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**The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees
University Advancement and External Affairs Meeting
Friday, October 23, 2020, 8:00 a.m.**

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

MINUTES

Chair Christine Heenan, acknowledged that a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m.

Attendees present for this virtual meeting:

The URI Board of Trustees voting members:

- Ms. Christine M. Heenan, Chair
- Dr. Karina Montilla Edmonds
- Ms. Cortney Nicolato
- Mr. Armand E. Sabitoni, Vice Chair
- Ms. Margo Cook (Board of Trustees Chair)

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

- Ms. Barbara Cottam, Chair, Board of Education
- Dr. Mayrai Gindy, Faculty Representative

The University of Rhode Island staff members:

- Linda Acciaro, Director, Communications and Marketing
- Robin Cawley, Executive Assistant II, URI Board of Trustees
- Heather Colby, Assistant Director, Brand Marketing and Advertising, Communications and Marketing
- Michelle Curreri, Chief of Staff, and University Liaison
- Kathy DiPietro, Executive Assistant, URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement (URIFAE)
- Austen Farrell, Chief Marketing Officer, URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement (URIFAE)
- Peter Harrington, Assistant Legal Counsel

The University of Rhode Island staff members (continued):

- Kelly K. Mahoney, Executive Director for External Relations and Communications
- Lil Breul O'Rourke, President, URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement (URIFAE)
- Louis Saccoccio, General Counsel
- John Stringer, Director, Institutional Research, Institutional Research
- Phillip Teixeira, Lead Information Technologist, Office of the Provost
- Cheryl Trudel, Executive Assistant, External Relations and Communications

Invited Guest:

- Diane Chace Fannon '74, Board of Directors, Executive Committee, Vice Chair / Marketing and Communications Chair, URIFAE

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

Chair Heenan called for a motion to accept the agenda for the October 23, 2020 meeting.

On a motion duly made by Ms. Nicolato and seconded by Vice Chair Sabitoni it was

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| VOTED: | THAT | The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees University Advancement and External Affairs Committee accept the October 23, 2020 meeting agenda. |
| | VOTE: | 4 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative. |
| | YEAS: | Ms. Christine M. Heenan, Dr. Karina Montilla Edmonds, Ms. Cortney Nicolato, and Mr. Armand E. Sabitoni. |
| | NAYS: | 0 |
| | ABSTAINS: | 0 |

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 10, 2020 MEETING [Enclosure 2a](#)

Chair Heenan called for a motion to approve the minutes for the September 10, 2020 meeting.

On a motion duly made by Vice Chair Sabitoni and seconded by Ms. Nicolato it was,

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| VOTED: | THAT | The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees University Advancement and External Affairs Committee approve the minutes of the September 10, 2020 meeting |
| | VOTE: | 4 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative. |

YEAS: Ms. Christine M. Heenan, Dr. Karina Montilla Edmonds, Ms. Cortney Nicolato, and Mr. Armand E. Sabitoni.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

3. DISCUSSION ITEMS

Chair Heenan announced to the Committee that she was looking forward to the discussion items: the update of the “Big Ideas. Bold Plans Campaign” for the University of Rhode Island; the review and discussion of the University’s national rankings and peer competitiveness; and the annual review of the University’s marketing and communications program. **Chair Heenan noted that her introduction of the topics was specifically expressed in reverse order of the agenda as she wanted to discuss them in reverse order sequence, as follows:**

a. Update of Big Ideas. Bold Plans. The Campaign for the University of Rhode Island

Chair Heenan invited Lil Breul O'Rourke to start the discussions by presenting the [URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement](#) update to the Committee. Ms. Breul O'Rourke, President, URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement, gave an update regarding the campaign progress.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Ms. Breul O'Rourke invited Committee members to ask questions and/or provide feedback.

Hearing none, Chair Heenan thanked Ms. Breul O'Rourke for the update, saying that the campaign presentation is a great way to speak not only to donors and prospects, but to the world more broadly about what makes URI special and distinctive and what direction the University is heading. Chair Heenan furthered her comments stating that the presentation was a great segue to move to the next topic of discussion of competitiveness and rankings. The URIFAE and the Alumni Advisory Committee look forward to hearing more about rankings with a focus of giving sustained and active attention towards the goal of moving the University’s future rankings in an upward trajectory.

b. Review and discussion of University’s national rankings and peer competitiveness

Chair Heenan invited John Stringer to present to the Committee. Mr. Stringer, Director of Institutional Research, gave a presentation entitled, [University of Rhode Island Rankings 2020-2021](#).

Chair Heenan interjected asking Ms. Breul O'Rourke if the URIFAE meets or exceeds the Campaign goals, and would that have the ability to affect the rankings related to financial aid and graduate indebtedness? Ms. Breul O'Rourke confirmed this as an area that the URIFAE does focus on, stating that scholarship dollars are immediately applicable, as well as use of endowment funds. Mr. Stringer interjected cautioning that not only in the US News rankings and Wall Street Journal rankings, but that throughout the rankings, indebtedness is increasingly becoming a factor.

Ms. Nicolato asked Mr. Stringer if the rankings criteria changes that US News historically implements each year are related to measures or weights, or both? Mr. Stringer explained that when they shifted weight away from alumni giving, they also increased the weight given to student excellence for those with SAT scores for students in the top ten (10) percent of their class.

Ms. Cottam noted that the “expert opinion” criteria was not really measurable. Mr. Stringer concurred, stating that it is probably one of the most common critiques of U.S. News and World Report Ranking, stating that historically, the “expert opinions” used to be reserved for provosts, chancellors and presidents. Chair Heenan explained that while the rankings might seem not to carry as much importance as the Wall Street Journal or the New York Times, but when looking at how heavily the rankings are weighted and what other presidents are saying, it is clear to see just how valuable it is that URI be in higher education press as well.

Dr. Gindy stated that for the second grouping of data points, the outcomes seemed to be about thirty (30) percent and while this is something URI is focusing on, she asked, “how do we measure just in that one category; is that something that we’re on the right track in your data?”

Mr. Stringer stated that, “we are absolutely on the right track, and we are headed in the right direction.” By reviewing part of his presentation, he further explained the “normalized,” against the minimum and maximum scores that were observed in the US News and World Report rankings this year that show URI’s graduation rate, and that the graduation rate performance and retention are around the middle fifty (50) percent; with the trend, “headed in the right direction.” Mr. Stringer added that the University is consistently increasing retention, with current preliminary figures showing first-year student retention rate for this year’s fall 2019 cohort, likely to be at an all-time high and is the same with our graduation rate, and the graduation rate performance, etc.

Mr. Stringer continued with his presentation of the Wall Street Journal and Times Higher Education rankings where URI is being ranked directly against small, liberal arts colleges as well as against major research institutions. Chair Heenan interjected stating that it was worth noting that unlike US News rankings, where URI is in the top fifty (50) percent, these rankings have URI in the lower fifty (50) percentile.

Board of Trustees Chair, Margo Cook asked for clarification related to the reputation rankings given that URI is now more recently being compared as a research institution. Mr. Stringer reiterated that URI’s reputation lags in the rankings on performance; however, Chair Heenan interjected stating that URI is not in a different cohort, while asking Ms. Cook for clarification of her question: was she asking if URI’s cohort has remained constant or has URI’s reputation ranking gone up or down? Ms. Cook clarified, stating her question was in relation to the reputation metric. Mr. Stringer answered that the reputation ranking is a fairly new metric, and URI does not have a lot of history to compare this relatively new metric with only approximately three- or four-year history. However, it has remained relatively stable during this time.

Chair Heenan noted that Ms. Diane Fannon, chair for the URIFAE, Marketing and Communications Committee was in attendance and asked Ms. Fannon if she would comment on some of the questions being asked; asking Ms. Fannon if she would take a look at the presentation slide: “[*Understanding URI’s 2021 Ranking*](#)” and comment on her thoughts relative to her insights, and in particular, where she would have the Committee concentrate.

Ms. Fannon stated that peer rankings on US News and World Report is a “top of mind awareness,” and is clearly something that can be impacted by marketing, and given that reputation does lag reality, it can be impacted by marketing as well.

Ms. Fannon noted the efforts that have been done to date with limited resources by the URIFAE marketing group, which has been applying communications against reputation and against peer review, reiterating the ability to affect change through marketing efforts. Ms. Fannon also noted the distinction

between the twenty (20) percent weighting of the US News and World Report as a pretty heavy weighting for peer review which is “top of mind awareness,” yet the Wall Street Journal ranked forty (40) percent of their weights focused on outcomes. Ms. Fannon further stated that with some of the outcomes being three (3) years old, this will eventually catch up, allowing URI the ability to market those advances, but the places where we can currently have the most impact in marketing is reputation and peer review.

Chair Heenan thanked Ms. Fannon for collaborating with the Committee and for bringing her wisdom and the thinking of her group’s expertise to the Committee. Both Ms. Fannon and Chair Heenan expressed excitement with the new governance oversight of URI and its new Board of Trustees and subcommittees structure recently implemented.

Mr. Stringer continued with his presentation and invited Mr. Austen Farrell, Chief Marketing Officer for the URIFAE to co-present for the overview slide portion of the presentation.

Mr. Farrell thanked Ms. Fannon for her involvement with the URIFAE marketing efforts and informed the Committee of the collaborative efforts between the URIFAE, Mr. Stringer, and URI’s External Relations and Communications Executive Director, Kelly Mahoney. Mr. Farrell reinforced that while rankings are not indicators of the University’s quality as an institution, they do still make headlines and become associated with overall perception.

Ms. Nicolato asked Mr. Farrell, “how are the two different rankings accessed to students and parents, and others; and which one is leaned on, as it relates to our students the most?” Mr. Farrell responded that he believes that “US News is the popularly understood one—that’s what prospective students look to, that’s what parents are thinking of, and that’s frankly, what sparks comments from alumni more often.” Mr. Farrell continued to remark that, “we know that the Wall Street Journal Times Higher Ed version has a different readership, and it’s more rigorous in how it calculates these things, as John noted.” Mr. Farrell concluded his comments saying that, “it’s a different audience and we were looking into both and will get into a little bit of that as we go.”

Chair Heenan stated that there is a tandem relationship between rankings and reputation; and reputation and competitiveness; but, with the Board of Trustees’ role to steward the long term health of the institution, it is most important to make sure that the Board is proactively examining and looking at how the University is pursuing recruiting efforts, and how the University is being presented to those who choose to either matriculate or work at URI, and that this should always be the priority, while also trying to improve the University’s standing in the area of rankings.

Mr. Farrell concurred with Chair Heenan stating that this too has been President Dooley’s outlook as well— that student access is the most important thing for a public university. If the effort to increase rankings does not really do much for the institution’s mission, then URI and other institution’s focused marketing efforts on rankings only provide for a “one-time bump,” that might give an institution only a few points in the rankings and doesn’t further what the University wants to do.

Mr. Farrell continued with the presentation and moved through the next few slides referencing several action items that the URIFAE are working on in collaboration with the internal partnerships (from the research area, Mr. Stringer, and External Relations and Communications, Ms. Kelly Mahoney and Ms. Linda Acciardo), regarding sustained ways to improve URI’s rankings with the goal of URI being on the top of the minds of constituencies within higher education using a two-part approach, etc.

Chair Heenan commented that many universities suffer from a lack of institutional response from the academic side that don't prioritize rankings and the ability to make that as easy as possible, to be as fulsome and as positive as possible in those surveys is a point that she does not want the University to miss.

Ms. Cottam asked the Committee if there had been a focus on rankings in the past, given that the rankings have been flatlined since 2012 when the University has made such great progress since then, noting URI as a much better institution academically, and in many other ways than it was back in 2012.

Mr. Farrell concurred with Ms. Cottam and gave an explanation that he too, as a non-native Rhode Islander, stated that it was apparent to him that the reputation he was aware of was not in alignment with the great work as a global research University that URI is. He noted that brief efforts over the last ten to fifteen years were made, and that he is excited to be talking with the Committee and others across the University to look at “next steps” which will reveal how the University can move forward to affect the rankings.

Ms. Heenan commented saying that the questions raised at the meeting shows the Committee members excitement and interest; and given the time and the need to proceed through the agenda, she asked the Committee if they had any objections to conclude the discussion and reconvene in December or January to revisit and take up the important topic of the marketing and communications efforts. Hearing no objections to the approach she outlined, Chair Heenan thanked Mr. Farrell and asked him to complete his presentation.

Mr. Farrell wrapped up his presentation speaking to the area of having purchased a mailing list of presidents and provosts across the nation; and that statistics from a recent communication sent to those on the list, showed solid opens rates and click throughs, with second time opens rates; confirming the value in sending repeated communications to this group to keep URI at the top of their minds.

Chair Heenan interjected stating that for Ms. Mahoney and Ms. Acciardo, and others, the value of analytics and measurement and the value of second open rate (as it was measured), enforces how critical it will be for URI to allocate resources to the effort of improving rankings.

Mr. Farrell concurred and continued with additional comments related to the email analytics and the potential reach of highly targeted audiences. Ms. Fannon interjected wanting Committee members who might be on the call, who have a background in marketing, to fully understand that financial constraints prevented the University in the past from previously investing in the purchase of a mailing list—stating resources were very limited and that the purchase of the mailing list, was in fact, “a very big deal financially for the institution;” while also reinforcing Chair Heenan’s comment that with metrics to prove effectiveness, the ability to be able to acquire resources goes up.

Mr. Farrell thanked Ms. Fannon for her remarks and concurred her assessment as well, while also noting that these are the kinds of investments that URI needs in order to obtain paid media and reach an external audience; which will require the URIFAE to partner even more with External Relations and Communications. Mr. Farrell concluded his portion of the presentation and turned it over to Ms. Acciardo.

Ms. Acciardo thanked Mr. Farrell and started her portion of the presentation with the slide entitled, “*Integrated Marketing Communications Strategy*” and proceeded to review recommendations as an integrated marketing communication strategy to execute a targeted integrated campaign to improve rankings.

Noting the time, Chair Heenan interjected, expressing the need to revisit the portion of the presentation related to the marketing strategy due to the great interest and need for further dialogue. She reiterated that it would be best to revisit the marketing strategy portion of the presentation at the Committee’s next meeting scheduled for January 14th or earlier if calendars align and committee members are willing to meet. Ms. Acciardo, agreed and asked if time permitted to present one last slide, “*Potential Next Steps?*” Chair Heenan approved and encouraged Ms. Acciardo to proceed before calling for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Acciardo concluded her portion of the presentation with the “Potential Next Steps” slide.

Vice Chair, Mr. Armand Sabitoni inquired if the integrated campaign is in the proposed budget, or if it is funded through the URIFAE?

Chair Heenan deferred to Ms. Kelly Mahoney, while adding that there is a broader question of where resources would be pulled from in order to be fully dedicated to the marketing strategy and that this year, funding would come from three sources: 1) the External Relations and Communications budget; 2) the URIFAE; and 3) new resources that will be needed. Chair Heenan asked Ms. Mahoney if this was an accurate assessment of the funding sources available and the need to find additional resources as well.

Ms. Mahoney concurred, stating that, “yes, definitely, we do have resources within external relations to support things that you see on this list (referencing the slide entitled, “*Potential Next Steps*), such as the Points of Pride and the digital newsletter that we put out. However, much of the integrated campaign that you will see in the presentation at the next meeting, does not have full resources behind it, and that would be something that we really need to look to for future funding cycles.”

Vice Chair Mr. Sabitoni asked if over the last ten (10) years, has a program, “like this been in place, or is this now a launching of a brand-new integrated campaign on recruitment and changing our levels?”

Ms. Mahoney responded that URI has a full recruitment campaign for students, which is different from a rankings campaign. A rankings campaign is specific to the tactics that Ms. Acciardo had started to highlight as part of her presentation and would be in addition to the student recruitment campaign. Ms. Mahoney further explained that she has been able to reallocate some resources over the past three years, but not to execute the fully integrated campaign that is being pursued, as communicated in the presentation.

Chair Heenan expressed her gratitude of friendship, purpose, and thinking noting the combined efforts of those with longevity and institutional knowledge, along with the thinking of those from elsewhere who bring external experiences and knowledge, that together lead to a powerful combination. Secondly, Ms. Heenan pointed out the crucial role of involving members from the area of institutional research when working towards the objective and efforts of improving rankings as essential to any meaningful change.

Chair Heenan delivered closing comments that expressed her gratitude to the Committee related to the importance and efforts towards improving the rankings and the efforts put forth within the marketing presentation. She also added that there is much interest to dedicate the necessary improvements, which go beyond that of the Committee, but to the interest of the full Board of Trustees, and that today was a

first step working towards marketing and rankings improvement strategies and efforts. Chair Heenan stated that an update would be provided at the upcoming full Board of Trustees meeting with the caveat of continuing the discussion at the January 14, 2021 meeting; or within the framework of another meeting dedicated solely to continuing the discussion and how the Committee can best support the efforts as outlined during the discussion and presentations. Chair Heenan then asked if there were any other questions besides those of Vice Chair Sabitoni, before making a motion to adjourn.

Ms. Fannon commented that the more that rankings are impacted, the greater ability there is to have alumni participate in the Campaign for the University, not only for the current Campaign, but that it is quite feasible to also affect participation for future campaigns as well. Audiences are intermingled, and that rankings are also not the end-all. Chair Heenan pointed out that participation rates also affect rankings as well; and as such, it is a virtuous cycle that would be beneficial to the University once established.

Dr. Gindy brought to the attention of the Committee and to everyone participating in the meeting, the last bullet point of the slide entitled, "[*Potential Next Steps*](#)" that would, "*establish a cross-departmental initiative to send University leadership and top faculty to key conferences...*" stating that she was glad to see this on the radar as, "faculty intermingle already, and it's paid for and they already have professional society leadership positions." As such, the University's brand could grow by the investment in faculty awareness that this is a University top level priority offered, and one that everyone has an ability to contribute to without much added resources.

Chair Heenan thanked Dr. Gindy and further expounded on the discussion point, saying the University's faculty partnerships are key, both making it easier for the University to help faculty to shine and in finding new audiences for their work, research, and breakthroughs in addition to helping them to understand the importance of rankings and reputation and their ability to recruit, be it graduate students, undergraduates or fellow faculty members.

Ms. Nicolato added that this is a distinctive opportunity to engage alumni at a much deeper level as the University has a lot of alumni who are proud of the University and would want to be involved. She suggested that that funding sources be delineated when presenting to help the trustees understand what resources are available as well as what is needed.

Chair Heenan thanked Ms. Nicolato and reminded the Committee of their commitment to participate in the Campaign from their last meeting when URIFAE President, Lil Breul O'Rourke, provided an overview of URI's Campaign. She suggested that "in that same spirit" for each Committee member who has active social media profiles to highlight (between now and their next meeting), one item that happened at URI for each week that they can share with their own networks. Chair Heenan stated that she would "step up first by volunteering" and seeing others who expressed approval among the Committee members. Chair Heenan asked if there were any other questions or comments, and with none noted, closed the meeting stating that she looks forward to a special meeting and then again on January 14, 2021 and thanked everyone for their participation.

4. ADJOURN

Chair Heenan called for a motion to adjourn for the October 23, 2020 meeting.

On a motion duly made by Mr. Sabitoni and seconded by Ms. Cortney Nicolato it was,

VOTED THAT The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees University Advancement and External Affairs Committee adjourned the meeting of October 23, 2020.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 8:56 a.m.

The next URI Board of Trustees University Advancement and External Affairs Committee meeting is scheduled for January 14, 2021.