

Minutes of the May 14, 2021 Meeting of the CELS Advisory Council

Call to Order: A meeting of the College of the Environment and Life Sciences Advisory Council was held at 10:00am via Webex video conferencing due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In attendance were Advisory Council members: Robert DiFilippo, Jonathan Feinstein, Kevin Killeen; Fraser Lang, Patrick McGuire, Becca Treitch, and Bruce Zetter; Skip Wilson, CELS/URI Foundation; MAF faculty member Whitley Saumweber; Michael Rice, URI CELS Faculty Secretary; John Kirby, URI CELS Dean presided.

URI-CELS Presentations and Discussion:

Dean John Kirby

Dean Kirby noted that despite the Covid-19 pandemic, it's been a fairly good year at URI in terms of student applications. With more than 27,000 applicants it is the largest ever with many in health-related fields. With such a number, many programs can become more selective with admissions. There will be 480+ new freshmen coming into CELS. On the personnel side, despite some 650,000 higher education personnel being furloughed or laid off due to the pandemic, there were none at URI. The twelfth URI President, Dr. Marc Parlange has been named and will begin his term on July 1. He is a member of the National Academy of Engineering, a first for URI. Also on July 1, the Department of Landscape Architecture will rejoin CELS and begin transformation to add graduate programs to its offering and strengthen the planning portfolio within CELS. Class offerings are likely to return to face-to-face in the fall with much of the classroom furniture being returned over the summer.

General discussion ensued based on a question from Becca Trietch about the long-term impacts of widespread remote learning over the last year and a half. Consensus projection is that face to face instruction will still dominate instructional modes, especially in CELS that emphasized hands-on-instruction in many labs, but the improvements in on-line technology provides opportunities for global engagement and other specialty applications. Videos of in-person classes through the URI curriculum support software (Brightspace) is used by student to assist studying. Online certificate programs are growing and will be an important part of CELS offerings

News from the URI Foundation:

Skip Wilson

Skip Wilson gave an overview of development activity since the last meeting. To date, the Campaign has surpassed the \$200 million mark and so too has the URI endowment, both historic milestones. With three years left in the Campaign, we are on pace to reach the \$250 million goal, though Skip stressed the final years of any campaign are always the hardest. Recent focal points at the Foundation include collaborative fundraising for neuroscience, a new regionalization structure, and an emphasis on non-alumni engagement. The 'Annual Fund' has been rebranded as the 'Rhody Now' program to better reflect its purpose of delivering immediate impact. Finally, CELS has had a record year for fundraising. Significant gifts include a new endowed scholarship for plant

sciences, two planned gifts supporting science communication and an existing biological sciences scholarship, and a \$1 million commitment for the Metcalf Institute.

CELS Faculty Presentation:

Prof. Whitley Saumweber, Department of Marine Affairs

Professor Saumweber is a new faculty member in the Department of Marine Affairs. He is a URI Alum, earning his Ph.D. in Biological Oceanography in the laboratory of Prof Ted Durbin at the Graduate School of Oceanography. He was a recipient of a John Knauss Fellowship from NOAA that brought him to DC. He worked in the Obama Administration as an oceans policy aide and on the staff of Sen. Daniel Inouye also in marine policy and global warming issues. He spoke of a number of current developments in Washington that may provide great opportunities for URI. Fomer governor, Gina Raimondo is now Secretary of Commerce and unlike most former secretaries, understands the role of NOAA that makes up 60% of the DOC budget. The proposed budget for NOAA by the Biden Administration is larger than any before. A major high-profile bill by Re. Raul Grijalva of Arizona titled 'The Ocean-based Climate Solution Act' seeks to add \$ billions to climate research and renewable energy. The offshore wind project governance developed by CRMC is seen as a model for ocean governance nationally. Rhode Island is poised to capitalize on its traditional role as a laboratory or microcosm for coastal policy development is well positioned to benefit from a number of new federal coastal science and policy initiatives, including renewable energy and sea level rise.

New Business:

It was announced that Frasier Lang will be retiring from his position as an advisor to the Metcalf Institute, so this would be his las meeting of the CELS Dean's Advisory Council. The Council Membership wished Frasier well in his future endeavors.

Old Business:

There was no old business.

Adjournment: *The meeting was adjourned at 11:25am.*

Respectfully Submitted:
Michael A. Rice, Faculty Secretary