

University of Rhode Island

Memorial Union (MU)  
Program Review

External Review Team Report

Submitted on May 31, 2018

External Review Team Members:

Edmund T. Cabellon, Ed.D.

Director of Administration, Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management,  
Assistant Professor (Adjunct), Ricciardi College of Business - Management  
Bridgewater State University

Jean Kim, Ed.D.\*

Former Vice President for Student Affairs at: University of Hartford, University of Puget  
Sound, and SUNY Purchase College;  
Former Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at: University of Colorado Boulder, University of  
Massachusetts Dartmouth, and University of Massachusetts Amherst;  
Former Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at  
University of Idaho

CRAIG E. SLACK, Ph.D.

Assistant Director, Adele H. Stamp Student Union – Center for Campus Life,  
Director, Leadership & Community Service-Learning  
Affiliate Assistant Professor, College of Education  
University of Maryland  
Director, National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs

\* External Review Team Chair

## Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary	3
II. Strengths: Effective components, accomplishments of note	4
III. Opportunities for Growth: Areas to improve, successes to build on	5
IV. Center for Student Leadership Development	8
V. Financial and accounting practices	11
VI. Memorial Union Operations	13
VII. Office of Student Involvement	15
VIII. Organizational structure, staffing, and professional development	17
IX. Strategic Direction for the Memorial Union	21

## **I. Executive Summary**

In alignment with the URI Student Affairs Division Department Review process, this external review began with a thoughtful reading of the comprehensive self-study report. Our reading provided an initial set of inquiries for the on-campus site-visit. During our site-visit we built upon these initial inquiries through meeting with the stakeholders identified in our three day itinerary, as well as holding individual appointments with constituents who reached out to meet with us. Grounded in each of these steps, the External Review Team (ERT) is submitting our final report with recommendations to the Memorial Union Director, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, and Vice President for Student Affairs. Based on emergent themes from our review visit and our understanding of best practices in the field, the ERT offers numerous recommendations in this report. These are offered for consideration and selection of the most feasible, timely, and mission-aligned action steps you are able and willing to take to advance the success of the Memorial Union and the Division of Student Affairs at University of Rhode Island.

This report is organized to begin with areas of Strengths (section II.), followed by section III that discusses Opportunities for growth we saw, and provides our assessment of the four functional areas (IV. Center for Student Leadership Development, V. Financial and accounting practices, VI. Memorial Union Operations, VII. Office of Student Involvement) currently within MU that include our findings, issues, and recommendations for each functional area. The report ends with our recommendations on Organizational structure, staffing, and professional development (section VIII.) and Strategic Direction for the Memorial Union (section IX.). During our visit we heard significant concerns about the MU as a facility, about its aged structure (even though the building has gone through 2 renovations and additions), limited square footage of the building, low quality of existing space, lack of easy flow, etc. While it is true that the facility can and does affect programming, since there is a new MU feasibility study by the Cannon Group, we focused our final report primarily on the MU programs. However, we have made a few recommendations about space allocations in section IX. Strategic Direction for the Memorial Union, which we believe will have a substantial positive outcome for the MU going forward.

We were honored to spend time with professionals, academics, community partners and students all of whom are clearly committed to the success of the Memorial Union. These recommendations in the final report represent our observations of the opportunities and resources available to clarify and deepen the impact of the Memorial Union on the URI campus. We hope the perspectives shared in this report serve as platform for continued conversation among all of the stakeholders of the Memorial Union.

## **II. Strengths: Effective components, notable accomplishments**

The following section outlines an overview of what the ERT found as strengths, including effective components and notable accomplishments.

### **1. Dedicated, Approachable, and Knowledgeable Staff**

When we met with various focus groups, people who work in the Memorial Union (MU) were consistently mentioned as strength. Staff members in various roles are seen as being student centered, doing what needs to be done to help students and making sure that students feel welcomed and cared for. Most have worked at URI and or the MU for decades (11 years up to 37 years) and are loyal to their department within the MU. It is also worth noting that while this is the first time that MU staff have engaged in a comprehensive program review of the department and were under a leadership transition, the MU self-study is high quality. We appreciate that this was a major effort and new learning for many. We congratulate them on a job well done.

### **2. Exemplary Signature Programs**

- As noted in the self-study, the Office of Student Involvement has increased collaboration with campus partners to improve the First Night/First Week programs by extending the number of programmed days and increased late night offerings. Increased programming attracting more than 3,000 at First Night and between 1,000 and 2,000 at the other late night events during Welcome Week, have reduced the number of transports/negative incidents.
- Rhody Adventures, the substance free weekend trips, attracts 1,000 students annually with an expense of \$50,000 and revenue of \$28,000. Housing and Residential Life and the Office of Student Involvement help to subsidize the program.
- Student Entertainment Committee that works well to serve as the largest campus wide student programming board at the University of Rhode Island.
- The All University Rainville Awards Program, recognizing, encouraging, and, celebrating student leadership within the URI campus community.
- Center for Student Leadership Development (CSLD) continues to offer the annual first-year Leadership Institute program for incoming students. In 2017, the program celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> year.
- The North Woods Challenge Course facility is a terrific venue for experiential leadership development and team building.
- A popular academic program, Minor in Leadership Studies, sponsored by the Center for Student Leadership Development since 1997, has graduated more than 600

students.

### **III. Opportunities for Growth: Areas to improve, successes to build on**

The following section outlines an overview of what the ERT found as opportunities for growth, including specific areas needing improvement, specific inefficiencies and successes to build on.

We will discuss our specific recommendations under section VIII. “Organizational structure, staffing, and professional development.” and functional areas under sections IV. Center for Student Leadership Development, V. Financial and Accounting Practices, VI. Memorial Union Operations, and VII. Office of Student Involvement.

#### **1. Human Resource Management**

As the MU staff identified in the Self-Study, there is a need to review staffing, rewrite job descriptions, and realign organizational structure. The opportunity here is that there is a general agreement among the MU staff that job descriptions are out of date and the current organizational structure does not support the most effective operations. Also, the lack of consistent staff evaluations over the years and growing pay inequities have negatively impacted progressive professional growth. In fact, professional staff noted multiple times that leadership failed to provide any guidance regarding these aforementioned items. Finally, there are related policies and practices regarding professional development and student employee training that need to be addressed.

#### **2. Student Engagement & Learning Areas**

- **Student-Run Businesses**

Building on the success of the 193 Coffee Shop, the MU could provide additional experiential learning opportunities for students by opening up dormant spaces within the MU that supports student run businesses or co-ops. This would also provide intentional partnership opportunities with the School/College of Business and other college faculty on campus to serve as advisors. Additionally, these student run businesses would create a pathway to review the MU’s entire student employment program and improve upon prescribed learning outcomes that tie directly to various URI academic programs.

- **Student Development Excellence**

Students, colleagues, and staff of the Center clearly described, observed, and identified intentional, student learning environments within the programs offered. The staff articulated a clear focus in strength based leadership with a strong grounding in leadership skill development of the students that engage with program offerings. There was mention of how identity plays a role in leadership education and the importance of distinguishing context in leadership learning. The field of Leadership Education is being guided to complexity and developmental scaffolding

as a powerful learning environment for students and more importantly for their leadership efficacy. Exploring how leadership education advances students' complexity over time through developmentally scaffolded experiences with attention to social/cultural conversations as a leadership development tool could emerge as more clear evidence of the program effects on student's leadership development. Moving from a numbers mind set to a focus on complexity through depth of participant treatment time will pay great dividends on student learning and skill obtainment.

- **Greater Support for Recognized Student Organizations**

Another student engagement theme that the ERT uncovered was the lack of staff, financial, and technological support for student organization success. Although Maureen McDermott (Assistant Director, Student Involvement) and Michael Nolfe (Coordinator, Student Involvement) provide support to student organizations, Michael's time is focused primarily on the largest student programming body, leaving a void for the majority of other URI student organizations. Financially, the ERT heard consistent concerns from students and staff alike regarding how the Student Senate allocate the Student Tax to student organizations. The lack of a clear, outlined, and consistent process, including evaluative rubrics, has created a sense of apathy and frustration that needs to be addressed. Also, the lack of innovative technological solutions such as CampusLabs for student organization management and the creation of co-curricular transcripts further supports antiquated processes and procedures that reflect a 20th century, not 21st century pedagogy.

- **Advising Student Government**

A critical role for overall student engagement and learning is strong advisement and leadership for the URI Student Senate. Consistently, through the ERT's time on campus, we heard concerns that there was a hands-off approach to the Student Senate. Additionally, folks shared that there has been a lack of direction and leadership for Student Senate since the previous MU Director's tenure. Comments that the either the Student Senate and/or MU Staff Advisors, "were difficult to work with", "did not provide clear access to information", and "had gotten worse over the years with no signs of improvement" raised high levels of concerns for the ERT.

Being a part of the URI Student Senate provides important learning experience for students. While they are a 501C3 organization, they still need mentoring and oversight from university staff to clarify and establish appropriate policies and procedures for student organization recognition, funding, and carrying out their fiduciary responsibilities. It was not clear how a learning mindset was being advanced to support the student senators and the Student Senate as whole in their elected responsibility to effectively participate in the campus governance structure, represent their constituencies, engage in drafting and advancing effective legislation on behalf of the students. Student Governance is a rich platform to teaching civic skills and assess learning outcomes. It was not transparent what those civic skills or learning outcomes were and how student senators were being engaged in

leadership trainings, retreats and/or academic course offerings to advance their leadership efficacy to effectively serve the student body at URI.

- **Additional Campus Wide Programs and Activities During Weekdays and Weekends**

The role of the Memorial Union includes providing multiple engagement opportunities. Unfortunately, it seemed that the Student Involvement office within the MU was conflicted in their role as a staff driven program model vs. a student driven model through the SEC. The tension seemed to go deeper within the staff concerning the frequency and scale of program offerings. Staff thought aloud with the ERT about doing large scale events like concerts or focusing on novelty and variety programs and theme events in the evenings. Should these offerings be driven by staff or students and what would the administrative and advising model look like to achieve the desired outcome. In order for the MU to emerge as “The Place to Go”, attention must be given to a more robust offering of programs during weekdays and weekends, and staff mindset must shift to a more holistic one with each office/center of the MU providing ideas and the execution of those ideas undergirded by a marketing campaign that gives the MU a cohesive and clear brand. An area ripe for exploration is how does the MU become the “Center of Campus Life” and the place that campus entities come to cocreate and deliver student focused programs. For example, the Student Involvement Office could leverage relationships with others on the campus (e.g., Multicultural Center, Resident Life, Academic departments, etc.) for campus wide program collaborations.

### **3. Financial Management**

Of the many areas the ERT reviewed, financial management of the MU requires significant overhaul. This includes the current staffing structure, policies, and procedures utilized. In terms of staffing, the Finance and Administrative unit of the MU could lead URI’s auxiliaries as part of the University’s Finance infrastructure. Their current structure, nested in the MU and separate from URI’s infrastructure, is antiquated and needs to shift to improve overall efficiency and accountability to the students and institution. Additionally, by supporting more auxiliaries throughout URI, their staffing size would be better justified.

Next, the financial policies that this unit manages need to be reviewed and updated, including how income flows in, out and through the MU units. Some examples include policies regarding the dissemination of Student Tax, MU Fund Balances, and allocation of income from Student Leadership initiatives back to their own department. Finally, various procedures like cash management and reconciliation with Student Organizations and vendor partners such as URI Dining and student employee training raised high risk concerns that need to be addressed to move the MU closer to its overall goals.

### **4. Innovative Practices Listed in Self-Study**

The following were included as innovate practices for the Memorial Union:

- A. Leveraging technology—Through the EMS software system, the office booked over 8,000 event registrations for the year and brought in more than \$15,000 in revenue to the facility.
- MU marketing and technical staff works with several academic and student affairs departments to implement digital signage campus wide including purchase, installation, content design and ensure proper networking for Four Winds software.
- Stepping into assessment culture—Identified KPIs (key performance indicators) for three program areas: student involvement, student leadership minor, and finance. Created 160 learning outcomes rubric for Student Leadership Minor.

While these may be innovative for URI's MU, these would not qualify as innovative in the Student Union or Student Activities profession. However, they do represent opportunities for improvement.

## **5. Student Support and Services to URI**

We appreciate the challenges of providing support to student groups and the campus community within an aged building with limited square footage. Beyond the plans to complete the current feasibility study for the renovation of the MU, there are some steps that could be taken within the current building to enhance services to the university community and provide needed space for student groups. Specific recommendations for this area are listed in section IX. Strategic Direction for the Memorial Union.

## **IV. Center for Student Leadership Development**

### **Findings:**

The tension between breadth and focus emerged in multiple internal and external contexts. Early in our visit, a desire to expand The Center for Student Leadership Development (to be known as the Center) was a described strain between their role as educators focused on developing, enhancing curriculum and their role as managers focused on operations and logistics for their corresponding programs.

We observed the Center is doing many things well with efforts to understand the impact of their work through a developmental portfolio and a significant number of skill outcomes with an assessment protocol. Questions arose addressing issues such as “how much is enough” and “how does quantity contribute to quality and educationally sound offerings with clear evidence of student development”. The Center’s co-curricular offerings match many of the most fruitful offerings provided in the greater field of Leadership Education. But there was an identified void between the intersections of the co-curricular and curricular offerings. Strategically weaving the co-curricular and curricular leadership offerings through a clear developmental scaffold framework would deepen student



learning and the leadership efficacy of students participating in Center programs. The work of the Center is defined by the daily balance of managing multiple contexts simultaneously. Capacity is the ability to create structures and processes that allow the Center staff to do their best within and across these multiple contexts. Several key points were noted with regard to capacity. New ideas for programming produce not merely new work, but additional work with limited resources, time, and energy. Organizational identity was a clear and consistent theme that emerged from both the internal review process and the external review conversations. This theme often came up in the language of “branding” and Leadership for What? A final identity consideration came in the context of the Center’s position within the Memorial Union, the academic home for the Leadership Minor and the Student Affairs Division as a whole.

### **Issues:**

- Operational demands tend to outweigh opportunities to focus on curriculum and learning strategies within programs. This dynamic seems particularly salient in the context of growth and expansion considerations (without a corresponding growth of staffing resources). One Coordinator commented that the staff seemingly work well together, but often concentrate on their individual programs rather than on shared curricular intersections. This comment reflected the time and energy Coordinators must devote to program logistics rather than on cultivating intersectionality, congruence, or sequencing along a clarified curricular path.
- Mission drift and/or lack of focus spawned confusion, stress, and limited bandwidth for the staff in the Center. Tension can occur when attempting to discern what programs and activities need to be or can be terminated. The metaphor of pruning a tree represents the need to curtail certain activities to promote growth in other areas. Finally, much of the dynamics associated with capacity issues appear to be related to a cultural expectation to do more to help maintain the reputation of the Center.
- The brand of the Center clouded what is the essential value of the Center as both a student development and academic enterprise. Brand is the expression of identity that communicates the key characteristics, values, and/or attributes of what the Center is and is not.
- From the outset, it was evident that clarification and prioritization was needed to help synthesize and focus energy, while staff members voiced concern about the threat of more work. There were consistent questions about the need to identify the Center’s unique role as one of the few Centers at the University and its purpose in advancing a campus (both Academic & Student Affairs) conversation on the role student leadership education plays and shared efforts that might warrant exploration. The Center seems best positioned to lead those campus conversations.

- The future of the Center needs to be more clearly aligned with the advancement of the field of Leadership Education and the discipline of Leadership Studies. As students learn about the Center by communicating the purposeful intersections between co-curricular (Institute and Certificate programs) and academic leadership offerings, they can evolve their leadership identity in relationship to their personal, professional and civic lives beyond their time at URI.
- The Center seems to hold partnerships in two ways: 1) within the Memorial Union and 2) certain faculty at URI. Partners and stakeholders within the Student Affairs Division and across campus consistently expressed a desire and willingness to enhance current collaborations with the Center. It's assumed that many of the existing relationships and partnerships for the Center originated with a clear intention and shared purpose; however, over time those partnerships are now at risk of falling into habituation--sometimes reflected by the notion of doing things because "that's the way we've always done it". This habituation seems most at risk in the context of the Centers' relationship with their community of faculty that give advice, support and academic grounding to the curricular program.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Clarify the Center's unique role within the Student Affairs Division and celebrate both the developmental and academic synergy of the Center. Consider better positioning the Center as a Student Affairs Department with direct lines to the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs to advance the academic work.
2. Revisit the partnerships with the Leadership Development Minor as a priority not only for the Center staff, but for faculty and ultimately the Division as well.
3. Reconsider the way URI represents the Leadership Minor in relationship to the larger field. As an example, public information about the leadership minor states "we are among only a handful of colleges and universities across the country that offers a Minor in Leadership Studies and one that is customized for each student". This may have been accurate at the time of the Minor's conception; however, it is no longer representative of the state of leadership education today.

The field of Leadership Education and the discipline of Leadership Studies has seen significant development of curricular leadership programs emerge over the past decade. It is more common to have academic leadership programs within multiple colleges and schools such as engineering, public policy, and education along with multi-disciplinary programs residing in broader academic homes such as Undergraduate Studies and Letters and Sciences.

4. Rethink the desired faculty relationship for the Center through mining the campus for a new generation of faculty that ground their academic work in themes of leadership. Embracing the Inter Association Leadership Education Collaborative guiding document for the Field of Leadership Education called " Collaborative

Priorities and Critical Considerations for Leadership Education could serve as a framework for a campus wide dialogue on the future of leadership education at URI.

5. Leverage Center's untapped potential with its division and engage campus partners. An example is examine how the Center intersects with the work of the Multicultural Center, Feinstein Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement, and Center for Career and Experiential Education.
6. Assume the role as convener of campus leadership educators to explicitly explore mutually beneficial outcomes. Leadership education is no longer bound by a department or academic lens but seen rather through a trans-disciplinary and campus wide lens which is not home to only one office or center.
7. Rekindle existing and establish new faculty partners to position the Center's academic program for its future. These conversations should be convened by the Vice President for Student Affairs to mitigate power dynamics and establish the Student Affairs Division as legitimate academic partners in concert with their traditional role of student development work with students.
8. Identify new forms of revenue such as offering classes during summer and winter sessions as a possible revenue stream for the Center.
9. Consider charging a consulting fee to student groups for consultation work with corporate sponsorship for student leadership conferences, institutes and certificate programs.

## **V. Financial and Accounting Department**

### **Findings:**

While mission and vision statement reflect the symbolic values of an organization, financial and accounting practices often reflect its *real* values. As an organization, the Memorial Union's Finance and Accounting group has operated independently of URI's financial systems, policies and procedures due to Student Union fee funding the Union's overall operations. While this provided the Memorial Union flexibility over the years, it also created a divisive culture within URI. Many outside the Memorial Union saw inequities and inconsistencies in how funds were managed, how accountability measures were enforced, and how large the staff is compared to other similar units within URI. Compounding this are broader cash management concerns, including the responsibility for Dining Services nightly cash drop and no accountability when cash is collected for student fundraising efforts.

Additionally, students and staff alike brought up concerns regarding management, oversight, and distribution of the \$4 million dollars in Student Activity Fees (or Taxes) by

the Student Senate. Some examples included inconsistent advising, no broad understanding or rubric reflecting how funds are distributed, and a large fund balance that sits unused. Similarly, the ERT found it curious that the fees collected from the Leadership Education areas went into the Memorial Union fund instead of directly supporting the operation of the Leadership areas.

The ERT was glad to learn that MU will be migrating to the URI purchasing process starting this summer. Utilizing the university's financial system rather than maintaining a separate MU system would be more cost effective. This is a good first step; however, there seems to be nuances of the MU accounting support to various functions housed in MU that needs to be addressed.

Finally, external partners to the MU had consistent perspectives and attitudes when it came to the Finance and Accounting group of the Memorial Union. Among these included: The former Director was very difficult to work with and was often a barrier not a road to a solution; the staff's sense of freedom from URI (acting independent of the rules and regulations set forth for other units at URI) was detrimental to cross campus collaboration opportunities; the policies and procedures have not been updated to meet the changing staff and student demographic URI serves.

**Issues:**

- The MU staff accounting and cash practices need to be reviewed and updated.
- The MU staff have a sense of freedom (being independent of URI's overall business function) that needs to be addressed, in order to evolve the operation.
- The MU cash accountability measures need to be reviewed.
- Management of the Student Activity Fee (Tax) by the Student Senate seemed quite hands-off by the Memorial Union Director, in his role as Advisor. Additionally, the high fund-balance gave the team pause.
- The centralization of all fees (including those collected from the Leadership Education areas) going into the general Memorial Union budget.

**Recommendations:**

1. Centralize all financial and accounting practices with the University for consistency and equity.
2. Complete an external audit of all financial and accounting practices.
3. Create a stronger accountability and verification process for all cash and fundraising operations.

4. Focus on the creation and dissemination of financial planning, policies, and procedures that will build transparency and trust in the Department.
5. Rewrite the Senate Finance Handbook to include clearer funding guidelines, rubrics and reporting expectations.
6. Allocate 5-10% of the Student Activity Tax Fund Balance to the Memorial Union staff as programming funding grant dollars that anyone could apply for. A cross divisional committee should oversee the process and awarding of these grant dollars that should have high assessment and data reporting expectations associated with it.
7. Allow the Center for Student Leadership to utilize all the Fees they collect from their area instead of redistributing it to the Memorial Union areas.
8. Have dining services complete their own cash boxes and deposits each night.
9. Partner with appropriate faculty and add learning outcomes for all job descriptions, develop matrices for measuring learning, and sharing the data with the Memorial Union and the Division.
10. Consider centralizing ALL auxiliaries' Finance and Accounting staff, including the Memorial Union, into one business office (Finance, Accounting, HR, Marketing, etc.) for efficiencies.

## **VI. Memorial Union Operations**

### **Findings:**

According to the Self Study report, the role of the Memorial Union Operations staff has remained consistent over the past three decades: “to provide the expertise, human resources, and daily action to meet and exceed the expectations of the Memorial Union stakeholders”. The MU Operations Staff achieves this through technology/AV support, manage parking, provide event advising, complete daily set ups and breakdowns, as well as maintain the cleanliness, functionality and security of the entire venue. According to the organizational chart provided to the External Review Team (ERT), the Operations Staff consisted of 18 professional staff members and at least 13 students for a building with 133, 000 square feet of internal space.

One of the clear themes we heard regarding the Memorial Union was the use, management, and assignment of space. While space constraints are not new to college campuses, the Memorial Union’s clustering of spaces throughout the building seemed inconsistent and lacking flow. There were a number of administrative departments still occupying the Memorial Union (including the curious decision to put Disability Services office on the third

floor) and a clear lack of student organization space. Where folks did occupy space, it seemed cramped and uninspiring, particularly for Student Involvement and Student Leadership areas. Finally, the historical relationship between the vendor partners on the ground floor, including dining and the bookstore, seemed strained. We heard this through our conversations with these folks where they highlighted rent agreement updates and shifts in the administration as some concerns.

Finally, when meeting with the Operations Staff about the *purpose* of the Memorial Union Building, they stated clearly that the purpose had not changed over the years. In fact they were emphatic that, “the Union was still the heart of campus... where everyone comes to socialize, conduct business, attend meetings or events, and grab food. It is a very active place”. Conversely, when asking other constituency groups about the Union’s purpose, the answers were thematically similar: “the building is old and dated, no one comes here”, “the building has outgrown the needs of our campus”, and “the Memorial Union is not the central gathering place for students”. Indeed, the ERT saw a clear disconnect between the Operations Staff (internal) and external constituents of the Memorial Union.

#### **Issues:**

- In a time of fiscal and human resource scarcity, the Operations Staff for the Memorial Building seems too large for its current roles and responsibilities.
- Space allocation, organization, and management of existing space are problematic.
- Vendor relationships were in flux or strained.
- Internal perspectives and attitudes about the Memorial Union’s role did not match external/community perspectives and attitudes.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Expand the responsibilities of the Operations Staff to include support of other adjacent buildings or reallocate staff to other areas within the Division of Student Affairs that need additional staff support. Utilize ACUI’s Benchmarking tools to move this forward with some comparison data: <https://www.acui.org/benchmarking>. It should not take 18 professional staff to make the building look good.
2. Move Parking lot oversight responsibilities to the Transportation and Parking Office.
3. Move the IT (and Communication) function to the Vice President for Student Affairs Office as a Divisional function and not solely for the Memorial Union.
4. Give the building back to the students by moving all Administrative Offices (except for the Operations, Finance/Accounting, Student Involvement, and Student

Leadership functions) out of the Memorial Union.

5. Reorganize spaces by floor for greater synergy. For example, third floor for Student Senate and Student Organizations, second floor for Student Run businesses, dining, and some Memorial Union staff; first floor for Disability Services and general gathering and meeting spaces, and the ground floor Memorial Union Staff and some vendor partners.
6. Create a fair and equitable process for space allocation, including representation from Memorial Union staff, student organization leaders, and Division of Student Affairs staff (for external perspectives).

## **VII. Office of Student Involvement**

### **Findings:**

The Office of Student Involvement serves as a comprehensive service provider focusing on consulting, advising, marketing and programming with many constituencies and competing interest. As with other offices in the MU, engaging in a review process has opened the door to opportunities for focus, classification, efficiencies, staff needs and direction setting for the future. The current generation of students' social and cultural interests have evolved as a result of dynamic norming behaviors around student socialization, group engagement and virtual communities participation. There has been a dramatic shift in ways students engage with each other and the out of class experience both in person and virtually. The fast paced flow of social innovations that offer students engagement opportunities challenge traditional ways of being for student involvement profession in higher education. Still though providing mentorship and advising is one of the effective, time honored, evidence based practices grounded in the student involvement professional field.

### **Issues:**

- The student involvement staff and students that the ERT met with expressed conflict over the programmatic model that should undergird the social and cultural offerings at URI. The major theme of disentions centered on staff driven programs vs a student center program model through SEC. The tension seemed to go deeper within the staff concerning the frequency and scale of program offerings.
- The MU staff and students crave to be known as "The Place to Go". However, attention must be given to a more robust set of programming and a clarification in the staff mindset of their roles as an office and as individual staff in order for the MU to become the "Center of Campus Life" and the place that campus entities come to cocreate and deliver student focused programs.

- The ERT identified through conversations with many MU staff, students and external stakeholders that there was the lack of staff, financial, and technological support for student organization success.
- The virtual platform being used through the Student Involvement Office to support student organizations was viewed as antiquated and not reflective of the 21 century 24/7 learning environment that the MU seeks to achieve.
- Space continually came up as a limitation in many and varied context. The Student Involvement Office is not conducive to providing student organizations a place to coexist with in a community environment, with technology, small group meeting areas, evident storage for group supplies, and marketing support, where all groups area welcome beyond the few that have dedicated offices.
- As mentioned the scope of this review was not on renovation topics though it was clear that the MU in its current configuration and future design discussions is still lacking in programming space to accommodate large scale and small intimate program offerings with the technology support to advance a breadth of social and cultural offerings.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Check in with the *Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) Campus Activities Programs* professional standards as a tool to administer an office audit and strategic directions plan to advance the staff and office towards the achievement of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century 24/7 learning environment for students.
2. Provide student organizations a place to coexist with in a community environment with the most cutting edge technology and marketing/design software, small group meeting areas, evident storage for group supplies, and marketing support.
3. Collaborate with colleagues and departments across the campus to intentionally promote student learning, development, persistence and success by requiring all student organizations to have faculty or staff advisors.
4. Establish a student organization advisor virtual resource center and training program to equip advisors with the skills, knowledge and supporting resources to effectively mentor student leaders and participants within the student organization system.
5. Engage University risk management, legal, academic, Student Government and student affairs staff in the design of a plan and justification for the implementation of comprehensive student organization advising model at URI.
6. Identify a set of student learning/skill outcomes that will guide their educational practice with all students engaged in the student organization system.



7. Work with institutional and student affairs assessment professionals in the creation of a comprehensive assessment plan with established success metrics and methods for disseminating examples of evidence based practice.
8. Collaborate with the Center for Student Leadership in the design of curriculum and program offerings to intentionally advance students organizational leadership skills within a developmental and sequenced framework grounded in identified learning and skill outcomes.
9. Evaluate the established office programming model from the lens of, are we a student and/or staff driven program unit, do we subscribe to a delivery practice of advancing large scale programs and/or 24/7 programming efforts?
10. Advance a campus social climate study focusing on student's social norms, leisure activity interests, program delivery methods and frequency and timing of program offerings as a guide in the design of a program model for the Office.
11. Review the Office's campus brand and gauge faculty, staff and students understanding of the office, its resources and offerings for the campus community.
12. Evaluate the organizational structure of the Memorial Union and reporting line of Office of the Student Involvement with the Vice President for Student Affairs and leadership team. The Division and campus community may be better served with a new reporting structure, as recommended in Section VIII.
13. Transition the advisement of the Student Senate to the Assistant Director, Student Involvement to emphasize the relationship between the student organization system, social life of the students and focus and expertise of the offices student group advising model.

Along with that shift there should be a dotted line supervisory relationship between the Assistant Director, Student Involvement and Student Senate Accounts Clerk to realize efficacies in the student organization financial system administration between and among the student organization system, student senate and the Student Involvement Office.

## **VIII. Organizational structure, staffing, and professional development**

### **A. Organizational structure:**

As the ERT has outlined through this report, there are many opportunities for the Memorial Union to evolve, shift, and pivot to meet the needs of today's URI community. The clearest way to expedite these opportunities would be to reorganize and restructure the current

MU organizational chart. This would ground the implementation of this report's recommendations in three ways.

First, reorganizing the Memorial Union in conjunction with the Division of Student Affairs and key URI constituencies allow for symbolic "bridges" to be rebuilt. Throughout our visit, there were many comments made about former MU leadership and staff that had "burnt so many bridges that the MU had left itself on an island". Any reorganization efforts must be led from the Vice President's Office to garner strategic thinking and buy-in across URI.

Second, reorganizing the Memorial Union should coincide with the findings and recommendations from the concurrent MU Space Renovation study. By synthesizing the findings and recommendations from both studies and including the URI community in the planning and execution, allow for new ideas and energy to flow back into the MU. This energy is what will sustain the third piece: a new mission, vision, and goals for the MU. Whether or not any of our recommendations are accepted below, the MU will have to reinvent itself to meet the needs of today's URI students. This work will not be easy given its history at URI, but from what we heard from folks and read from all the materials provided during our visit, URI is ready for this change.

The issues the ERT considered in recommending organizational structure changes are many. Among them are: the MU Custodial Team seemed to be overstaffed, given the size and scope of the building, as well as the level of daily foot traffic through the facility; MU seemed to be relatively a flat organization, but the organizational culture seem to affect a more hierarchical experience; Professional staff (particularly the Assistant Director group) seemed to be very dissatisfied of their titles, given the scope of their responsibility; there seemed to be limited cross functional and cross level communication among MU staff; the connection to academic affairs seems tenuous, even with the leadership staff teaching courses, which limit advocacy and marketing opportunities for their programs; and physical location disbursement of the student leadership development staff limited program synergy and visibility.

Finally, we should note that these changes below do not denote any title changes or promotions for any of the existing staff. We recognize that at a four-year public institution like URI, the labor Unions will have to be included thoughtfully and carefully to execute these changes with great attention, focus, and dignity for the staff involved. We will provide a proposed/recommended organizational chart for your reference separately.

## **Recommendations:**

### 1. For the Division of Student Affairs:

- Create a Student Engagement (or Success or Retention) Portfolio under Dr. Lori Ciccomascolo by moving the Center for Student Leadership Development and the Office of Student Involvement to her supervision. This would elevate these two areas as Divisional Departments, outside of the MU, with a focus on student success, retention, and or overall success. We believe that programming efforts from both of these departments would be cross-divisional whenever available. While physically these areas would still remain in the MU, their reporting line to the Associate Vice President would energize and broaden their perspective.
- Move Mr. Vik Patel, Information Technologist out of the Memorial Union and into the Vice President's Office to help lead technology and marketing efforts across the entire division. This role is an important one as the Division evolves under Dr. Collins' leadership.
- Move the following Auxiliaries under the Memorial Union Director: Conferences and Special Programs, Campus Store, and Dining Services to strengthen the Memorial Union's position as the URI leader in management and growth of revenue coming into the University. This would also create natural partnerships between the remaining MU Units (Finance and Accounting and Union Operations), which may, over time, merge with various functions of the Auxiliaries moving to the MU for efficiency purposes. Other than the Housing area, the Memorial Union could create this as a clear pathway to reinvent itself.

### 2. For the Memorial Union:

- Institute monthly MU wide staff meetings as listening sessions and to encourage cross-functional collaboration.
- Assess staffing levels based on industry standards (CAS, ACUI) of various functions.
- Update all job descriptions to reflect current responsibilities, with HR and Union leadership.

## **B. Professional Development and Employee Training**

We heard that staff members are not evaluated beyond the 6 month and 1 year probationary period review. Apparently the practice has been that after the first year, staff members do not engage in APR (Annual Performance Review). Without such process in place, we wondered how a supervisor ensures that staff are working towards achieving annual goals, provides necessary feedback and training for professional development, and rewards/recognizes good work being done.

We heard that the union contract might disallow such review process taking place. However, a scan of the current union contract for professional staff states clearly in PSA Article XII, Evaluations, "All employees shall be evaluated periodically but not less than once every two years. A written statement of evaluation shall be placed in the employee's official personnel file.". While this contract reflects a 2015-2018 timeframe, the ERT found it interesting that the language in this section of the contract (PSA Article XII, 12.3, H.) stated "Appropriate forms and signature pages will be developed mutually by the Office of Human Resource Administration and URI/PSA no later than April 30, 2001." The facts regarding staff evaluations are clear: there has been no clear and concerted effort to properly evaluate and give feedback to staff and leadership in many years. This, in part, is at the root of some of the Memorial Union's challenges. The MU culture is lacking accountability at all levels.

We agree with the Self-Study that there is a need to enhance professional development among staff to provide better support and guidance as they work with student leaders. While there are some exceptions, e.g., leadership studies minor and KPIs identified for some areas, MU's assessment focus has primarily been on inputs versus outputs (e.g., program outcomes and learning outcomes). In order for MU to establish a culture of assessment, all staff members need training and development in outcomes assessment, knowledge of how to use technology and data to improve programs offered.

MU also employs over 50 students in various functional areas. While these student employees are getting training on their specific duties, until now there has not been a comprehensive training program designed for all MU student workers. Such training would provide a greater context for student employees to know how their individual work contributes to the overall success of MU, increase cross functional awareness, create a sense of unity, and enhance their learning from doing the job.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Clarify job expectations by setting annual goals for staff and implement performance review process to ensure proper development and accountability.
2. Require participation and provide training in the areas of assessment, diversity and cultural competencies, Title IX, emergency protocols, and student organization advising by utilizing training programs available through URI, Division of Student Affairs, and MU created.

3. Develop MU wide student employee training program delivered at least annually and require participation as a condition of student employment.

### **IX. Strategic Direction for the Memorial Union:**

We were glad to learn that the Division of Student Affairs has begun a strategic planning process using the Appreciative Inquiry and SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) frameworks. While the strategic goals and objectives have not yet been drafted, vision, mission, values, and five pillars have been identified and agreed to. So the strategic planning process for the DSA is better than halfway completed. Given this, it is a perfect time for the Memorial Union, as a department under Student Affairs, to begin its own strategic planning process. We note that the MU currently does not have a strategic plan; however, the Self-Study identified this task as very important to be done and the staff seems willing to, perhaps even eager to, participate in the strategic planning process. As is the case for all strategic planning process, MU process should be as inclusive as possible, providing a great opportunity for staff, student employees and students to come together. This planning process should be well paced, build on momentum, and completed within a year followed by annual action plans to implement various phases of the 5 year strategic plan.

One of our observations from the visit is that the current mission of MU (while it is stated on the website, and in the Self-Study) is not clear to staff, students, and campus partners. Some see the mission as providing space for student groups, a meeting place, and place to get food. Others see the mission as providing learning programs, services to students and the campus community. Some saw it as a building, others as set of programs and services. Some question whether it is the heart of the campus, is it a destination point and if so, for what? Some wonder if the general student body is aware of MU's purpose. Is it a student union or a campus center? If it is a student union, is it for students and by students? If student union, should the word "student" be in the building name as well as in the mission statement?

#### **Recommendations:**

- A. Comprise and charge the MU strategic planning team.
- B. Begin the strategic planning process with a planning retreat.
- C. Consider changing the name of the department from the Rhode Island Memorial Union to Rhode Island Memorial Student Union.
- D. Keep the location of programs Center for Student Leadership Development and Office of Student Involvement in the MU building even though the program supervision may be changed as recommended.

E. Explore the feasibility of moving out administrative offices of Dean of Students and Division of Student Affairs from the MU to create more space for student use.

F. Move the Disability Services from the third floor to the first floor to improve access.

G. Create a new dedicated faculty lounge space in the MU where faculty can meet up with students individually and/or in small groups.

H. Add to existing Dunkin Donuts, to Create a food court in the Rams Den with national chains such as Subway, Panera Bread, Panda Express, Sbarro, Jamba Juice, Chopt, and others rather than using the dining services outlet currently there.

These changes would make it possible for the MU to become once again a destination point for the URI community; a place to eat, meet, greet, connect, plan, work, and play.

In closing, the strategic planning process provides a great opportunity to clarify the MU mission, the higher purpose for its existence. It also provides opportunities to state its aspirations by creating a shared vision for the department, a positive forward- looking version of the MU. The strategic planning process should also lead to identifying core values that provide behavioral guidelines of how staff and students would work together and interact with each other and other members of the university community. Finally the strategic plan needs to include strategic goals and objectives that are in alignment with the Division of Student Affairs' strategic plan.