



President's Commission on the Status of Women  
University of Rhode Island  
Information for New Members  
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## PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The President's Commission on the Status of Women examines and responds to the needs of women at the University of Rhode Island. The PCOSW functions primarily by studying unmet needs, and then recommending ways of meeting those needs to other organizations and individuals that are in a position to respond to them. Rather than providing direct service, it thus operates to facilitate the effectiveness of others. At times this involves working toward the establishment of new organizations and positions that will address those needs.

### History and Purpose of the PCOSW

Following intensive study in May 1999, the students in Women's Studies 490, along with the directors of Women's Studies and of the Women's Center, recommended creation of the President's Commission as the best structure for responding on an institutional level to climate issues affecting women. Their recommendation was echoed by an ad hoc group of faculty and staff, the Committee on Equity for Women, who presented to the President their concerns, along with a petition signed by 130 faculty and staff members. In December 1999, URI President Robert Carothers and Provost M Beverly Swan announced the establishment of the PCOSW. President Carothers stated:

The commission is being created to help promote an environment free of discrimination in which the unique contributions of each woman will flourish. The university recognizes that creating a climate of inclusion for women is essential to sustaining a strong and productive institution of higher learning. Furthermore, we believe that a healthy environment for both minority and majority groups helps build a sense of community for all.

An article in *The Good 5c Cigar* the following month reported:

Among the proposed objectives of the commission are to establish a specific agenda around the issues that concern women at URI, recommend additional strategies to enhance or change existing policies through the review of policies and programs already in place and to provide and circulate information concerning programming, reports and educational opportunities and materials to the URI community and the public.

Following work by a steering committee to refine the mission statement and further develop its objectives and goals, the new PCOSW held its first meeting in the spring of 2002.

The University Manual now defines the PCOSW as follows:

The President's Commission on the Status of Women shall promote an environment free of gender-based discrimination by establishing an agenda around issues that concern women at the university and recommending to the President strategies to enhance or change existing policies and programs at URI. To accomplish its mission, the Commission shall work with members of the university community and in collaboration with organizations and structures within the University of Rhode Island.

The membership shall be appointed by the President and shall comprise approximately twenty-five individuals who represent a variety of faculty, staff, administration and student perspectives on the status of women at URI.

## **Historical Evolution of PCOSW and Mission (type) Statements:**

**December 1999:** Pres. Carothers and Provost Swan announced creation of PCOSW, stating:

*“The commission is being created to help promote an environment free of discrimination in which the unique contributions of each woman will flourish. The university recognizes that creating a climate of inclusion for women is essential to sustaining a strong and productive institution of higher learning. Furthermore, we believe that a healthy environment for both minority and majority groups helps build a sense of community for all.”*

URI indicated it would find a new home for the Women’s Center; appoint a full-time director to the Women’s Center and provide funds for programming; put in place a process for keeping the university community informed of outcomes of cases involving sexual discrimination, harassment or assault; address issues of tenure, retention, and promotion of women to bring their numbers more in line with those of their male counterparts; address the issue of needed enhancement of family leave and childcare, and being the process for a permanent Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity and Diversity Officer with a commitment to women’s issues.

University Manual: *“The [PCOSW] shall promote an environment free of gender-based discrimination by establishing an agenda around issues that concern women at the university and recommending to the President strategies to enhance or change existing policies and programs at URI. To accomplish its mission, the Commission shall work with members of the university community and in collaboration with organizations and structures within [URI].”*

**April 29, 2002:** *“The [PCOSW] examines and responds to the needs of women at [URI]. The PCOSW functions primarily by studying unmet needs, and then recommending ways of meeting those needs to other organizations and individuals that are in a position to respond to them. At times this involves working towards the establishment of new organizations and positions that will address those needs.”*

### **MISSION:**

*“... is to promote an environment free of gender-based discrimination in which the unique contributions of all will flourish by developing alliances and collaborating with the existing organizations and structures within the University communities.”*

**October 19, 2009** Strategic Plan:

*“A University that embodies gender equity and inclusion”*

**July, 2011** PCOSW Leadership retreat:

*“To institutionalize a University that embodies gender equity and inclusion for all women, reflecting awareness of and sensitivity to issues of race, ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, age, ethnicity/culture, veterans, and students.”*

## **Historical Evolution of PCOSW Goals:**

### ***April 29, 2002:***

- Ensure that personal safety for women is preeminent with an emphasis on prevention through educational programs for the University Community.
- Intensify efforts to recruit and retain women of color in all sectors of the institution.
- Ensure that sexual harassment is addressed through increased emphasis on prevention, reporting, and effective disciplinary measures. [In collaboration with the Harassment Subcommittee of the URI Affirmative Action Equal Opportunity Committee.]
- Address issues of tenure, retention, and promotion of women to bring their numbers more in line with those of their male counterparts.
- Provide an adequate Women's Center as the single best source of information, education, and advocacy in matters of concern to women.
- Address the issue of needed enhancement of family leave and childcare.
- Address other issues as shall be deemed timely and necessary.

### ***November 1, 2006 PCOSW Strategic Plan:***

- To create a climate which embodies and promotes greater gender equity and inclusion, which promotes wellness and in which hostility is decreased.
- To foster an environment that is accommodating to families and worker's lives off the job, and supports all lifestyles and all life stages.
- To lead a unified coalition of campus diversity and equity initiatives to advance issues of equity.
- To improve PCOSW's use of effective strategies for advancing its work.

### ***October 2009 and 2010 PCOSW Strategic Plans (Goal 5 added)***

- Foster a climate which embodies and promotes gender equity and inclusion, in which hostility is decreased.
- Create a climate that promotes wellness and safety
- To promote gender equity in recruitment, hiring, and retention, and to address social classism so as to guarantee practices and policies that build and sustain gender equity.
- Improve PCOSW's use of effective strategies for advancing its work.
- Improve retention of undergraduate women students on campus.

## **History of the President's Commission on the Status of Women at University of Rhode Island**

In December of 1999 URI President Robert L. Carothers and Provost M. Beverly Swan announced the establishment of the President's Commission on the Status of Women at the University of Rhode Island, the formation of a steering committee, and a series of steps intended to advance the progress of women at URI. The University would, among other initiatives, find a new home for the Women's Center, located now at 22 Upper College Rd.; appoint a full-time director to the Women's Center, Carolyn Sovet, and provide funds for programming; put in place a process for keeping the university community informed of outcomes of cases involving sexual discrimination, harassment or assault; address issues of tenure, retention, and promotion of women to bring their numbers more in line with those of their male counterparts; address the issue of needed enhancement of family leave and childcare; and begin the process for a permanent Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity and Diversity Officer with a commitment to women's issues. A steering committee was then appointed to refine the Commission's mission statement and further develop its objectives and goals.