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**The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees  
Academic Affairs and Research Committee Meeting  
Thursday, January 20, 2022 • 4:45 p.m. EST**

**The University of Rhode Island  
Robert J. Higgins Welcome Center, Hope Room  
45 Upper College Road, Kingston, RI 02881**

**UNOFFICIAL MINUTES**

Committee Chair Neil Kerwin welcomed everyone to the January 20, 2022 meeting of the Academic Affairs and Research Committee of the University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees. He conducted a roll call attendance and determined that a quorum was present. At 4:45 p.m., this meeting was called to order.

The Committee held a hybrid meeting in accordance with Governor McKee's Executive Order 22-01. Some Committee members gathered in person, and some members participated remotely. Public access to the meeting was made available via the YouTube video platform.

The URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee members in attendance:

- Mr. Neil Kerwin, Committee Chair (remote)
- Dr. Karina Montilla Edmonds, Committee Vice Chair (remote)
- Honorable Charles J. Fogarty (in person)
- Dr. Mayrai Gindy, Faculty Representative (ex officio, non-voting, in person)
- Mr. Matthew Lenz (in person)
- Ms. Susan Petrovas (remote)

The URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee members not in attendance:

- Mr. Richard Humphrey
- Ms. Margo Cook (ex officio, voting)
- Mr. Michael McNally (ex officio, voting)
- Dr. Marc Parlange, URI President (ex officio, non-voting)

The University of Rhode Island President’s Leadership Council members in attendance:

- Dr. Laura L. Beauvais, Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs (in person)
- Ms. Anne Marie Coleman, Assistant Vice President, Human Resources Administration (in person)
- Dr. Dean Libutti, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success (in person)

The University of Rhode Island staff members in attendance:

- Dr. Jennifer Burgess, Director, UCAS Academic Enhancement Center (remote)
- Ms. Robin Cawley, Executive Assistant II (in person)
- Ms. DeeDee Chatham, Director, Undergraduate Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (in person)
- Ms. Carol Connolly, Assistant Legal Counsel (remote)
- Ms. Jennifer Critcher, Assistant Director, Coastal Resources Center (in person)
- Ms. Michelle Curreri, Secretary to the Board of Trustees (in person)
- Mr. Peter Harrington, Associate General Counsel (in person)
- Ms. Ann Morrissey, Special Assistant to the Provost (in person)
- Dr. Jeannette Riley, Dean, College of Arts & Sciences (in person)
- Dr. Rebecca Romanow, Program Director, URI Film/Media (in person)
- Ms. Shawn Simmons, Executive Assistant II (in person)
- Dr. Kimberly Stack, Director, Center for Career & Experiential Education (in person)
- Dr. John Stringer, Director, Institutional Research (in person)
- Dr. Elin Torell, Senior Coastal Resources Manager (in person)
- Dr. Anne Veeger, Vice Provost for Academic Faculty Initiatives (in person)
- Dr. J.P. Walsh, Director, Coastal Resources Center (remote)

Outside guests in attendance:

- Ms. Vinita Mehra, Director, Global Business Practice, Kegler, Brown, Hill & Ritter (remote)

## 1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion that the URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee accept the agenda for the meeting of January 20, 2022.

On a motion duly made by Karina Montilla Edmonds and seconded by Charles Fogarty, it was

VOTED:            THAT            The URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and  
Research Committee accept the Agenda for the meeting  
of January 20, 2022.

VOTE:            5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in  
the negative.

YEAS: Karina Montilla Edmonds, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin,  
Matthew Lenz, Susan Petrovas.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

## 2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

### a. Minutes of the September 23, 2021 Meeting [Enclosure 2.a.](#)

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion that the URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee approve the minutes for the meeting held September 23, 2021.

On a motion duly made by Charles Fogarty and seconded by Matthew Lenz, it was

VOTED: THAT The URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee approve the minutes for the meeting held September 23, 2021.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Karina Montilla Edmonds, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Matthew Lenz,  
Susan Petrovas.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

### b. Ratification of the Agenda and Approval of the Minutes of the November 4, 2021 Meeting [Enclosure 2.b.](#)

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion that the URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee ratify the agenda and approve the minutes for the meeting held November 4, 2021.

On a motion duly made by Karina Montilla Edmonds and seconded by Matthew Lenz, it was

VOTED: THAT The URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee ratify the agenda and approve the minutes for the meeting held November 4, 2021.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Karina Montilla Edmonds, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Matthew Lenz,  
Susan Petrovas.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

### 3. REPORT OF THE CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER

Interim Provost Laura Beauvais presented her report ([Enclosure 3.a](#)). She discussed key performance metrics focused on graduation and persistence. To address the support of graduation and persistence numbers, the following initiatives are being added/implemented:

- Four new assistant deans of DEI
- Four new STEM Educators
- Equity in Retention Academy with the Gardner Institute
- Re-enrollment/Re-engagement program
- J Term and Summer to accelerate degree completion

Interim Provost Beauvais introduced the topic of Academic Efforts in Support of Student Success at URI. Dr. Jen Burgess presented information about the Academic Enhancement Center ([Enclosure 3.b.-c.](#)). Following her presentation, Dr. Kimberly Stack presented on the topic of the Career and Experiential Learning at URI ([Enclosure 3.b.-c.](#)). Ms. Deedee Chatham followed with her presentation on the Launch Lab and Undergraduate Research and Innovation at URI ([Enclosure 3.d.](#)). Dr. Anne Veeger prepared a brief update on COVID initiatives ([Enclosure 3.e.](#)). This presentation affirms that URI will be returning to in-person learning and that URI is joined in that by other leading educational institutions in Rhode Island. In the interest of time, her verbal report was postponed until later in the meeting.

Committee Chair Kerwin took up the action items prior to discussing Item 4.

### 5. ACTION ITEMS

- a. Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion that the Academic Affairs and Research Committee of the URI Board of Trustees recommend that the Board of Trustees approve the awarding of undergraduate and graduate degrees, diplomas, certificates, and honors conferred by the President to the students who have completed their requirements at the conclusion of the Fall semester for December 2021 and who have been approved by the URI Faculty [Enclosure 5.a](#).

On a motion duly made by Karina Montilla Edmonds and seconded by Matthew Lenz, it was

VOTED:        THAT        The Academic Affairs and Research Committee of the URI Board of Trustees recommend that the Board of Trustees approve the awarding of undergraduate and graduate degrees, diplomas, certificates, and honors conferred by the President to the students who have completed their requirements at the conclusion of the Fall semester for December 2021 and who have been approved by the URI Faculty, as recommended and presented.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Karina Montilla Edmonds, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Matthew Lenz, Susan Petrovas.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

- b. Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion that the Academic Affairs and Research Committee of the URI Board of Trustees recommend that the Board of Trustees approve the advancement of Film Media Studies from “Program” to “Department” status, as recommended and presented in [Enclosure 5.b.](#)

Interim Provost Beauvais explained the rationale for making this change as being integral in the development of the Harrington School of Communications and is supported by Dean Jen Riley and Professor Rebecca Romanow. Complete details are included in Enclosure 5.b. Trustees Matthew Lenz and Karina Montilla Edmonds expressed support.

On a motion duly made by Charles Fogarty and seconded by Karina Montilla Edmonds, it was

VOTED: THAT: The Academic Affairs and Research Committee of the URI Board of Trustees recommends that the Board of Trustees approve the advancement of Film Media Studies from “Program” to “Department” status, as recommended and presented.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Karina Montilla Edmonds, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Matthew Lenz, Susan Petrovas.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

- c. Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion that the Academic Affairs and Research Committee of the URI Board of Trustees recommend that the Board of Trustees approve the awarding of tenure to Dr. Melissa Sutherland, Professor of Nursing, College of Nursing, as recommended and presented in [Enclosure 5.c.](#)

Interim Provost Beauvais explained that the Dean of the College of Nursing, Dr. Barbara Wolfe, is building a national and international caliber faculty, and Dr. Sutherland fits this role.

On a motion duly made by Matthew Lenz and seconded by Karina Montilla Edwards, it was

VOTED: THAT The Academic Affairs and Research Committee of the URI Board of Trustees recommend that the Board of Trustees approve the awarding of tenure to Dr. Melissa Sutherland, Professor of Nursing, College of Nursing, as recommended and presented.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Karina Montilla Edmonds, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Matthew Lenz, Susan Petrovas.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

#### 4. DISCUSSION ITEM

- a. Establishment and registration of a University of Rhode Island branch office in the Republic of Fiji and the USAID-funded Pacific Islands Fisheries Project known as “OurFish OurFuture” under the leadership and direction of URI’s Coastal Resources Center. [Enclosure 4.a.](#)

Dr. J.P. Walsh, Director of the Coastal Resources Center, joined by Dr. Jennifer Critcher, Assistant Director, Coastal Resources Center, and Dr. Elin Torell, Director of International Coastal Programs, and supported by Mr. Peter Harrington, Associate General Counsel, Ms. Carol Connolly, Assistant Legal Counsel, and Ms. Vinita Mehra, Director, Global Business Practice, Kegler, Brown, Hill & Ritter, made a PowerPoint presentation to inform the Committee about the plans for a branch office in Fiji. The decision to go forward with this initiative was approved by the Institutional Risk and Compliance Committee earlier in the day.

Committee Chair Kerwin asked how many staff would be stationed at the new office; the answer is approximately eight people, several hired locally. He then mentioned that he had seen the earlier presentation, and it looks promising. Committee Chair Kerwin then asked several questions about our existing office in the Philippines. In response to additional questions, Dr. Walsh explained the anticipated start-up time. He offered the congratulations of the committee to Dr. Walsh and his team.

Committee Chair Kerwin then asked Interim Provost Beauvais to return to the subject of COVID. She asked Dr. Anne Veeger to speak to this subject. Dr. Veeger said that URI has instituted several new measures prior to the spring semester. She affirmed that we are requesting that students be boosted and take a point of origin test before returning for classes. URI’s vaccine mandate and masking requirements worked very well for the fall semester, but nonetheless, students do get together unmasked, mostly off-campus, and there are related surges of COVID because of that. She said we are optimistic for the fall, based on dropping rates of infection in Rhode Island. Many of our peer institutions in the region, including Brown University, are starting classes face-to-face, and we feel confident that this is the right strategy. There are likely going to be issues to address, but URI is going forward to support students and the faculty in offering a vibrant on-campus experience.

Committee Chair Kerwin asked if the booster rate will be comparable to our excellent vaccination rate. Dr. Veeger replied that the numbers are coming in, and we will be tracking them. Committee Chair Kerwin thanked the staff and said that the Committee will continue to watch enrollment numbers carefully.

## 6. ADJOURNMENT

Committee Chair Kerwin thanked the Committee and called for a motion to adjourn the meeting of January 20, 2022.

On a motion duly made by Matthew Lenz and seconded by Charles Fogarty, it was

VOTED:        THAT        The URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee adjourn the meeting of January 20, 2022.

VOTE:         5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS:         Karina Montilla Edmonds, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Matthew Lenz, Susan Petrovas.

NAYS:         0

ABSTAINS:    0

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

The next URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee meeting is scheduled for April 21, 2022.