

Proposal to establish a PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON EQUITY AND INCLUSION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Presented to: David Dooley, President, University of Rhode Island (via VP Thompson)

Prepared by: *Working Group to establish a [President's Commission on Equity and Inclusion for People with Disabilities]*, facilitated by Pamela Rohland 874-5411

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Introduction:

Since the establishment of civil rights laws, such as Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act of 2008 (ADAAA) citizens with disabilities have been guaranteed equal opportunity under the law. Therefore, during the last 30 years, the University of Rhode Island and our general society have become much more accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities; and, the number of citizens, including Veterans, who identify as having a disability has dramatically increased. For example, data from the URI Disability Services for Students has demonstrated more than a 330% increase since 1995 in the number of URI students identifying to the office. This is a nation-wide trend. Despite many gains, however, there is still much to accomplish if we are to develop a university community that provides a completely inclusive, universally designed, and welcoming experience, in the context of social justice, for all individuals with either apparent disabilities or invisible disabilities.

Historically administrators and community members at the University of Rhode Island have engaged in positive actions to address issues of inclusion for people with disabilities. The Changing the Culture Initiative trained over 200 disability resource mentors at three RI state colleges to mentor colleagues on disability and accessibility; also, Tom Dougan, VP of Student Affairs, established and appointed an Advisory Committee on Disability Issues in 2006, which has since been represented on the URI Equity Council and on the Student Affairs Division Diversity Committee. However, in the areas of universal design for learning and campus accessibility, problems still remain to be solved. There is yet no central overarching URI organization or center to address the concerns of students, faculty and staff with disabilities at the University of Rhode Island.

With the arrival of the new Chief Diversity Officer and the establishment of several President's Commissions for civil rights groups on campus (i.e. Women, People of Color and LGBTQQ), the timing is now right to also establish a President's Commission for people with disabilities, a fourth civil-rights-protected group. We appreciate and welcome the encouragement from the Associate Vice President for Community Equity and Diversity to submit this proposal to establish a formal **President's Commission on Equity and Inclusion for People with Disabilities**.

The following paragraphs propose a tentative Name, Mission Statement, Goals, and Priorities, to be confirmed in the first year (including membership, initial tasks and funding needs).

Proposed Name:

President's Commission on Equity and Inclusion for People with Disabilities, **-or-**
President's Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, or alternative.

Proposed Mission Statement: The [President's Commission on Equity and Inclusion for People with Disabilities] works collaboratively with all areas of the University of Rhode Island to ensure an inclusive, universally designed, and welcoming campus in terms of safety, wellbeing and education for students, faculty and staff who have disabilities.

Proposed Goals:

1. In the context of social justice, encourage a climate to celebrate differences and abilities among all people at URI, while affirming the many outstanding contributions of people with disabilities to the campus community.
2. Identify major topics of concern for the community of people with disabilities, including those with "Disabled Veteran" status.
3. Propose policies, programs and training so that URI's ongoing dialogue of social justice and civil rights continues to include issues related to disability.
4. Collaborate with campus departments, colleges, and organizations to recommend accessibility, safety, and universal design of buildings, the curriculum, programs, and services.
5. Advise primary administrators who support and serve students, faculty, and staff with disabilities; including Office of Community Equity and Diversity; Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity, and Diversity/ADA Coordinator; Personnel Services; Disability Services for Students/Office of Student Life; Facilities Services, Public Safety, etc.
6. Monitor the effectiveness of proposed/implemented policies and initiatives.
7. Communicate progress of these efforts to the administration and surrounding community.
8. Submit recommendations to the President and the Chief Diversity Officer that would enhance inclusion and equal opportunity for people with disabilities.

Proposed Initial Priorities to discuss:

1. Confirm/amend the name of the new President's Commission on Equity and Inclusion for People with Disabilities.
2. Confirm/amend the primary mission statement and goals of the commission for inclusion in the University Manual.
3. Propose the tentative membership categories. Suggested membership may include but not be limited to the following: people with and without disabilities, faculty/students/staff, URI unions, multiple campuses, service offices advised by the Commission (HR, Disability Services for Students, AAEOD, Public Safety, etc.), ex-officio members, voting members, etc.
4. Propose and prioritize the initial set of tasks for the future commission to address. A suggested set of tasks may include but not be limited to:
 - a. Recommend a central URI Campus Evacuation Plan for students, faculty & staff with disabilities, in case of emergency and presence of first-responders.
 - b. *Survey the URI community on a regular basis for ideas of inclusivity; acknowledging what has already been accomplished and what remains to be accomplished. (See appendix for initial ideas)

- c. Central proctored space available for faculty reservation to assist with accessible testing or for makeup tests for athletes and medical absences.
 - d. Research online accessibility and universal design in all aspects of URI function, such as, websites, online-learning, educational spaces, etc. Make recommendations to the appropriate entities as required.
 - e. Ensure reasonable education and awareness to the URI Community concerning
 - i. Disability related issues,
 - ii. Accessibility for all types of disability including invisible disabilities;
 - iii. Outreach to URI students with Disabled Veteran status.
 - iv. Universal design of buildings, websites and learning.
 - f. Advocate to appropriate entities for physical accessibility on campus.
 - g. Advocate for educational and worksite accessibility.
 - h. Advocate universal design and inclusive pedagogy, including online learning.
 - i. Advocate for accessible bathrooms that lock safely – parallel to and in collaboration with concerns of gender-neutral or family friendly bathrooms.
 - j. Encourage student groups to develop and celebrate disability affinity or cultural identity.
5. Propose funding needs (suggested up to \$2900 annual budget) to support the work of the commission:
- a. Interpreter for each meeting \$800 (@ \$100.00 per meeting * 8 meetings)
 - b. Sustenance for planning retreat \$600 (@ \$20.00 per person * 30 people)
 - c. Printing needs @ \$500.00
 - d. Celebratory event @ \$1000.00 (or encourage use of campus diversity funds)

Conclusion:

In summary, a [President's Commission on Equity and Inclusion for People with Disabilities] is a much needed mechanism and it would add a Disability voice in the ongoing dialogues of Social Justice and Equity at URI. Of particular importance are the concerns of students, student veterans, faculty and staff at URI who have disabilities – both apparent disabilities AND invisible disabilities. Since disability is an important part of the discussion in regard to community, equity, and diversity, a commission is needed to research important concerns and to advise the administration about these concerns. We now welcome your thoughts on the establishment of the new commission, request your approval to proceed, and ask your guidance on next steps in bringing such a group to fruition.

Respectfully submitted by the working group to establish a President's Commission on Equity and Inclusion for People with Disabilities:

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|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| • Faye Boudreaux-Bartels | • Roxanne Gomes | • Karol Leuzarder |
| • Stephen Baker | • Mark Hardge | • Jerry Sidio |
| • Elizabeth Cooper | • Kerri Hicks | • Pamela Rohland |
| • Leo Carroll | • Laura Kenerson | • Susan Roush |
| • Paul DePace | • Mary Jane Klinkhammer | • Earl Smith |
| • Nancy Ann Doyle Moss | • Maggie Korn | • Mollie Smith |
| • Diane Goldsmith | • Rosemary Lavigne | • Delores Walters |

Appendix: Sample of Ideas for a Survey

Partial List Proposed by Mary Jane Klinkhammer:

- Do we invite disabled art and performance into our community to celebrate disability?
- Do we have an inclusive mental health practice?
- Do we offer continuing education and training opportunities on disability issues?
- Do we really strive to understand the disabled person's individual interpretation of their own experience? (as opposed to the non disabled interpretation of what the disabled personal experiences)
- Do we consider the impact of the 'outsider experience'---Are we as aware as we should be of the effects can social constructs of non-disabled people placed on the disabled individual (i.e. perceptions of impairments) "How did you get like that?" "Can you be cured?" "Where you always in a wheelchair?"
- (Cont'd)

Also proposed by Diane Goldsmith: Surveys should also reach out to groups of students, and educators (Faculty and Staff) regarding classroom/online classroom experiences. Survey Monkey's link on accessibility: Survey Monkey's link on accessibility: http://help.surveymonkey.com/articles/en_US/kb/Section-508-Compliance.