



January 31, 2023

Dr. Marc Parlange
President
University of Rhode Island
35 Campus Avenue, Green Hall
Kingston, RI 02881-1303

Dear President Parlange:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 18, 2022, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Rhode Island and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Rhode Island be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2027 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2027 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. transitioning to new leadership and a new Board of Trustees and implementing improvements to its governance processes and policies.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Rhode Island was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of April 23, 2018 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends University of Rhode Island (URI) for its comprehensive, reflective interim report. We concur that URI “emerged” from the pandemic as a “strong institution that successfully delivered its mission and met the academic needs of [its] students.” We appreciate the University’s commitment to improving its advising capabilities; we understand there are now 20-full time advisors in the University College for Academic Success, and there have been additional training opportunities for all advisors. URI also purchased the Starfish software, which engages the entire community in student success efforts. The Commission notes with favor the University’s ongoing “thoughtful and deliberate planning process” and appreciates that, under the guidance of its new president, URI is developing a new 10-year strategic plan. Particularly noteworthy is University of Rhode Island’s identification, planning, and implementation of new academic programs, including the BS in Interdisciplinary Neuroscience, BS in Data Science, and a Professional

Doctorate of Business Administration. The size of the full-time faculty has increased from 703 in FY2016 to 757 in FY2021, thereby “reduc[ing] the institution’s reliance on part-time adjunct faculty.” The Commission appreciates that, since 2017, the “financial resources of the University have remained stable” as enrollment has remained strong. The University has also constructed three new buildings and dedicated \$155 million to “capital maintenance and infrastructure repairs.”

The Commission thanks University of Rhode Island for its reflective essay on student success. We understand that these efforts are framed by the University’s Academic Strategic Plan: *Innovation with Impact: Shaping the future of URI*. The Commission is gratified to learn that “assessment is practiced as an integral and iterative process with a program improvement feedback loop.” Learning outcomes assessment is a “faculty-driven process,” and all academic programs engage in a biennial reporting cycle. Particularly noteworthy are the University’s efforts to understand the overall undergraduate academic experience, including the mapping of academic program learning outcomes to the Association of American Colleges and Universities VALUE rubrics. The institution’s general education and graduate student learning assessment processes are also commendable. Lastly, the Commission is gratified to learn that University of Rhode Island’s first-year retention rate has “remained stable over three cohorts at an institution high of just over 85%,” and we appreciate that “URI is committed to addressing the continuing disparity in retention and graduation rates for historically under-represented students.”

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2027 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. The item the Commission asks to be given special emphasis within the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation is a matter related to our standard on *Organization and Governance*.

The Commission understands that changes in the General Laws of Rhode Island have prompted a “systemic examination of governance practices and a renewal of policies and procedures.” We understand that the Rhode Island Board of Education and Council for Postsecondary Education was replaced with the University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees on February 1, 2020. A new University President began his tenure in August 2021, and an interim provost began shortly thereafter with a search for a new provost in progress. The Commission further understands that there has been a “major effort underway to revise and update the University Manual,” as it is the “authoritative primary source for governance and policies” at the University. As guided by our standard on *Organization and Governance*, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2027 comprehensive evaluation will provide University of Rhode Island an opportunity to apprise the Commission on its success in these matters:

The authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and sponsoring entity (if any) are clearly described in the institution’s by-laws, or an equivalent document, and in a table of organization that displays the working order of the institution. The board, administration, staff, faculty, and sponsoring entity understand and fulfill their respective roles as set forth in the institution’s official documents and are provided with the appropriate information to undertake their respective roles (3.1).

The board has a clear understanding of the institution’s distinctive mission and exercises the authority to ensure the realization of institutional mission and purposes. The board approves and reviews institutional policies; monitors the institution’s fiscal condition; and approves major new initiatives, assuring that they are compatible with institutional mission and capacity. These policies are developed in consultation with appropriate constituencies. The board assures that the institution periodically reviews its success in fulfilling its mission and serving its students. The Board is effective in helping the institution make strategic decisions and confront unforeseen circumstances. It regularly reviews the institution’s systems of enterprise risk management, external audits, regulatory compliance, internal controls, and contingency management. The board assures appropriate attention is given to succession planning for

institutional leadership and, where applicable, the composition of the board itself (3.7).

Utilizing the institutional governance structure, the board establishes and maintains appropriate and productive channels of communication among its members and with the institutional community (3.9).

The chief executive officer, through an appropriate administrative structure, effectively manages the institution so as to fulfill its purposes and objectives and establishes the means to assess the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer manages and allocates resources in keeping with institutional purposes and objectives and assesses the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer assures that the institution employs faculty and staff sufficient in role, number, and qualifications appropriate to the institution's mission, size, and scope (3.12).

The institution's chief academic officer is directly responsible to the chief executive officer, and in concert with the faculty and other academic administrators, is responsible for the quality of the academic program. The institution's organization and governance structure assure the integrity and quality of academic programming however and wherever offered. Off-campus, continuing education, distance education, correspondence education, international, evening, and weekend programs are clearly integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution (3.14).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by University of Rhode Island and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board and the head of the system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Margo Cook and Shannon Gilkey. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Russell Carey

RC/sjp

cc: Margo Cook
Shannon Gilkey

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions