

**The University of Rhode Island  
Campus Recreation  
External Review Final Report  
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**Submitted By:**

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**Introduction:**

The External Review Team was comprised of Nicole Olmeda from The University of Texas at Austin, Larry Mellinger from Elon University, and Cynthia Costanzo from The University of Connecticut. The Team was invited for a two day visit to The University of Rhode Island in Kingston, Rhode Island to conduct a comprehensive external review of the Campus Recreation Department. The purpose of the external review was to support the self-assessment investigation completed in June 2018, conducted by the Campus Recreation Department and to meet the collective requirements for program evaluation for the Division of Student Affairs.

The department self-assessment utilized the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Standards for Collegiate Recreational Sports to guide their review. In 1986 the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), in conjunction with a consortium member, NIRSA - Leaders in Collegiate Recreation, established standards and guidelines for collegiate recreational sports programs. While neither CAS nor NIRSA has established a formal external assessment process, the standards and guidelines are used as a framework to evaluate and assess progress toward program compliance with acceptable industry practice. The CAS standards now contain the following parts:

- Mission
- Program
- Organizational Leadership
- Human Resources
- Ethics
- Law, Policy, and Governance
- Diversity, Equity, and Access
- Internal and External Relations
- Financial Resources
- Technology
- Facilities and Equipment
- Assessment

The external review consisted of qualitative and quantitative elements, including the review and analysis of numerous resources provided by the department. The External Review Team utilized the following materials; the CAS self-assessment report, departmental budgets and finances, marketing materials, survey reports, and additional miscellaneous documents. The on-site visit conducted by the External Review Team was conducted from October 14-17, 2018. This on-site visit and review included department facility tours as well as interviews and focus groups including; the campus recreation personnel, student employees, program participants, institutional colleagues and partners, and Student Affairs leadership. Additionally, all stakeholders were provided with an opportunity to submit anonymous feedback to the External Review Team following the on-site visit.

For the purposes of providing the most useful feedback for the department - this report is organized into the following sections:

- [A] Overall Findings
- [B] Strengths
- [C] Aspirations and Opportunities
- [D] Assessment
- [E] Action Steps
- [F] Strategic Directions

## **[A] Overall Findings**

The University of Rhode Island Campus Recreation department provides facilities, programs, and services to the campus community within the typical structure of a collegiate recreation program as established by the NIRSA and CAS. The department mission statement seems to align with and complements the Division of Student Affairs and institutional mission and purpose.

The department appears to be staffed by passionate and engaged professionals; however, it is clear that the organizational structure and the functions of many of the full-time staff positions need to be more clearly defined and potentially re-aligned. This seems to be an effect of the department's continued challenges with establishing and communicating an identity. An area of emphasis for the department moving forward is to clearly identify and communicate departmental goals and strategies as it continues to evolve. Thus, the portfolios of each full-time staff member should be assessed as they will play an essential role in the department's direction and success. Many full-time staff positions include both programming and facility management and could be contributing to some inefficiencies within the department.

Programs offered are consistent with industry standards. The addition of a centralized marketing area to enhance program promotion is clearly a positive addition to the department. Additionally, a focused marketing approach will likely assist with communicating the department's identity to the campus community as well as support future efforts to promote memberships and special events to enhance revenue opportunities. Efforts in this area should continue to be focused on digital solutions as many programs continue to move away from print collateral and towards digital and social media channels.

While some policies and procedures seem to be well established there are opportunities to improve various internal systems. The special event and facility rental process seems complicated and appears to rest on one individual within the department. This process should be assessed, redefined, and potentially resourced differently. It should then be clearly communicated to constituents – ideally via the website – of what the processes, policies, and fees are for renting or reserving facility space. Additionally, opportunities to improve the policies and financial management systems for the Club Sports program deserve focus and future exploration.

Generally, there appears to be positive relationships between the department and the many internal campus partners. Additional opportunities to further professional partnerships were identified that will likely yield successful outcomes. The relationship and cross-departmental functioning and resulting outcomes between Campus Recreation and the Division of Athletics were heavily explored throughout the site visit and have been identified a significant area for review moving forward. This relationship appears complex and not able to be fully understood by the external review team. As many of the athletic facilities currently are shared resources between departments, further exploration of the relationship/coexistence between Campus Recreation and the Division of Athletics is a significant area for further investigation and review.

The financial operating principles and practices of the department were found to be a bit disconnected and confusing for the external review team. An analysis of expenditures, resources, and the department's financial impact on the campus community should be conducted before establishing funding priorities and making significant changes. There also appears to be the potential to restructure funding processes to simplify user outcomes (i.e. refunding Intramural teams half of their entry fees as a method to deter forfeits; the antiquated Club Sports/Student Senate accounting processes).

Finally, an emphasis on technology and software systems should continue to be a focal point of review and further exploration as it has direct implications on the ability to improve systems and efficiencies within the department.

**[B] Strengths: Effective components, accomplishments of note, direct and indirect impacts on students, faculty, staff, and URI community.**

*[B1] Passionate and Committed Staff*

Both the professional and student staff are committed to providing high quality, diverse programs to the URI community. All staff the review team interacted with were open, honest, and improvement-oriented, indicating their passion and commitment. As the second largest employer of students on campus, the department should develop strategies for leveraging the opportunity to engage student employees in the development, marketing, and promotion of department programs and services.

*[B2] Anna Fascitelli Fitness and Wellness Center*

This facility is open, modern, and a source of pride for students, faculty, and staff across campus. It also has an excellent location in a high traffic area of campus, with close proximity to dining and other wellness providers. As the University continues to develop wellness programs, this facility will be essential to effectively engaging the campus community. Both short- and long-term maintenance and development of the space should be planned for to ensure the success of this space for many years to come.

*[B3] Pool as a Community Engagement Space*

There were several faculty, staff, and community members who spoke about the impact the pool had on their personal well-being, often stating that they, their children, and in some cases, grandchildren learned to swim and utilized the pool throughout their lives. Additionally, nearly all beach lifeguards in Rhode Island are trained in this pool, making it an important part of the state's tourism. The pool is in dire need of updates (addressed later in the recommendations), but a plan to develop the pool and strategically engage both the campus and surrounding community is essential to the success of the department and, arguably, the entire University.

*[B4] Sailing Center and Associated Programs*

The Sailing Center is a unique facility that provides diverse engagement opportunities for students through academic, instructional, and club programming. Additionally, the space is another important community engagement space, specifically in terms of summer camps. The facility needs some updates, but the greatest opportunity to develop the space is to work with the University to provide transportation to the Sailing Center, particularly for students living on or near campus.

*[B5] Club Sports*

Club Sports offer exceptional engagement, leadership, and wellness opportunities, particularly in fostering a sense of belonging and institutional pride. Compared with similar programs, their financial support is sufficient overall, although that number may be a bit misleading considering the significant amount of resources dedicated to more expensive clubs, such as renting ice time for the hockey club and the high cost of the sailing team. Several recommendations are provided later in this report to ensure the continued development and long-term success of the program.

*[B6] Outdoor Field Space*

There is a significant amount of field space dedicated to recreational programs, so it is not recommended that additional space is acquired. However, the condition and usability of the current fields is not suitable for club sports competition in some areas, and not safe for any recreational activity in other areas. As the department develops a facilities master plan, reimagining the use of outdoor spaces and investing resources into their development is strongly recommended (specific recommendations noted later in the report).

**[C] Aspirations/Opportunities for Growth: Areas needing improvement, inefficiencies, and what successes can be built upon.**

*[C1] Develop a Campus Recreation Strategic Plan*

The most significant area of growth identified by the review team was the need to develop a strategic plan and facilities master plan. This will enable the department to collectively develop a plan for future programs and partnerships, solidify and communicate values and priorities, and add consistency and purpose to decision-making. Moreover, a strategic plan and facilities master plan will provide a much-needed paradigm shift to becoming more planful and less reactionary as a department, and empower the director to be more visionary and future-oriented.

*[C2] Revisit Budgets and Funding Models*

Budgets have been developed as the department has grown, but have done so in an inconsistent manner that has led to many limitations on how funds can be spent, thus creating internal inconsistencies amongst access to resources. It has also forced some areas to become more dependent on revenue generation. All department budgets and associated policies should be revisited and streamlined whenever possible, then all revenue targets and associated program fees be reestablished in a manner that is more consistent across the department.

*[C3] Facilities/Space Allocation, Use, Management*

Recommended to inventory all indoor and outdoor facility space used within Campus Recreation including those spaces used by the Club Sport program. We found it unusual that there were club sports that have dedicated space for their use when space is so limited for Intramurals and other areas of Campus Recreation. It presented the appearance that not only is Campus Recreation competing for space with Athletics, they also aren't allocating and utilizing all of the outdoor field space within their portfolio to its full potential.

*[C4] Develop an Operations Plan*

Many department processes seem to have been passed down by word of mouth over the years. As the department continues to grow, it is essential that standard operating procedures in all areas are documented. This will add consistency across the department and allow for smoother transitions, greater transparency, and higher efficiency.

*[C5] Identity and Relationship with Athletics*

The department seems to be experiencing an issue with their identity on campus. While the department was formally separated from Athletics in 2007, it felt to us as if Campus Recreation is still in the midst of this transition. There doesn't appear to be clearly defined agreements or processes for how space is reserved, scheduled, and maintained. Although the transition has been completed for many years, Campus Recreation has not yielded any significant gains. Athletics continues to be the campus priority and recreation has largely remained in a 'support role'.

*[C6] Develop Usage Plan for New Turf Field*

Recently, the University approved plans to develop a new turf field in the varsity football stadium. Student Affairs is financially contributing to the turf and there has been an agreement, in principal, that Campus Recreation will be able to use the space for programming. It is recommended that an MOU is established so that all parties understand the facility scheduling and use expectations and responsibilities of each department prior to the facility opening. Additionally, there should be clear expectations as to the financial commitments for the maintenance and operations of that field.

*[C7] Improve Field Conditions*

While the amount of space available for recreation is sufficient, field conditions are not. The condition of fields, including drainage, irrigation, leveling, and ongoing maintenance must be addressed in a facilities master plan, along with a priority that aligns with department priorities and programming strategies.

*[C8] Capitalize on the Sailing Center*

Develop a plan to capitalize on the engagement and educational opportunities involved with the Sailing Center, specifically as it relates to students living on campus. Campus Recreation should advocate for transportation to be provided to the Sailing Center. Additionally, structural updates to the facility should be considered in a facilities master plan.

*[C9] Redevelop Keaney Gymnasium*

If Athletics takes ownership of the North Gymnasium as a basketball practice facility, Keaney Gymnasium must be renovated so that Campus Recreation can maintain continuity of operations in moving to a smaller space.

*[C10] Revisit Varsity-Club Sports Policy*

Currently, a policy exists that any varsity sport may not be duplicated as a club sport. We did not speak with anyone who knew the specific origins of the policy, but it can be assumed that it was from the time when Campus Recreation reported to Athletics. It also appears that there is a loophole, so that students interested in forming clubs that do have correlating varsity sports are able to do so, but they are not affiliated with Campus Recreation and/or Club Sports. This is a major liability and risk management concern, and also leads to inconsistency and confusion amongst students. It is recommended that this restriction is eliminated immediately.

*[C11] Develop More Comprehensive Risk Management Policies and Procedures for Club Sports*

Consider the addition of greater access to an athletic trainer, either contracted or as a staff position. Additionally, develop policies to meet industry standards for mitigating risk in club sports, such as a concussion education and management policy.

*[C12] Become a Leader and Partner in Campus Wellness Initiatives*

Campus Recreation is uniquely positioned to be a leader and partner in any divisional or campus-wide wellness initiatives, specifically as it provides excellent wellness promotion opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and members of the community. Additionally, as a department that engages a large number of students in positive activities, Campus Recreation can leverage its ability to connect with students with offices that may have a stigma associated with help-seeking behaviors, such as the health center or counseling. To do so, the department must shift the conversation so that Campus Recreation is seen as a benefit to mental health, fostering social connections, and building a community, just as much as it is seen as a leader in physical well-being.

*[C13] Centralize Professional Staff Offices*

Professional staff are spread throughout several facilities on and off campus. While this may be suitable for specific functions of jobs directly related to the spaces overseen (e.g., the pool and sailing center) it does not foster a culture of teamwork and communication. In any facilities planning, it is strongly recommended to consider this.

**[D] Assessment: Adequate assessment and evaluation for program type, key performance indicators, and benchmark programs.**

While the topic area of assessment is most often associated with student learning outcomes, it is recommended that the department adopt a broader perspective for the assessment initiatives identified below. Assessment consists of systematic plans and processes to meet internal and external accountability expectations to assess and evaluate achievement of departmental goals related to student learning and development. Departments must conduct regular assessment and evaluations using both qualitative and quantitative methodology to determine achievement of mission and goals and ensuring program comprehensiveness. Data are collected from students and other relevant constituencies and evaluated regularly to determine how well the department complements and enhances the institution's stated mission and educational effectiveness. The results of program evaluations are to be used to revise and improve programming, identify needs and interests, and recognizing professional staff performance.

It appears as if there are some program evaluations and event surveys being conducted, but that there is no specific centralized strategy or plan with which surveys and evaluations are developed or executed. One approach to deciding what projects should be conducted is to ask and answer the following questions prior to developing any assessment project:

1. What do you need to know?
2. Why do you need to know it?
3. Who are you assessing?
4. How will you use the information collected?
5. How will you collect the information needed?

All assessment projects should be purposeful, meaningful, and relevant - but more importantly - not everything needs to be assessed all the time. It is also important to note that there are many types of assessment - and projects can be more than just a survey.

*[D1] Benchmarking*

It is recommended that the department take steps to acquire benchmarking data from other peer institutions including: organizational charts, indoor and outdoor space per student data [indoor square feet per student and acreage per student], budget models, etc. This should be an immediate initiative as it should help inform and educate department leadership as to best practices and industry standards. This will also help in laying some foundational work for a department strategic plan.

*[D2] Assessment Inventory and Plan*

A good starting point for any quality assessment program is to inventory all of the qualitative and quantitative data currently being collected within the department. There were quite a few program evaluations and surveys provided to the external review team. It is advised that the department inventory all existing survey projects - ensuring all are serving the needs intended. Additionally, it would serve as a better foundation for telling the story of the department if there were some centralization of assessment efforts. The department should identify annual assessment themes that connect to institutional and Student Affairs initiatives or strategic plans, and then execute assessments with a clearly identified plan and by a centralized team.

*[D3] Feasibility Study for Replacing Tootell Aquatic Center*

Assess the need/feasibility/opportunity for constructing a new indoor pool, highlighting community engagement and revenue opportunities (i.e. state high school associations, healthcare providers, local programming, etc.). It should also include the impact this facility has on the region and the state (i.e. beach lifeguards) and the potential financial, political, and community implications if this facility were to close.

*[D4] Assessment of Costs/Impact on Services Delivered to Athletics*

An analysis of the impact that Athletics has on the department should be conducted. This should include financial, human resources, facility space, impact on informal/open recreation, etc.

**[E] Action Steps: Items which can be implemented immediately to improve the services, programs, and activities offered through Campus Recreation.**

*[E1] Conduct a Comprehensive Review of the Department's Financial Resources and Revenue Sources/Opportunities*

- Assess current funding sources including limitations for uses of funding
- Assess potential sources for additional revenue
- Assess potential to combine funding sources and expand how funding is allocated
- Benchmark all current fees (rentals, program, membership) against industry standards and establish short term goals

*[E2] Conduct a Comprehensive Review of the Organizational Structure*

- Assess roles, responsibilities of current full-time professional staff
- Conduct a job equity review:
  - Assess equitability of roles and responsibilities by job classification
  - Establish needs analysis for current vacancies
- Conduct benchmarking analysis for:
  - Current organizational structure against peer institutions
  - Current job titles against roles and responsibilities

*[E3] Establish an MOU with the Division of Athletics to Define the Parameters of the Relationship*

- Establish priority usage guidelines for all shared access facilities
- Establish agreement, including fee structure, for administrative services rendered by Campus Recreation
- Establish five-year capital improvement plan
- Establish standing committee, represented by each unit, to manage issues related to operational oversight (facility rentals, facility access, operational hours)

*[E4] Establish Stakeholder Groups to Define Department Initiatives and Goals*

- Student Advisory Committee: provides input regarding current operation and needs analysis and establishes a 'voice' for students
- Community Advisory Committee: serves to define current needs and provide vision for future partnerships
- Faculty/Staff Advisory Committee: serves to cooperatively engage the University's conversation regarding wellness and integrate Campus Recreation's wellness initiatives into a formal plan.

*[E5] Conduct a Comprehensive Internal Assessment for the Facilities Operated by Campus Recreation and Assess the Impact to Program Participation*

- Campus Recreation map:
  - Multiple locations for many programs. How would a user understand the layout?
  - Does the current program layout meet the community needs?
  - Is programming impacted by location of facilities?
  - Does offering programs and services in multiple locations impact participation?
  - Is the community fully aware of the locations of all programs and services?
- Hours of operation:
  - Variance of operational hours by facility. Is this confusing for participants?
  - Do the hours of operation meet current and projected needs?
- Outdoor facilities:
  - Who supervises/monitors the facilities?
  - Who schedules the facility usage?
  - How is programming coordinated by facility to support departmental efficiencies?



**[F] Strategic Directions: Short-term and long-term recommendations for the department.**

It is the consensus of the External Review Team that significant potential for success exists within the department of Campus Recreation to positively impact the URI community. To unlock that potential will require a strategic and systematic approach by the professionals from Campus Recreation as well as support and guidance from the administration of Student Affairs. The following represents ten short-term and long-term considerations.

*[F1] Establish an organizational structure that will appropriately resource the department.*

*[F2] Define the most important programs and services offered through Campus Recreation.*

*[F3] Define the identity of Campus Recreation at URI.*

*[F4] Develop and commit to a defined vision for Campus Recreation.*

*[F5] Identify Campus Recreation's desired culture.*

*[F6] Establish a five-year plan with concrete, realistic and achievable objectives.*

*[F7] Identify campus partners that will help Campus Recreation achieve their goals.*

*[F8] Match financial resources and goals to program and service goals.*

*[F9] Establish departmental policies, procedures, and processes with intentional outcomes.*

*[F10] Provide comprehensive, intentional, outcome driven training for all staff.*