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Student Representative

**The University of Rhode Island
Board of Trustees Meeting
Friday, October 23, 2020 • 3:00 p.m. EDT**

**PURSUANT TO GOVERNOR RAIMONDO'S EXECUTIVE
ORDER, THIS MEETING WAS HELD VIRTUALLY USING THE
WEBEX PLATFORM (BOARD MEMBERS ONLY) AND
FACEBOOK LIVE (PUBLIC VIEWING)**

MINUTES

Chair Cook welcomed the members of the University of Rhode Island (URI) Board of Trustees to the Plenary Session at 3:00 p.m. and asked Attorney Saccoccio to take a roll call attendance. There were no action items for this meeting, and therefore, a quorum was not necessary.

Attendees present for this virtual meeting:

The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees voting members:

- Ms. Margo Cook, Chair
- Dr. Karina Montilla Edmonds
- Mr. Michael Fascitelli
- Mr. Richard Humphrey (arrived late)
- Mr. Matthew Lenz
- Mr. Michael F. McNally, Vice Chair
- Ms. Cortney Nicolato
- Ms. Jay Placencia
- Ms. Cecilia Rouse
- Mr. Armand Sabitoni

The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees ex officio members:

- Mr. Tim DelGiudice-Chair, Council on Postsecondary Education
- Ms. Barbara Cottam-Chair, Board of Education
- Dr. Mayrai Gindy-Faculty Representative

The University of Rhode Island Staff

- President David M. Dooley
- Mr. Louis Saccoccio, General Counsel
- Ms. Michelle Curreri, Chief of Staff and Secretary to the URI Board of Trustees
- Ms. Anne Marie Coleman, Assistant Vice President for Human Resources
- Dr. Mary Grace Almandrez, Associate Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer
- Dr. Kathy Collins, Vice President for Student Affairs
- Mr. Donald DeHayes, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

1. Discussion Item

a. Community, Diversity, and Inclusion at the University of Rhode Island

Chair Cook explained that this inaugural session commencing on day one of the board meetings is a means to educate the Board about URI. The topic for this session addressed community, equity, diversity and inclusion at the University. Chair Cook shared that this topic was discussed at every presidential search town hall meeting held during the week of October 19. She stressed the importance of the Board's support to ensure that there be diversity, inclusivity, and equity among the teams that support the policies of the University. Chair Cook turned the discussion over to President Dooley and Dr. Mary Grace Almandrez, Associate Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer.

President Dooley shared that community, equity, and diversity has been one of the University's transformation goals for the last ten years and considered that goal to be foundational to all other goals of the University. He added that the goal is to be transparent so that the Board understands the University's investment of time and money in its efforts for new commitments that are contemplated and/or being put into place.

President Dooley turned the discussion over to Dr. Almandrez and shared that she came to URI after having a very distinguished career at Brown University by leading many diversity and inclusion efforts there. President Dooley added that Dr. Almandrez heads up the efforts around community, equity, and diversity, serves as the Chief Diversity Officer, and is a member of the senior leadership team at URI.

Dr. Almandrez began discussing her presentation entitled, "[*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at URI*](#)". She shared that when the office of Community, Equity, and Diversity (CED) launched its first 5-year Strategic Plan in 2017, it focused on three primary priorities: recruitment, retention, and institutional transformation.

Recruitment

Feedback was received from faculty and students indicating the need for improvements in recruiting more Black, Latinx, and Indigenous faculty and having search committees be appropriately equipped with a knowledge base on launching affirmative, inclusive, proactive, and innovative strategies to attract diverse talent.

Retention

CED will focus on building a community that is inclusive and welcoming so that all member's contributions are valued. CED is also looking at opportunities for advancement and promotion at all levels of the institution as well as enhancing and expanding professional development. Dr.

Almandrez also shared that all new employees receive workplace harassment training. Online training on how to engage the campus community in critical conversations to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion is also being explored.

Dr. Almandrez reported that Dr. Joanna Ravello, Director of Community and Organizational Development, launched a social justice and inclusion micro credential that allows all university employees and affiliates to participate in learning modules that examine diversity and inclusion issues in the workplace.

Institutional Transformation

Dr. Almandrez shared that CED is exploring ways to cultivate institutional capacity and address structural issues and is also examining ways to promote inclusive campus policies and practices. Issues of activism are being addressed in response to recent events relating to Black Lives Matter, freedom of speech, and implications of the current election. Dr. Almandrez reported that students would like to major in any discipline, in any college and take courses that unpack issues, privilege, power and difference.

Dr. Almandrez provided the Board with updates made in the past year such as the creation of the University Diversity Council (UDC), comprised of students, faculty, staff and alumni from all URI campuses. The purpose of this council is to recommend diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives to the President and senior leadership.

Campus Climate Survey

Dr. Almandrez provided an update for the launch of the Campus Climate Survey in Spring, 2021. Rankin and Associates have been hired as consultants and will help to create a personalized survey instrument. The survey will be approximately 20-30 minutes long and will cover a variety of questions to be completed in one sitting. Dr. Almandrez added that a live website for the survey will be available in mid-February, with a response rate goal of 30%. The survey and data will be owned by URI which will allow the UDC to measure progress and campus climate over time. Survey results will be available in Fall 2021 followed by focus groups to examine the data which will provide information to develop a new strategic plan in 2022.

Dr. Almandrez concluded her discussion by informing the Board that CED would be participating in their second external review in 2024 and that the Board should have received a copy of the annual report via mail. Dr. Almandrez also shared the link to the annual report then turned over the discussion to Provost Don DeHayes.

Provost DeHayes discussed the work that has been accomplished in the Division of Academic Affairs pertaining to community, equity and diversity. He shared that the goal to “ensure an equitable and inclusive campus community” was established in the first URI Academic Strategic Plan (2010-2015), which focused primarily on recruiting and retaining students. The second Academic Strategic Plan (2016-2021) includes a goal for the University to embrace diversity and social justice with three particular strategies --- diversifying faculty and staff, recruitment, retention, and graduation of students from underrepresented groups, and creating a diverse and socially just community. Provost DeHayes emphasized that the most work to be done, in his view, is the need to further diversify the faculty and staff and developing new and creative ways of transform search and hiring practices. He shared positive news that faculty diversity has increased from 15% to 21.4% over the past five years, which mirrors the university-wide number for the proportion of students of color currently at URI. However, much more work is

needed to increase the proportion of Black Latinx, and Native faculty in the community, as there has been a relatively small increase over the last five years.

The second strategy in the Academic Strategic Plan was to increase recruitment, retention, and graduation rates for students of color and those underrepresented on campus. For detailed information in this regard, please refer to the [data](#) herein.

Provost DeHayes highlighted a dramatic percentage change in student enrollment since 2008 and also reviewed the data in regard to closing the equity gap, which can be viewed [herein](#).

The third strategy Provost DeHayes discussed was to make diversity, equity, and inclusion a university-wide priority throughout the URI community. Provost DeHayes noted that the Academic Affairs Diversity Task Force (AADTF) was created in 2009 using a shared governance approach to enhance diversity and anti-racism focusing on the academic core mission. The AADTF is chaired by the Provost and Vice Provost and includes faculty and some staff from each college. As a result of this task force, a multicultural post-doctoral program was established; diversity committees were established within several colleges; professional development was sponsored; and curriculum development was supported.

Provost DeHayes shared that the AADTF developed framework for multicultural competency within the revised general education curriculum. Currently every student must take at least one course that addresses this learning outcome. Our goal is to have the curriculum within the majors also reflect diversity, inclusion, and antiracism in the context of academic programs and majors. He added that the general education revision also included the development of a global competency learning outcome so that every student is able to think and function across cultures in a global context as well.

Provost DeHayes also shared that the AADTF has been sponsoring inclusion workshops for faculty in order to provide creative inclusive and equitable learning in the classroom. He also shared that the Graduate School leads a diversity and inclusion badge program through workshops that emphasize knowledge, skills, and dispositions in cultural competence.

Provost DeHayes shared that this year's Academic Summit, *Anti-Racism at URI: Academic Culture & Pedagogy* will be held on January 21, 2021. In addition, he is currently working with the AADTF, the Council of Deans, and Dr. Almandrez on an agenda for [Anti-Black Racism at URI: An Academic Affairs Agenda for Change](#), which is in the beginning stage of completion and was the focus of the Council of Dean's retreat held in August, 2020.

The discussion on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at URI continued with words from Dr. Kathy Collins, Vice President for Student Affairs. Dr. Collins noted that the first Strategic Plan for the Division of Student Affairs was created in 2019 with operationalized values around equity, inclusion and respect and shared the [link](#) to the plan with Board members. Dr. Collins added that her team strives to create a multicultural campus environment that "celebrates diversity through celebration, through education, through space, through listening, and through support of all of our community members." Dr. Collins stressed that a student's feeling of connection and belonging is one of the most important factors as to whether that student stays in school. She also stressed that much work is needed in the areas of recruitment, retention of staff, and changes to the recruitment process. Dr. Collins stressed the importance of making connections in order to fill jobs necessary to support the URI community. She shared that the Multicultural Center, and the Women's Center have interim directors, which is unacceptable, and that the community deserves to have those positions permanently filled.

Dr. Collins noted that Austyn Ramsey, Student Senate President, was invited to speak at this session, but was unable to attend due to her exam schedule. Dr. Collins received permission to share her [quote](#) on this topic. Dr. Collins stressed that although great strides have been taken in this area, a tremendous amount of work is needed. This concluded Dr. Collins' discussion and the meeting was opened to the Board for any questions or comments.

Dr. Montilla Edmonds asked if the data presented today could be broken down into which departments are doing the best and which need help in terms of diversity. Provost DeHayes answered that the data can be aggregated by student, faculty, college, and department levels. He added that the faculty of color are scattered across campus over many disciplines, although there is some variation from college to college. In addition, he stated that there is some tendency for both the Pell-eligible students and students of color to concentrate more in the arts and sciences and health sciences rather than the engineering and stem disciplines.

Dr. Almandrez shared that tables are available in the legislative report that was submitted, which provides a specific breakdown by rank of faculty as well as class year for students.

Ms. Nicolato commented that she would like to see collective training for board members in some capacity whether it be attending the Academic Summit, racial equity training, etc. in an effort to support students and faculty.

Provost DeHayes responded to the above comment by speaking to the Graduate School Diversity Badge Program. He explained that the growth of this program, since its inception, went from 8 students to 290. He also added that the popularity of this program is such that external constituents have requested that it be available to their employees.

Dr. Almandrez added that by having the highest level of leadership within the University participate in these types of trainings, it will send a message to the community that there is a deep commitment to learn alongside the URI community.

Chair Cook requested that all Board members be invited to the Academic Summit as an additional opportunity for self-education and also requested that the Governance Committee include the topics discussed in today's meeting at the June retreat.

Chair Cook asked Dr. Almandrez and Dr. Collins if there is a goal around faculty and student diversity and asked how the Board can help in recruiting efforts.

Provost DeHayes responded that one goal is to have a zero-equity gap, where all students, regardless of their ethnic background or Pell status, have an equal path to success. He added that continuous improvement in the number of faculty and staff hired will depend on the University being attractive by providing pathways for students of color. Provost DeHayes shared that the goal each year is to have the diversity of the incoming freshman class be higher than the diversity of the entire student population of the current year. He noted we have been successful in this regard over the past several years.

Dr. Collins added that faculty and staff who explore employment at the University look at the overall URI community and base their decisions not only on the job, but on how welcoming the community is for themselves and/or their families. She stated that living in the state of Rhode Island is expensive and that we must look at systemic issues such as that in order to attract and retain people.

Dr. Almandrez spoke of the importance of portraying the community as inclusive and welcoming and reported that the Community, Diversity and Equity website was revamped to send those messages to the external community.

Ms. Placencia inquired as to how the Board can be helpful to Dr. Almandrez and her team.

Dr. Collins responded that there will be continued conversations in this regard based on feedback from students, faculty and staff. She added that research from Rankin and Associates shows that people care about belonging and making connections and that hard work will be necessary to show the community that it is important to the University.

President Dooley asked that the Board take a position, demonstrate commitment, and actively involve itself in modeling the types of things they wish to see the institution's membership involved in. He believes these actions would send a powerful message to the University community and the State.

Chair Cook stated that the Board is very supportive and committed and will work together as a group to take the steps necessary to engage the Board in taking action.

Provost DeHayes added that he would like the Board to take a powerful position by holding the University accountable for the progress in diversity, student recruitment, enrollment, graduation rates, and research. He further added that the University should be able to demonstrate the progress made, and if not made, understand the reasons why.

Provost DeHayes pointed out that accountability will be an important factor for the Board when hiring the next URI president and that it will be important to "not only hear what they have to say, but to actually learn about what they have done." He added that in regard to diversity and the AntiBlack Racism: Academic Affairs Agenda for Change, the feedback received from faculty and staff of color was that more bold actions are needed, not more bold statements.

Ms. Rouse shared that Princeton University set up a committee within their Board a few years ago that addresses diversity, equity and inclusion, and its purpose is to do accountability work. Both Chair Cook and Ms. Placencia agreed that this is a good idea and that the Board must figure it out and get the work done.

Dr. Edmonds asked if there was a network for faculty or any efforts to connect faculty with other Rhode Island schools such as Providence College or Rhode Island College.

Provost DeHayes shared that many education faculty work closely with Rhode Island College and faculty in the neuroscience and biomedical areas work with Brown University. He added that one of the challenges is in partner hiring, as many academics partner with other academics. The University looks for creative ways to make this work to assist in retaining faculty at the institution.

Ms. Placencia noted that labor and succession planning around University administration be addressed at some point in Board discussions. Ms. Nicolato shared that she recently presented to the AFLCIO and that racial equity strategies were at the top of everyone's minds in the labor community.

The discussion was brought to a close and Chair Cook thanked everyone in attendance for their participation on a very critical topic.

Chair Cook called for a motion that the University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees adjourn the Plenary Session of October 23, 2020.

On a motion duly made by Ms. Placencia and seconded by Dr. Edmonds, it was

VOTED: THAT: The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees adjourn the meeting of October 23, 2020.

VOTE: 8 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Margo L. Cook, Karina Montilla Edmonds, Richard Humphrey, Matthew Lenz, Michael McNally, Cortney Nicolato, Jay Placencia, Cecilia Rouse

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

ABSENT: Michael Fascitelli, Armand Sabitoni

The URI Board of Trustees Plenary Session of October 23, 2020 adjourned at 4:14 p.m.

The next meeting of the URI Board of Trustees is scheduled for October 24, 2020.