Name of Proposal: Growing Teaching Assistantships to Enhance graduate education

Academic Division/Area: Academic Affairs

Priority # 1

All divisions and Athletics should use this template to submit any/each new funding request to the SBPC. Consideration should be given to share and communicate initiatives being proposed to determine potential partnering and synergies between and among divisions and Athletics prior to submission.

All proposals should clearly identify (a) what is being requested, (b) rationale for the request, (c) associated costs, and (d) possibility of alternative (partial) funding source(s) (including reallocation or cost share). The Proposal should also identify (e) how the request relates to URI’s Strategic Academic plan and (f) benefits URI. Data (including benchmark data) may be provided with the request to help support it.

1. A. Please briefly describe the process and timeline as to how these new funding priorities were developed or derived? B. What processes or incentives have been considered to encourage reallocation from within the division/unit?

A. At the 2014 and 2015 Graduate School Summits, there were substantive discussions about the need to increase the number of Graduate Teaching Assistantships at URI. As enrollment has grown at URI over the past decade or more, the number of GTA’s has remained essentially static. At these summits, there was also substantial discussion about the need to establish clear and sound criteria to guide the allocation of GTA’s that exist now and that may exist in the future. Following those summits and during the past year, a Teaching Assistant Task Force (TATF) was appointed by the Provost and Dean of the Graduate School charged with studying the issue of graduate teaching assistantships (GTA’s) to explore a more strategic allocation of graduate teaching assistantships across academic units, define the role(s) of GTA’s within the University, and enhance graduate enrollment and programs with regard to GTA’s. The Task Force shared their draft findings and solicited feedback from faculty at the Graduate Summit in 2015, the Council of Deans, and a 2016 Department Chairs’ Forum. The final task force report (See Appendix A TATF report) included recommendations for a more strategic allocation for graduate students and articulated fundamental principles regarding the GTA distribution and recommended an increase of ~83 additional GTA’s at URI to maintain a similar student to GTA ratio that existed ~ 20 years ago. The report also noted that there has not been an increase in GTA’s at URI for at least 25 years (and likely much longer than that), despite undergraduate enrollment approaching 5000 students over the past 20 years. The TA Task Force, Council of Deans, department chairs, and the Graduate School all strongly endorsed the priority and recommendations of the initiative to substantially increase the University’s GTA’s. The GTA
Task Force recommendations, along with the strong endorsement of these various groups, has led to this initiative being the #1 new funding priority request for the Division of Academic Affairs.

2. **Please identify what is being requested, associated costs, possibility of alternative (partial) funding source(s) and/or any match funding, and the rationale for each requested item. Use as much space as needed. Please indicate also any possibility of alternative or match funding.**

50 new Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA's) over a 5-year time period.

Graduate programs are an essential and vital component to URI's mission as the flagship learning-centered research university of Rhode Island and to our role and commitment to provide advanced education to a diversity of audiences and constituents. The second goal of URI’s 2016-2021 Academic Strategic Plan calls for “increasing the magnitude, prominence, and impact of URI’s research, scholarship, and creative work” (URI Academic Strategic Plan 2016-2021, p. 3). One of the best ways to fulfill this goal is to promote excellence in graduate education. Providing funding to highly qualified graduate students is essential to making URI graduate programs competitive and, in many cases, also enhances our ability to recruit, enroll, and retain international graduate students, which directly addresses goal 3 of the Academic Strategic Plan. Graduate Teaching Assistantships represent a strategic investment that simultaneously enhance the quality and numbers of graduate students at URI and can enhance diversity of both our graduate programs and the professorate (Academic Strategic Plan goal 4), while also supporting the growing demand for instruction at multiple levels and across all disciplines within the university.

The current number of GTA's is 346 at an annual cost of approximately $16 million. GTA's are a limited and valuable resource that helps us meet and enhance research and education missions of the University of Rhode Island. Since the early 1998, the number of undergraduate students has increased by more than 4000 undergraduate students and the number of TAs has remained essentially level. Strategic allocation of existing GTA's coupled with the addition of new TAs will invigorate research, enhance and expand graduate programs and enrollment, and, at the same time, contribute to undergraduate education. The TA task force recommended strategic investment of 83 new GTA's coupled with an evidence-based assessment of current allocation and the implementation of a clear set of criteria for allocation of current and future funded GTA's.

Working from the TATF report and recommendations, the Office of the Provost and the Graduate School have developed a Graduate Teaching Assistantship Allocation Model (see Appendix B) that includes a set of Fundamental Principles regarding GTA roles and distribution, a process for GTA allocation at College and University levels, and criteria that will guide the allocation of all GTA's, including existing and new ones that might be requested in this proposal, moving forward. An essential component of the Model is the establishment and funding of 50 new GTA's over the next five years. The new GTA's not only fill a critical teaching support need for the university and will enhance our competitive position in recruiting top graduate school applicants, but they also represent an incentive to
undertake the very difficult work of reallocating GTA’s that had been historically assigned to specific departments many years ago (>25 years). Importantly, the new GTA request will NOT be established, until and unless the new model of GTA allocation is also implemented.

The approximate cost of 50 new GTA’s including stipends, benefits, and tuition waivers for FY 19 will be approximately $2,118,500, which will be spread over five years ($423,700 per year for 5 years). That is, we propose adding 10 new GTA’s per year for 5 years to the pool of 346 GTA’s that have been in place for at least 25 years. The Division of Academic Affairs will provide a $50,000 per year co-share from strategic reallocations within the Division. As such, the total annual request of new funds to support the GTA’s will be $373,700 per year for 5 years or a total new investment in GTA’s $1,868,500. The Division of Academic Affairs will be providing a total co-share of $250,000 over 5 years.

3. **Is this request strategic and how does the request support or relate to URI’s Strategic Academic Plan?**

While GTA’s are not the cheapest mechanism for providing teaching support, a strategic investment in GTA’s enhances and enriches the quality of our graduate students through its positive recruitment and retention impacts, and also simultaneously directly supports our research and undergraduate teaching missions. As a flagship research university with growing undergraduate programs in STEM and health disciplines/professions, an expanding need for laboratory TA’s, recitation leaders, teaching assistants in large courses, and a commitment to both globalization and diversity, an investment in GTA’s is both strategic and essential for URI at this time.

Increasing the number of GTA’s and their strategic allocation directly relates to Goal 1 of transforming the graduate student learning and academic support and preparing our graduate students for an ever-changing world. Through these GTA experiences, graduate students gain real world experience and are more competitive as they graduate and pursue their career goals. Graduate programs are an essential and vital component to URI’s research mission. The second goal of URI’s 2016-2021 Academic Strategic Plan calls for “increasing the magnitude, prominence, and impact of URI’s research, scholarship, and creative work.” One of the best ways to fulfill this goal is to promote excellence in graduate education. Providing funding to highly qualified students is essential to making URI graduate programs competitive. Teaching Assistantships are one of the key ways to fund graduate education.

URI’s strategic plan (2016-2021) calls for increases in experiential learning opportunities for undergraduates including undergraduate research, field courses, computer simulations, writing assignments and other activities that require greater mentorship than traditional lecture courses. Therefore, courses that provide important service paired with experiential learning are essential to undergraduate curricula and require TA support. TAs will play a key role in meeting this important goal.
Increasing GTA’s will have a direct impact on Goal 3 of growing a global presence because international graduate students will proportionally increase with the availability of increasing GTA’s and the same is true for Goal 4 of increasing diversity. The availability of an increasing number of GTA’s will have a profound and very direct positive impact on increasing the quality of our graduate programs, supporting our graduate students, and increasing the diversity and internalization of our graduate programs. Further, with the extensive discussions and the recommendations in the task force report, there will be a related undertaking to more efficiently and effectively allocate GTA’s across programs, which relates to Goal 5 on Administrative efficiencies and effective use of resources. New fundamental principles regarding the GTA distribution, a new process for GTA allocation at College and University levels, and a new set of criteria to guide the allocation of GTA’s at URI have been developed collaboratively and through extensive efforts and numerous meetings (See Appendix B, Graduate Teaching Assistantship Allocation Model).

4. How does the request provide additional benefit to URI? (Enrollment, student services, condition of campus, fundraising/development, public relations, etc.)

Increasing GTA’s will directly increase graduate enrollment and the reputation, quality, and prestige of the graduate programs because these assistantships enable the University to bring in the best and brightest graduate students, which positively impacts our graduate programs and their reputation. Furthermore, GTA’s serve as informal mentors to undergraduate students and, through their actions in the classroom, laboratories, and recitation sections, expose undergraduates to research and the merits and benefits of pursuing advanced levels of educational achievement. Finally, our doctoral students represent the future professorate for URI and institutions all over the country and the world. As a flagship public research university aspiring for excellence, it is in URI’s best interest to serve as an institution that graduates accomplished and productive doctoral students with a strong potential to contribute to the academic mission of research universities throughout the world. Indeed, this ultimately defines a critical segment of our institutional image and reputation.

5. Please provide any data (including benchmark data) relative to the request OR a statement as to why no benchmark data is available.

Between 1994 and 2015, the number of URI undergraduates has increased by greater than 4000 students. The number of TAs has remained roughly the same over a 20-year period. (see graph below). The slight growth in TA’s between 2010 and 2015 was due to the implementation of the temporary GTAP funding, which still includes 6.5 TA’s in 2017 and when they graduate these funds are not base funds and therefore, not permanent. In order to maintain a similar ratio of undergraduate students to TAs that URI had in the mid-1990s, URI would need 418 TAs, an additional 83 TAs. In this SBPC request, we are proposing an increase of **50 TA’s over five years (10 per year)**, allowing steady progress to be made while making more manageable the financial request.
While undergraduate enrollment has increased considerably, graduate enrollment has declined.

Undergraduate Enrollment from 1985-2017:
Interest in graduate programs remains strong as evidenced by the number of applications (see chart below). One of the reasons enrollment has declined over the years is the lack of financial support for graduate students.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Applications</strong></td>
<td>2442</td>
<td>2541</td>
<td>3260</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>3125</td>
<td>2993</td>
<td>3046</td>
<td>3014</td>
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<td><strong>New Students</strong></td>
<td>708</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>852</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>837</td>
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<td><strong>Fall Total Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2083</td>
<td>2184</td>
<td>2123</td>
<td>2046</td>
<td>2035</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1989</td>
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Source: The Graduate School, URI