

## URI Completes Review of Talent Development Program

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The University of Rhode Island recently completed a comprehensive review of its Talent Development Program that was founded in 1968 to provide access to higher education for Rhode Island high school graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The review process began in fall 2016 and included a self-study by the Talent Development staff, followed by an external review team assessment. This resulted in a series of recommendations to strengthen the program. The Talent Development staff has already submitted an action plan, with staff members assigned to address the team's findings by specific deadlines.

The self-study, external review report and action plan can be found at <http://web.uri.edu/student-affairs/assessment-planning>.

- We found the TD program to have contributed substantially to providing access to URI for underrepresented minority and educationally disadvantaged students and to increasing racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the undergraduate population. We also found the relatively low rate of persistence to graduation for TD program participants to be deeply troubling at a time when leaving college with educational debt and no degree is a significant burden. We recommend, therefore, that the TD program mission pivot from one of creating access to one of promoting student persistence to success (defined as learning, persistence, and degree completion).
- We found overall that program mission, size, leadership, staffing, and resources are not aligned to achieve the goals of access and success. A habit of operating as a “stand alone” program – from student recruiting through academic advising and support – may have made sense for the TD program in the past, but it no longer does.
- The TD program must transform into an assessment-informed unit that leads to campus partnerships on behalf of student learning, persistence, and degree completion.
- Responsibility for the success of TD program participants belongs to everyone on campus.
- We recommend focusing TD program staff on goals related to academic success and holistic problem solving. The kinds of obstacles to persistence that some TD program participants face (e.g., poverty, family violence, homelessness) require coordinated, wrap-around support from campus partners. Student success teams and an inter-unit,

holistic co-curriculum of student support are two recommendations in support of campus and TD program transformation.

### **Other Recommendations**

- Separate admission/financial aid decisions, which rightly belong in Enrollment Management, from Talent Development for the program to focus on persistence and degree completion.
- Shift to a professional contemporary student success leadership/staffing model rather than continue with charismatic leader model. This includes a focus on assessment, predictive analytics, holistic student success, and collaborative/partnership/institutional efforts.

### **Overall Recommendations for the University**

- Develop appropriate TD organizational reporting structure.
- Enhance existing programs to support diverse students as well as training and education for faculty and staff.
- Expand appropriate support systems for students who apply for TD but are accepted through regular admission.
- Ensure academic advisors in University College for Academic Success and colleges are adequately prepared to meet the unique needs of TD scholars.
- Emphasize collaborative and collective responsibility for TD scholars, including convening various internal stakeholders, office of Community, Equity and Diversity, University College for Academic Success, and academic colleges to make strategic decisions about student success.
- Invest in additional institutional research capacity to meet the data and analytic needs of the TD program and to benefit all students who enroll at the University.