds (Moody's) and A+ (S&P) are appropriate. The University does not have responsibility for its proportion of unfunded liabilities for the State's defined benefit pension fund, identified on its financial statements through GASB 68, but it does make significant contributions annually to the pension fund. All fiscal policies can be found on websites associated with various offices including Budget and Financial Planning, Controller, Purchasing and Research and Economic Development.

The University adopted a policy, in 2012, to set aside unrestricted funds in a contingency fund against unanticipated or uninsured costs and events. As a budget governor, this had the effect of requiring a margin to be reserved, and the Administration set a target of 5% of the prior year's unrestricted revenues. As of the end of FY2016, this contingency fund was \$23M (out of a total of \$33.6M of unrestricted balances) or 6% of the prior year's unrestricted revenues. This is a prudent and disciplined approach for which the University should be commended. The President may designate amounts in these fund balances above the contingency level for strategic one-time investments. For instance, the University is funding planning costs for a new Capital Campaign through this mechanism. The URI Foundation has an expanding role in supporting critical University programs through fundraising and through management of the University's endowment. URI receives \$10-15M in gifts and endowment income annually through the URI Foundation to support programs and student support. It is intending to launch the University's next Capital Campaign early next year, focusing on strategic objectives.

Budget Planning

The University adopted a budget process in 2010 that links directly with strategic and academic planning, primarily through the work of the Strategic Budgeting and Planning Council (SBPC). This Council consists of senior leaders, faculty, academic unit leaders, a community member, students, and a representative of the URI Foundation. The work of the SBPC is tied directly to the Academic Strategic Plan (*Innovation with Impact: Shaping the Future of URI*). All requests for new funding from the operating budget, unless previously obligated, require endorsement from the SBPC before submission to the President for his decision, depending on available resources. As noted in the self-study, “Requests for funding from division leaders are expected to cite data, including benchmark data, concerning the efficient and effective use of resources.” The work of the SBPC is accessible through its website, and the process involves member research and ratings of proposals, presentations, and deliberations leading to recommendations to the President.

The Administration follows the Principles for a Strategic and Sustainable Budget Process, which declare the values the University holds important in resource allocation and management. These procedures are substantially more rigorous and transparent than noted in the last self-study in 2007; however, the current self-study acknowledges the following:

The SBPC continues to be challenged, however, with arriving at a process that is responsive to the needs of the various units on campus while also focusing on strategic priorities and addressing critically important evolving needs and financial mandates. During its annual process review, the SBPC noted the issue of funding emergent critical needs and mandates within the current process and recommended modifying its process to improve consideration of these needs.

The Council does a full self-assessment after each annual cycle to identify and make any needed adjustments to process or policy. The SBPC serves a similar role in prioritizing capital projects for inclusion in the CPE’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

It was noted in the self-study that: “All divisions of the University have their own budget processes aligned with their own internal strategies but reflect the University’s strategic goals.” Academic Affairs uses a budget planning process that requires tying current and proposed initiatives to specific Academic Plan themes and goals. The process requires proposed budgets plus multiyear projections for each academic unit. As stated, “important” requirements in the budget process include an emphasis on strategic investments, an open and transparent process, data-informed measures of productivity and cost effectiveness, and initiatives to support innovation.” Academic leaders are required to share plans and requests with colleagues, members of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, and the Provost’s staff. When tenure-track faculty positions open up, the position reverts to the Provost for allocation to areas of “most-need” for instructional programs based on demand and program development data. There is a formal mid-year financial review process following guidelines from the Office of Budget and Financial Planning.

The Vice Provost for Enrollment Management with assistance from Institutional Research and the Enrollment Management Committee does enrollment forecasting, planning, and budgeting. Enrollment has been stable with increases in targeted programs; the majority of freshman come from out-of-state, in particular from neighboring states. URI has held or increased its “market share” of these students, but each of those states has similar demographic challenges to Rhode Island’s. Its financial plan is highly dependent on maintaining these proportions of out-of-state students while not growing tuition discounting disproportionately. The University has improved its retention over recent years, and this has contributed additional funds for strategic investments through improved net tuition. There were no concerning findings on the institution’s A-133/Uniform Guidance audits regarding financial aid.

Appropriations

Like many state flagships, URI has faced reductions in state support for operations; its appropriation is \$5.1M less in FY2018 than it was in FY2007, but the current level (\$77.4M) is \$20.8M more than the lowest point in FY2012, representing approximately 15% of its operating expenses. The University makes its annual request for state support through the Council of Postsecondary Education’s (CPE) budget process that also includes setting tuition and fees and a preliminary request to the Governor for the following year’s appropriation; this process must conclude with approval by the full Board of Education by October 1 in the year preceding the fiscal year in question. With the CPE’s approval, the budget goes to the Governor for inclusion in the overall state budget request to the legislature. As noted, in the self-study “...the governing board has autonomy in proposing the University’s budget and setting tuition, while the legislature has final authority over appropriations.” The University increased enrollment in higher-demand programs, particularly with out-of-state students, and improved retention of the student body to make up for declining state funding during this period. The University hopes to see increases in state appropriations, returning to pre-recession levels over the next five years.

The CPE maintains a rolling five-year funding plan for all three of the public higher education institutions in the State. The self-study indicates that this plan incorporates “strategic financing recommendations of the board of education.” New sources of revenue through new programs or program delivery go through the budget review and approval process, and, when appropriate, go forward for approval from CIHE-NEASC. The Office of Budget and Financial Planning has a series of substantial controls for expenditures throughout the University.

There appear to be political influences in the budget process with the Council for Postsecondary Education, both in terms of University appropriation requests as well as setting of tuition and fees outside of the CPE’s financial processes. In addition, though the CPE has clear direct authority to set tuition and fees for each of its institutions, it had taken direction from the executive branch. It is also unclear how budget decisions from the CPE reflect the distinct mission of the University vis-à-vis the other two institutions.

State support also includes capital funds. There are four sources of external capital besides contributions:

- The RI Capital Budget (specific capital projects and asset protection - \$13.9M in 2017), funded by the state through a specific set-aside of general revenues
- General obligation bonds (RI) for academic projects (require voter approval) – does not require the University to pay debt service

- Revenue bonds for auxiliary enterprises (through an RI issuing agency) – requires the University to pay debt service
- Certificates of Participation (COPs) - funds issued by the State for projects related to energy conservation, technology, equipment, etc.

This support has been substantial in the past ten years, providing a large majority of funding of major capital renewal projects. The University recently issued revenue bonds to provide substantial funding for a new residence facility as well as to gain savings by refunding existing bonds.

Ethics, Oversight, and Reporting

The University maintains typical ethics reporting processes and is subject to the State’s Code of Ethics. Internal audit functions are through the State’s office. RI requires completion of an Annual Financial Integrity and Accountability Report.

The University follows GASB accounting standards and has appropriate external annual audits for preparation of financial statements and for OMB Uniform Guidance (Single Audit). The most recent reports had unmodified opinions from the external auditor; it had a number of significant deficiencies (not material weaknesses) in its Single Audit report for which disclosure was required. Each was in the Student Financial Assistance Cluster, and none had any questioned costs. An examination of these findings indicated that they were typical of common findings at higher education institutions, and there were corrective action plans for each finding. Fiscal policies are readily available online. There are multiple state agencies that have “an active role in overseeing the finances of the University.”

Information, Physical, and Technological Resources

Information Technology

The Information Technology Services (ITS) reports through the Office of the Provost. Key institutional IT resources include:

- PeopleSoft eCampus
- Sakai LMS
- Google G-Suite for Education (Email and other applications)
- Telecommunications
- Data Networking
- Server Management
- Help Desk
- Classroom Support
- Media Services

IT priorities and efforts are guided by the recent IT Strategic Plan (2017), developed with “substantial community involvement and input” by the IT Governance Council. ITS is cited for bringing applications to the community that create real administrative efficiencies. The upgrade to Google applications is cited as enabling “better collaboration for students as well as faculty

and staff.” The University is using cloud-based services to address concerns for disaster recovery and business continuity, and this will continue as systems are replaced or upgraded.

The self-study acknowledges that “investments in information technology” continue to be a challenge, stating that resources are insufficient. Through year-end allocations, the administration has funded priority one-time projects outside of the regular budget. The IT Strategic Plan identifies as critical steps in implementing the plan:

- Determining the right balance of central and college/department-based IT resources
- Making IT positions more market-competitive

The administration has initiated a review of IT services that will incorporate “right-placing” distributed vs. central resources as well as performing zero basing of budgets. The latter is a vital step towards achieving service levels required by the community.

The self-study states that the “five-year plan is in place and implementation is underway.” An initial project, consolidating multiple active directories resulting in a single sign-on capability, has come through the SBPC process as the top priority for the next year. This project will address serious internal security concerns as well as user issues for accessing key University systems including educational ones. There is not yet a definitive funding plan to address the other initiatives in the IT Strategic Plan, which could be up to \$15 million. The University has begun recruiting a permanent Chief Information Officer to take initiatives forward, a critical step in achieving these goals.

The six goals of the plan are as follows:

Teaching and Learning:

- Enable and support innovative teaching and learning through advanced IT services.

Research:

- Create and enhance IT services to support research, scholarship, and creative work.

IT Infrastructure:

- Establish and create an agile, sustainable, and effective IT infrastructure.

IT Services:

- Advance the development, integration, and delivery of University-wide IT services to support effective management of physical, financial, and human resources.

IT Risk Management:

- Design and implement a secure IT environment that reduces risk and ensures business continuity.

IT Governance:

- Foster a collaborative and transparent planning, management, and communication protocol to effectively deliver, coordinate, and prioritize IT services.

These goals are linked directly to the Academic Strategic Plan.

The self-study noted recent observations regarding institutional information systems:

- PeopleSoft – meeting needs, may consider cloud-based services

- Budgeting software needed and under evaluation (Oracle Hyperion)
- Sakai – moved to cloud and stable, outsourced support, upgraded in late-summer
- Increased core fiber infrastructure
- Improvements to data center
- Need to rationalize directory services and identity management

Libraries,

The University of Rhode Island has three libraries: the Robert L Carothers Library and the library and Learning Commons at the (Main) Kingston campus, the Providence Campus Library, and the Pell Marine Science Library at the Narragansett Bay Campus. The University acknowledges adequate information resources but lagging staff support for library functions and expenditures as compared to URI's peers such as James Madison, University of Vermont, University of New Hampshire, and others. At the same time, its "gate count" for use by the URI community exceeds these peers. Of particular note, were expenditures for total library materials and for ongoing subscriptions, 20% and 49% respectively behind the peer median for these categories; however, total expenditures for materials have grown at a rate greater than the median, over the last five years (+45% vs. +11%).

The libraries focus on instruction around information literacy using guidelines set by the Association of College and Research Libraries. They regularly survey users to understand their opinions on service quality, finding that undergraduates feel more positive than do graduate students and faculty. The University has addressed demands from customers by building the Carothers Library Learning Commons and "strategically transforming the University Libraries to become a robust digital library of the 21- century." This includes the addition of the Active Learning Classroom, a Makerspace, and soon an Artificial Intelligence laboratory. Officials would like to continue to renovate existing stack space for student use. Library staff feel they can maintain and improve resources in the near future, and they have requested positions through the Strategic Faculty Investment Initiative.

The libraries now host URI DataSpark for the State, which complements the University's focus on "big data."

Physical Resources and Safety

The University has added substantially to its physical plant over the past 10 years, averaging \$71M/year according to an outside firm, and a substantial amount of that (46%) was for improving existing space. Incorporated into these projects was \$35M for fire safety improvements as well as disability accommodations. The deferred maintenance backlog, while still substantial, has held steady in that time period, and there is a focus on disability accommodations for both new and existing space. URI has invested in significant sustainability and energy efficiency initiatives (\$19M in FY2017), resulting in real savings in utility costs. The University has developed, and the State has supported, significant facility additions and improvements through general obligation bonds that require voter approval; the self-study says that RI has committed to support core academic functions such as a two-phase College of Engineering Complex and two new vivaria. Over this period of time, the Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation (RIHEBC) has also issued revenue bonds associated with capital projects for self-supporting auxiliary services on behalf of the University. RIHEBC

recently issued this type of bonds to provide substantial financing for a new 500-bed residence facility.

The SPBC reviews capital projects and prioritizes them into a rolling five-year plan that takes into account likely funding options. The URI Narragansett Bay Campus Master Plan for that location guides projects there. The University is initiating a campus master planning process for the Kingston Campus, building on completed plans for transportation and parking, landscaping, and storm water management. Other planned additions include renewal of the Fine Arts Center and the Narragansett Bay Campus among others. The overall capital plan “wish list” exceeds \$724M; it is highly likely that the University will have to prioritize to anticipated state funding levels and its own debt capacity. The University is conducting advanced planning on a number of potential projects. The self-study notes:

To improve strategic capital planning, the Division of Administration and Finance added a new position in FY2017 to the Business Services group, Director of Capital Planning and Real Estate Development. This position is designed to strengthen the link between the CIP and the goals of the Academic Strategic Plan. The first action in this process has been the introduction of the above-referenced “New CIP Project Submission & Review Process” as well as adjusting the alignment of achievable priorities with the Senior Leadership Team.

One particular project, the Upper College Road project, is an effort to create public-private partnerships in order to develop amenities adjacent to the main campus; in addition, it is seeking partners to advance an Innovation Campus for research using seed money from state bonding (\$20M).

Organizations within the Department of Public Safety include a police department with sworn officers; parking and transportation services; an Office of Emergency Management; Fire and Life Safety functions; and an Environmental Health and Science unit. Expectations and the deployment of safety and security technology have prompted the Department of Public Safety to request new positions from the SPBC to manage and use effectively this technology to improve safety on campus. These functions run regular tabletop and training exercises. URI police are seeking and expecting accreditation next summer from the Rhode Island Police Officers’ Commission on Standards.

STANDARD 8: EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The institution demonstrates its effectiveness by ensuring satisfactory levels of student achievement on mission-appropriate student outcomes. Based on verifiable information, the institution understands what its students have gained as a result of their education and has useful evidence about the success of its recent graduates. This information is used for planning and improvement, resource allocation, and to inform the public about the institution. Student achievement is at a level appropriate for the degree awarded.

URI has a strong commitment to ensuring satisfactory levels of student achievement and currently available evidence suggests the institution’s success in meeting its expectations. The indicators the University uses for these measures of success are appropriate to its mission.

Undergraduate and graduate student retention and graduation rates are important institutional-level indicator of student success for the University; URI tracks its progress on this measure across student populations and over time and its rates have improved fairly substantially. For example, according to self-study documentation, the overall four-year graduation rate improved by almost 6.5 percentage points between the 2006 and 2012 entering cohorts. In the self-study, URI also reports that the average time to degree of 4.2 years “compares favorably with peer institutions” according to *Complete College America*. While there is some variability across sub-populations, the retention rate for the University’s Talent Development Program students has also seen steady improvement. These students’ 6-year graduation rate has gone from 41.5% (2007 Cohort) to 60% (2011 Cohort), closing the gap between this group and the campus-wide average from -8.5% to 5%. Six-year graduation rates for students with disabilities, while showing improvement over the same period, are now among the lowest of the subpopulations at 55%.

Also in the self-study, the 2016 pass rates reported for state and national licensure exams are high: NCLEX (Nursing) at 83%; NAPLEX (Pharmacy) at 92.2%; and PRAXIS II (Education) at 100%. The University also tracks employment, both through the accredited programs that collect the information and through a post-college employment and earnings survey. As the institution acknowledges, response rates are low for this survey and, therefore, the representativeness of the results is in question. The University is currently pursuing improved means for collecting post-graduation information and improving the response rate.

The institution collects and analyzes evidence of success across its varied student populations – in some cases (e.g., retention) tracking achievement for subpopulations separately. URI’s two fully online degrees have not yet been offered for a long enough period to calculate program retention and graduation rates. However, tracking is done of course completion. The rates to date are high, ranging from 93% to 95% completion.

The Data First and E-series forms on student achievement and success are readily available online for almost all undergraduate programs. Graduate programs have more recently (2012) begun identifying learning objectives and developing assessment plans, and in 2016 the Graduate Council adopted a requirement that all course syllabi include learning outcomes statements. While some gaps do exist, a number of graduate programs now have learning objectives available through the online E-series forms. The recently developed learning objectives for the new General Education program are also readily available. With new leadership in place, Student Affairs is reviewing its objectives and, according to the self-study recognizes the need to “set outcomes, goals and metrics.” While some variations across undergraduate and graduate program statements exist, these statements are generally clear and together represent the level and range of degrees offered.

While the general education program is built around 12 learning outcomes, the team found a variety of statements distributed in various materials. These include: a “Student Learning Outcomes” statement available in the online course catalog (but not in the hard copy version), goals and values statements in the Academic Strategic Plan that suggest a set of expectations for student learning, and the “Cornerstones” statement which also suggests institution-level expectations for student learning. Student Affairs and Academic Affairs administrators acknowledged the confusion over these campus-wide statements. They noted the importance of developing one shared campus-wide statement so that schools and colleges, administrative units,

and individual programs can align their goals to these institutional learning outcomes. Further, it is important that the institutional learning outcomes align with the goals and values expressed in the Academic Strategic Plan.

The University has made substantial advances in understanding what and how its students are learning. According to a 2014 SLOAA report, departments use a range of both qualitative and quantitative, and direct and indirect methods to assess student success at the program level. Since 2006, the University has had in place a regular cycle of undergraduate program-based student learning outcomes assessment, and in 2012 began a program of graduate-level learning assessment as well. Both levels of programs are represented in the E-series forms. Each department's assessment of student learning is tied to its expressed program-level learning objectives for students. According to a 2014 Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation (SLOAA) office study of the products of program assessment, the objectives most commonly assessed by undergraduate programs were related to knowledge, critical thinking, communication, and research. For graduate programs, the most frequent objectives were knowledge, research, communication, critical thinking, and professionalism. These assessment activities occur at both the course and program level which, for some programs, are tied to licensure or other competency measures.

Drawing on its experiences in these efforts, URI adopted an outcomes-based General Education program in fall 2016 and has begun piloting rubrics to promote alignment of General Education courses with these General Education learning objectives. Additional information on the results of the General Education assessment efforts are not yet available, given the short period of time in which the program has been in place.

Student Affairs has also implemented a schedule of "Comprehensive Program Reviews" (beginning with a review of the Talent Development Program) and continues to develop unit-wide assessment strategies. The current plan is to complete at least two department reviews per year during the 5-year assessment cycle.

It was not apparent to the team that assessment of student learning at the institutional level had not occurred in recent years. The University did participate from 2008 to 2012 in the Wabash Study (a longitudinal study which investigates critical factors that affect the student outcomes of a liberal arts education). In addition, the University participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) every three years and some of the results of the survey have been used to better understand the quality of the student experience on specific topics (e.g., advising) and to provide evidence of faculty effectiveness and student learning engagement. In addition, the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) and SLOAA periodically provide focused NSSE reports to specific institutional audiences (e.g., deans, the Talent Development Program). Given the multiple demands and the limited data analysis resources available, these investigations into the overall quality of the URI student experience (and the comparisons of the URI experience to the experiences of students at other similar institutions) have to date been episodic and limited.

As indicated earlier, the institution has a relatively long history of supporting academic program-based student learning outcomes assessment through the leadership of SLOAA and the newly instituted Faculty Development Office. There are two Faculty Senate committees that oversee assessment efforts: the campus-wide Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee, and the Faculty Senate Subcommittee on Assessment of General Education (SAGE). Through collaboration between these committees and with SLOAA, the University has also developed an impressive set

of assessment tools, tracking processes, and support mechanisms, including departmental instructions and rubrics for reviewing programs. In addition, SLOAA and members of the two assessment-related Faculty Senate committees provide substantial individual, departmental, and college consultation and support.

There are areas where institutional support for the assessment efforts could be improved. As identified in the self-study and supported in discussions during the site visit, faculty and department chairs believe their investment in assessment is not valued by academic leadership, either in terms of promotion and tenure decisions or in acknowledging the time commitment required to design, conduct, analyze, and act upon assessment results. A few suggestions were to: 1) clearly articulate how assessment work will be “counted” in promotion, tenure, and merit decisions; and 2) adjust other workload responsibilities for faculty who take the lead in program assessment efforts (as is done for advising loads). In addition, in some colleges the Associate Dean helps support program assessment efforts which could be encouraged for other colleges within URI. More broadly, faculty and administrators alike noted the important role college deans play in not only demonstrating the value of the work but also in communicating firm expectations for departmental participation in the assessment process.

The University’s commitment to using the results of assessment to improve is demonstrated in a number of ways. One example is the focus on improving retention rates, a goal that is well known and referenced by numerous members of the University community (from individual faculty members to administrators, to members of the Council for Postsecondary Education). Through the analysis of retention rates, the University identified the problem of students who do not make progress in earning credits in a timely manner and the “Take 15 and finish in 4” initiative was developed to encourage students to make timely progress. The University tracked changes in credit accumulation and retention rates before and after the program was implemented. Not only did credits earned increase substantially after program implementation, but retention rates also improved. The institution’s tracking of the outcomes of this initiative serves as a good example of evaluating the impact of initiatives on important outcomes.

Program-based student learning outcomes efforts are also used to improve programs. A study by SLOAA in 2014 analyzed the types of changes resulting from the analysis of assessment results that departments reported and found that 47% of departments identified pedagogical changes and 41% identified curricular changes. One department’s experience with assessment, for example, helped the faculty develop a streamlined and more coherent curriculum that also led to improved student-writing skills. In other conversations during the site visit, faculty talked about the need for clarity in informing students of departmental intentions for their learning, improved syllabi and course design, and better course proposals. In addition, administrators expressed appreciation that assessment efforts have been useful in informing departmental curriculum changes and also have helped faculty gain insights into what they don’t know about student performance.

Parenthetically, but an indicator of good assessment practice, SLOAA and LOOC also use evidence to determine the effectiveness of the student learning outcomes process itself, including surveying departmental chairs on a regular cycle to collect feedback on the process and have made changes to the process based on this and other feedback.

Student Survey responses have been used in some focused ways. These include using NSSE items to assess advising and instructional effectiveness. IDEA results are used to inform teaching

effectiveness and as a measure of quality of the data elements provided to departments for Academic Program Reviews. The Academic Strategic Plan identifies a set of outcomes to measure the University's progress on priorities and NSSE measures are used as indicators of quality on a number of the dimensions. In all of these cases, the expectation is that these metrics will be tracked over time.

The Self-Study describes a number of other recent initiatives where it is too early to measure success. These include: General Education and the assessment process, Student Affairs assessment efforts/plans, development of a mandatory exit survey for undergraduates and graduates, the revised alumni/post college employment and earnings survey, evaluation of the changes made to advising, and the impact of the move to online course evaluations using IDEA.

The methods URI employs to understand student success are generally valid for the purposes used. As new methods are developed, efforts are made to insure their validity, for example the work being done by SAGE and SLOAA to ensure the validity of rubrics developed to assess the new General Education requirement prior to broader use. While the campus is using a number of forms of evidence, there nonetheless are gaps that suggest areas for improvement. These include: some variability in the validity and usefulness of program assessment plans and evidence; limited department-level measures of the quality of the student experience; and the somewhat sporadic and disjointed use of the NSSE data despite URI's strong response rates and the survey's value in providing longitudinal and cross-institutional comparisons.

Another aspect to be addressed is the integration of the assessment processes and measures into program evaluation, planning, and resource allocation. The University's intention is evidenced in the Academic Strategic Plan, and recent actions to better connect program learning outcomes assessment to the Academic Program review process. However, the collection and use of evidence is yet to be integrated across the University. For example, student learning outcomes evidence is collected through one set of processes (described earlier), but the relationship between this evidence and the University's strategic planning priorities or resource allocation was unclear to the team. Also, as noted, NSSE results are prominently featured in the Academic Strategic Plan's indicators of progress pages, but NSSE results appear to be only minimally used in campus-based reflection or consideration of institutional practices.

In addition, while indicators of the quality of the student experience are clearly important to the URI per its Academic Strategic Plan, individual academic departments and other relevant units on campus appear to have little access to comparative evidence of the quality of their students' experiences (comparative to other departments at the University or to national disciplinary peers). And, while the Academic Program Review's (APR) Chairs' Survey asks departments to identify evidence of effectiveness that they collect, and some of these indicators (e.g., job placement) are included in the Strategic Planning metrics, the connection between the evidence and strategic planning priorities has not yet been clearly articulated. Moving into a more broadly coordinated and connected approach could strengthen URI's educational effectiveness efforts considerably.

Further, discussions with members of the University who work closely with collecting and disseminating evidence of effectiveness affirmed the team's impression that these individuals are not regularly included in discussions of how to bring evidence to bear to support and inform various campus priorities. Such consultation could provide useful insights to enhance the

institution's selection and use of evidence, thereby facilitating the University's development of an integrated approach to planning and assessment.

The visiting team collected substantial evidence (through discussions with faculty, administrators, students, and university leadership) of the University's interest and commitment to building robust processes for using evidence to improve educational effectiveness. At the same time, current assessment and data analysis resources are stretched thin and the amount of progress the campus has made is therefore particularly noteworthy. For the institution to address the challenges identified will require additional support.

STANDARD 9: INTEGRITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

The institution subscribes to and advocates high ethical standards in the management of its affairs and in its dealings with students, prospective students, faculty, staff, its governing board, external agencies and organizations, and the general public. Through its policies and practices, the institution endeavors to exemplify the values it articulates in its mission and related statements. In presenting the institution to students, prospective students, and other members of the public, the institutional website provides information that is complete, accurate, timely, readily accessible, clear, and sufficient for intended audiences to make informed decisions about the institution.

Overall, URI strives to comply with a range of policy requirements from the state of Rhode Island, as well as internal, mission-driven aspects of integrity, transparency and public disclosure. Its institutional goals and mission serve as the guide for planning at all levels of the institution, prioritizing integrity, operating with transparency and adhering to principles of public disclosure.

Integrity

As outlined in Standards 3 and 7, the institution strives for a high degree of integrity in all of its interactions with prospective and current students, alumni, faculty, staff, the public, external agencies and the Council on Postsecondary Education. As discussed in Standards 1 and 2, strategic planning processes are well developed in coordination with the strategic and long-term institutional goals and mission. This principled approach is evident in many ways.

Policies on conduct for members of the University community articulate a balance of freedom of speech and assembly with freedom to learn in an environment free from disruptions. The policies are outlined in the University *Manual*, and reinforced by procedures for scheduling and approval of events, meetings and political actions/activism on campus. Emphasis on student and faculty research in strategic decision-making as well as in communications and external relations, demonstrates support for a culture of evidence-based inquiry. Both faculty and staff pointed to recent cases in which the President's public statements on controversial issues at the local, national and global level served as a model of active and principled discussion on campus.

Policies for academic integrity in the classroom and for research are clearly articulated and easy to locate in multiple areas on the URI website, including in the Student Handbook and the University *Manual*. Syllabus recommendations to faculty include the text of policies regarding

academic integrity and student contact. Faculty, staff and students reported that undergraduate students are generally introduced to academic integrity and appropriate research practices and ethics in the URI 101 course, as well as in advanced coursework in their major. Integrity violations are handled directly by faculty; subsequent violations are expected to be reported to the Dean of Students' Office for a disciplinary process that emphasizes student understanding of academic integrity. Faculty also reported that they receive training and recommendations in course and assignment design strategies that support academic integrity and make it easier to identify plagiarism and cheating.

Violations of research integrity are defined in terms of fabrication, falsification and plagiarism, and procedures for reporting instances of these violations are available at multiple locations, including the Office of Research Integrity and the Division of Research and Economic Development. In congruence with the research integrity process, and as the result of State legislation, University staff, faculty and students must comply with conflict of interest guidelines for research. Intellectual property policy is integrated with conflict of interest compliance, with an eye towards enabling the development of research that has marketable applications.

The Office of Community, Equity and Diversity (CED) covers both policy (affirmative action and equal opportunity) and a broad range of services and initiatives to support a diverse and inclusive campus community. Relevant legislation and key definitions of discrimination, protected classes, and a hostile work environment appear on a subsection of its website, along with procedures for conducting fair and unbiased hiring and contacts to request training or report issues of concern. A newly-released "A Campus-Wide Guide for Promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion," CED's Strategic Plan, 2017-2022, outlines both broad strategies and concrete action steps for recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, staff and students that support the University's strategic goals for inclusion. Increasing campus diversity and fostering an inclusive environment are key strategic goals for the University, priorities reflected in the work of diversity committees, within units, as well as staff within the CED. The new Gender and Sexuality Center, as part of the broader Office of Community, Equity and Diversity, is an example of administrative responsiveness to articulated student needs and activism to expand the inclusivity of the campus as a whole. The Center was designed and built in response to and with input from students, and offers schedulable meeting spaces open to the entire campus, as well as events and programs that promote access, acceptance and community.

Information on complaint and grievance policies and procedures is readily available, as well as relevant contract language for faculty and staff contracts. Beyond these procedures, the Ombuds Office now includes two part-time Ombuds and two-student assistant Ombuds. Administrative support for this program demonstrates institutional commitment to the small but important role it plays in ensuring that all members of the campus community can easily find support in navigating institutional policies and procedures, and in seeking resolution of issues and grievances that extend beyond the established grievance and complaint processes.

Transparency

In general, the information listed in the public disclosure section of this standard is openly available on the URI website. The implementation of WordPress for content management has allowed for streamlining of the URI web environment and created a more consistent, branded user experience across University sites. Staff associated with communications and web development indicated that ADA compliance and accessibility, particularly on main landing

pages across the website, was a continuing priority. The search function of the site works extremely well across platforms including handheld devices, although information frequently appears in pdf documents which must be opened and further searched to locate information. In particular, information on admissions, transfer credit, and student-oriented policies/Manuals are easy to find and access. Information for faculty and staff is usually accessible, but these areas, some of which are the purview of distributed departments, are less well maintained and returned 404 (page not available) errors at a rate that was overall low, but still sufficient to slow information seeking in a few places.

The institution maintains an easily accessed list of available programs as well as other information that presents a fair and honest portrayal of educational and co-curricular opportunities available to students on campus. Furthermore, there are clear procedures in place for ensuring that web content on main pages is accurate and up to date. In particular, Enrollment Management has developed a regular, collaborative procedure with the units for updating Catalog content and ensuring that it accurately reflects current course offerings.

In 2008, the University undertook a rebranding initiative that has been highly successful in improving the image of the University, particularly within the state. “Think big. We do.” motivates both on-campus and broader communications, emphasizing URI’s role as the flagship university. This branding has also extended through a switch to WordPress for web content management to provide a more unified web presence, and the development of a template that creates a consistent look and feel for the online image of the University. An investment in web team personnel has enabled the process of standardizing the website and tracking down and removing links or pages that are outdated. However, more work still needs to be done in this area, particularly with web pages maintained by distributed units and departments.

Public Disclosure

URI makes a broad data set available to the public through the Office of Institutional Research. There are two areas for improvement: First, to make some data, such as student debt information, currently embedded in the Common Data Set on the OIR website, more easily visible to site visitors; second, to make more information on post-graduation success available. The “Fast Facts” page and “Just the Facts” document provide a set of data in an easily accessed (pdf) form, but not all of the information types listed in the standard are included in this easy-to-read format. The projection section of Standard 8 identifies a set of strategies to address the latter concern, including use of a “point of graduation” survey and switching to a new post-graduation survey; however, publicly available data on student employment outcomes are not available after 2014, except as embedded information in reports from individual colleges. The graduation and post-graduation survey data, housed within the Career Services and Experiential Learning office, does not have an area for student outcomes data, reports or other materials on its website. These data, as well as other relevant data points from elsewhere in the institution, would help fulfill the spirit of public disclosure more fully if made available on the IR website.

AFFIRMATION OF COMPLIANCE

To document the institution’s compliance with Federal regulations relating to Title IV, the team reviewed the University of Rhode Island’s Affirmation of Compliance form signed by the CEO.

The institution's policies regarding credit transfer are found on multiple websites, in the University Catalog, and in the self-study. Articulation with other Rhode Island public institutions is found on the website of the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner. Public notice of the evaluation visit and the opportunity for public comment was made on the URI website and published in the *Providence Journal*. Grievance procedures for faculty and staff are found on multiple websites and within collective bargaining agreements. A grievance procedure is also available for nonunion employees. Student rights, responsibilities, and grievance procedures are found in the Student Handbook and on multiple websites. Student authentication in online programs and courses is done through a password-protected learning management system. Definition of the credit hour appears in print and web versions of the *University Manual*. The team's review found that credits are awarded in accordance the institution's policies that are in accordance with the Commission's standards across the various methods of course delivery.

SUMMARY

The University of Rhode Island has implemented significant planning and evaluation procedures in response to CIHE communications over the past ten years. The self-study process, including utilization of the Data First and E-series forms, has engaged a broad representation of the campus community and the critical linkage between strategic planning and resource allocation is recognized.

URI initiated a significant effort to improve its strategic planning. The Joint Committee on Academic Planning (JCAP) was created and charged with the responsibility of creating and updating an Academic Strategic Plan (ASP). The first formal ASP, covering the period 2010-2015, was approved in 2009 ("Charting our Path to the Future: Toward a Renewed Culture of Achievement"). The current strategic plan – "Innovation with Impact: Shaping the Future of URI"—developed in 2015 covers the period 2016-2021.

The review team recognizes that issues remain regarding the governance between the University and the state of Rhode Island. There is a potential COI between the interests of Rhode Island's Council on Postsecondary Education and the Commissioner of Postsecondary Education regarding efforts to unify the three public higher education institutions to achieve efficiencies and seamless transferability. Additionally, there remains significant issues about the scope of the Council's and Commissioner's authority over URI's decision-making authority. We raise these issues knowing that they are beyond the purview of the University to correct but wish them to be part of the record of the comprehensive review.

In a relatively short time, URI has achieved positive transformation in the face of significant declines in state financial support and external governance changes. It has done this through the President and Provost's stable leadership, their appreciation for shared governance, and significant leadership changes of operational divisions and colleges. Some organizational restructuring has occurred as the positive transformation has elevated research and student success.

STRENGTHS

Since the 2007 Comprehensive evaluation and the 2012 Fifth-year Interim report, there has been steady progress in addressing the need for a formal, systematic academic program review process. The review plan now in place consists of a three-level procedure, with annual reporting of data to departments and colleges, a standardized internal biennial survey of data, and comprehensive self-studies with external review every six years. Specific professional units requiring external accreditation are evaluated as required by the appropriate external evaluators.

The General Education plan has been substantially and impressively revised since the last comprehensive evaluation. The new curriculum was presented in 2012, adopted by the Faculty Senate in 2014, and launched for incoming first-- year students in 2016. The new learning outcomes embody breadth across the sciences, arts and humanities, and also overlay skills in information literacy, global and diversity appreciation, communication skills, knowledge synthesis, inquiry based critical thinking and problem solving.

Student learning outcomes and assessment plans exist for every program. URI is commended for over a decade (2006-2016) of attention to developing a standardized process for measuring the effectiveness of its programs through learning outcomes assessment. The commitment to engaging faculty members in the process, both as peer reviewers of departmental assessment efforts and through committee participation/assessment leadership, is recognized.

Students report that the University provides a strong sense of community. They feel welcome and at home and commented positively on the wide array of campus-based activities.

Several unique programs of study are offered that capitalize on both the location of the institution (e.g., Graduate School of Oceanography) and timely responses to current real-world challenges (e.g., multiple level degrees in Digital Forensics and Cyber Security, pharmaceutical sciences, a DNP/PhD in nursing, and a new health/wellness major).

Since the last review, URI has hired approximately 40% of its faculty, most of the deans, and many senior leaders. The influx of new personnel has helped to build enthusiasm and facilitated greater openness to new ideas.

The University has committed to a substantial hiring plan for faculty, adding 60 new FTE (45 tenure-track and 15 full-time lecturers) in fiscal years 2016-2019 and reallocating positions as they become vacant. These positions are allocated toward increasing reliance on full-time faculty for teaching, addressing teaching needs in high demand areas, and expanding the University's research activities, especially in areas important for the State's economic development.

Through prudent financial management, the University is in a stable and improving fiscal situation in spite of declining state support. The University has developed reserves at reasonable levels for contingencies and for strategic initiatives.

The work of the Strategic Budget and Planning Council (SBPC) is transparent and well-documented, and it has refined its policies and processes after each cycle.

The University has added to and improved its physical plant over the past 10 years. In addition to new space, these efforts have included significant fire safety improvements, disability accommodations, sustainability and energy efficiency initiatives, and staying even on its deferred maintenance backlog. Most of this has been accomplished through significant capital support from the State, either directly or through voter-approved bonding.

The President models open and free discourse on campus through public statements that invite debate and discussion.

CONCERNS

The University's strong focus on access currently is not highlighted as part of its revised mission statement.

Even given the openness of the University's planning and budgeting processes, further efforts to enhance communication of these processes and their outcomes to all constituencies are still needed.

Unit level planning is yet to be coordinated and made more transparent.

The organizational structure of operations such as HR, Procurement and Travel is unnecessarily bureaucratic. The processes for searches and procurement now require multiple levels of review and could perhaps be streamlined.

Student access to high quality advising is not consistent and seems to vary based on class standing and major.

A definitive funding plan to address the initiatives in the IT Strategic Plan, which could be up to \$15 million, is yet to be developed.

There is no single statement of institution-level expectations for student learning, rather a variety of statements that provide differing versions of these goals.

Using the results of Student Learning Assessment activities to inform the University's planning and resource allocation is a connection yet to be made.