

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Students, and Board of Governors
of the
University of Rhode Island
Kingston, Rhode Island
by
An Evaluation Team representing the
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
of the
New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Prepared after study of the institution's
self-evaluation report and a visit to
the campus, October 21-24, 2007

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This report represents the views of the Evaluation Team as interpreted by the Chair. Its content is based on the committee's evaluation of the institution with respect to the Commission's criteria for accreditation. It is a confidential document in which all comments are made in good faith. The report is prepared both as an educational service to the institution and to assist the Commission in making a decision about the institution's status.

COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION
New England Association of Schools and College
Preface Page

Date form completed: October 22, 2007

Name of Institution: University of Rhode Island

1. History: Year chartered or authorized 1892 Year first degrees awarded 1894

2. Type of control: ☒ State ☐ City ☐ Other; specify: _____
☐ Private, not-for-profit ☐ Religious Group; specify: _____
☐ Proprietary ☐ Other; specify: _____

3. Degree level:
☐ Associate ☒ Baccalaureate ☒ Masters ☒ Professional ☒ Doctorate

4. Enrollment in Degree Programs (Use figures from fall semester of most recent year):

	Full-time	Part-time	FTE	Retention ^a	Graduation ^b	# Degrees ^c
Baccalaureate	10,210	1,665	10,763	80.6%	56.9%	2,015
Graduate	949	942	1,497	n/a	n/a	560
First Professional*	556	0	569	92%	94%	87

(a) full-time 1st to 2nd year (b) 3 or 6 year graduation rate (c) no. of degrees awarded most recent year

5. Number of current faculty: Full time 671 Part-time 25 FTE: 687

6. Current fund data for most recently completed fiscal year: (Specify year: 2006)
(Double click in any cell to enter spreadsheet. Enter dollars in millions; e.g., \$1,456,200 = \$1.456)

Revenues		Expenditures	
Tuition	\$121.000	Instruction	\$122.000
Gov't Appropriations	\$105.000	Research	\$57.000
Gifts/Grants/Endowment	\$74.000	General	\$109.000
Auxiliary Enterprises	\$56.000	Auxiliary Enterprises	\$53.000
Other	\$18.000	Other	\$21.000
Total	\$374.000	Total	\$362.000

7. Number of off-campus locations:
In-state 1 Other U.S. 2 International 0 Total 3

8. Number of degrees and certificates offered electronically:
Programs offered entirely on-line 1 Programs offered 50-99% on-line 0

9. Is instruction offered through a contractual relationship?
☒ No ☐ Yes; specify program(s): _____

10. Accreditation history:
Candidacy: none Initial accreditation: Dec., 1930 Last comprehensive evaluation: Fall, 1997
Last Commission action: accepted the fifth-year interim report Date: March 7, 2003

11. Other characteristics:

*Doctor of Pharmacy students

*Source: 2006 Audited Financial Statement

INTRODUCTION

The NEASC team that visited the University of Rhode Island, October 21-24, 2007 was impressed with the self-study document, the accompanying CD, and the variety of materials in the workroom. The self-study document accurately described the current issues facing the campus and outlined strategies for meeting them.

We had full access to many faculty, staff and students during our visit and found all to be most forthcoming. We met groups of students, administrators, staff and faculty, including department chairs. The team met with the Self-Study Committee and various team members also met with the other key committees on campus such as the Joint Strategic Planning Committee and the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee. We also met representatives and officers of the Faculty Senate and the President of the Student Senate. In addition, we met the President and Provost, academic Deans, the Chair of the Board of Governors, the Commissioner of Higher Education, and three other members of that group as well as other key administrative staff. We met with over fifty students, some forty department chairs, over thirty staff, as well as numerous faculty in addition to the chairs. (see appendix)

We toured the Kingston and the Narragansett Bay campuses and one team member visited the Providence campus.

The team found an attractive and vibrant institution that fulfills an important mission for the state of Rhode Island as the land and sea grant institution. The challenge that was mentioned in the team report in 1997 of financial constraints continues and the campus is making several efforts to diversify its financial base. It also is working with the state to obtain more flexibility that could lead to greater efficiencies in managing its resources. Enrollments are strong, several new and renovated facilities have been opened, and new academic programs that address state needs are in place. Additional plans for a research park are being developed. Other challenges outlined in previous communications from NEASC were that of developing a revised general education program and putting in place learning outcome/assessment measures. The team examined these areas during our visit and both of these issues have been addressed.

STANDARD ONE: MISSION AND PURPOSES

The institution's mission and purposes are appropriate in higher education, consistent with its charter...and implemented in a manner that complies with the Standards of the Commission.

As indicated in the 2007 self-study, the mission statement of the University of Rhode Island (URI) has undergone several revisions over the years, but in principle the various mission statements have reflected the original founding purposes of the University embodied in Section 16-32-3 of the General Laws of Rhode Island.

MISSION STATEMENT (CURRENT)

The University of Rhode Island is the State's public learner-centered research university. We are a community joined in a common quest for knowledge. The University is committed to enriching the lives of its students through its land, sea, and urban grant traditions. URI is the only public institution in Rhode Island offering undergraduate, graduate, and professional students the distinctive educational opportunities of a major research university. Our undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, research, and outreach serve Rhode Island and beyond. Students, faculty, staff, and alumni are united in one common purpose: to learn and lead together. Embracing Rhode Island's heritage of independent thought, we value:

Creativity and Scholarship
Diversity, Fairness, and Respect
Engaged Learning and Civic Involvement
Intellectual and Ethical Leadership

The 1997 self-study indicated that a process of updating the 1987 mission statement was initiated as part of a state system-wide effort to draft mission statements that would be compatible with a new mission statement adopted by the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education (RIBGHE) in August 1992. In September 1996, the RIBGHE approved a new mission statement for the university. Most recently, in January 2005, the RIBGHE passed a motion requiring the Rhode Island institutions of higher learning to review and revise their mission statements. During the campus visit, discussion with members of RIBGHE revealed that the request for revising the URI mission statement was made not due to any issues that the Board had with the previous statement, but more so as part of a semi-periodic review of such statements among the higher education institutions of the state.

In response to the RIBGHE mandate, URI had an ad hoc committee, chaired by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, work to draft a revised mission statement. This committee consisted of faculty members representing a diverse spectrum of educational specialties, a representative from student affairs, and representatives from student leadership and administrative staff. The final version of the new mission statement was endorsed by the University's Faculty Senate on October 20, 2005, and it was approved by the President on November 1, 2005. The RIBGHE formally approved the new mission statement on January 24, 2006.

The role of the university, defined by its charter as a research-based institution dedicated to educational, research, and outreach efforts, is clearly stated in the new mission statement. Similarly, the distinctive character of the university as a land and sea grant as well as an urban university and commitment to these traditions and visions is indicated in the mission. The mission statement indicates the important interconnection of students, faculty, staff, and alumni and defines the values that the university embraces. The mission statement indicates that the university's undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, research, and outreach serve Rhode Island and beyond.

It was not, however, apparent that the mission statement provides the basis upon which the university identifies its priorities, plans its future, and evaluates its endeavors. The self-study indicated that the Strategic Plan has four initiatives: 1) enhancing student recruitment, retention, involvement, and graduation rates, 2) improving the fiscal health of the university, 3) creating a more inclusive environment, and 4) improving the efficiency and effectiveness of research and outreach support. There does not appear to be a well defined relationship between the mission statement and the strategic plan that focuses on the values mentioned in the mission statement.

In discussions with the Chair and three other members of the RIBGHE, the notion of “access” as a key component of the mission of the university was emphasized. “Access” was also underscored at a meeting of the Council of Deans as a key mission of the university – providing higher education opportunities for students in the state of Rhode Island. Similarly, in the President’s overview contained in the self-study there is a mention of being committed to access and that the university sees this as a fundamental part of its mission. It does not appear that “access” is a key aspect of the newly revised and approved mission statement despite the emphasis being placed on it by the RIBGHE and the university’s administrators.

The self-study indicated that the mission is fully consistent with the vision statement of the university and the building of a new culture for learning; moreover, a new vision statement is now being developed. The self-study indicated that the vision statement, which was created in 1992 and reviewed by the Joint Strategic Planning Committee in 2003, will be formally reviewed in light of the new mission statement.

The mission statement is concise and is found on the university web site as well as in hardcopy and online publications of the University *Catalog* and, therefore, does appear in appropriate institutional publications. The mission statement is realistic and defines its educational dimensions regarding the communities it serves. It indicates how the university is committed to enriching the lives of its students.

A survey of faculty and administrative staff conducted by the university in fall 2006 revealed that 67% agreed or strongly agreed that they were previously familiar with the content of the new mission statement and a strong majority (85%) believed that the mission statement was appropriate. The survey also indicated that while 79% agreed or strongly agreed that the mission statement reflected their roles at the university, only 49% believed that the statement has a clear impact on how they conduct their work at the university.

A similar survey of a sample of students conducted by the university showed that 45% of the students knew of the existence of the mission statement; however, only 9% were familiar with its content. After reviewing the mission statement, 67% of students believed that their roles at the university were reflected within it, and 89% agreed or strongly agreed that the mission statement was appropriate.

As indicated in the *Catalog*, a linkage of the mission statement to “URI Cornerstones” developed by the Quality of Student Life Committee and endorsed by the URI Student Senate is presented.

The university had a subcommittee evaluate the consistency of the college and department mission statements with the university's statement. The most highly correlated component was outreach, with civic engagement/service and scholarship also strongly reflected. Teaching, independent thought, and diversity were among the least reflected concepts in the mission statements of the nine colleges. In contrast, the academic department mission statements most strongly reflected teaching followed by scholarship, civic engagement/service, and outreach. Similar to mission statements of the colleges, the values of diversity and independent thought were among the least reflected concepts in academic department mission statements.

Based on what was discussed in the 1997 and 2007 self-study documents, it appears that the mission statement has undergone revision when the RIBGHE has requested such a re-evaluation. The 1997 self-study indicated that the university as a whole should consider implementation of a more frequent mission statement review process. It is unclear whether such a periodic re-evaluation of the content and pertinence of the mission and purposes of the institution is done on a more frequent basis.

In approving the new mission statement, the RIBGHE charged the university with using the mission statement as a basis for reviewing and revising, as necessary, its vision statement and for developing a statement of prioritized goals to be used in reviewing and revising, as necessary, existing planning documents and attendant action plans. The RIBGHE also indicated that the mission statement and related planning documents will be used as a guide in the allocation and re-allocation of resources. In addition, the RIBGHE charged the university to use the mission statement as a basis for the university's various units (e.g., schools and departments) to develop their own mission statements. The RIBGHE also charged the university with institutionalizing a clear procedure for regularly reviewing and revising the mission and vision and prioritized goals as well as the planning documents upon which they are based. Since the new mission statement was only recently approved, the university will need to follow through on this charge from the RIBGHE.

The revised mission statement is more concise than the previous one and embodies "values" which the university holds in high regard. The team notes that the RIBGHE has charged the university to effectively use the mission statement as a basis for planning. The team was concerned, however, that the statement lacks a key component dealing with "access;" yet access was mentioned time and again by members of the Board and by individuals in the university community as an essential part of the mission of the university. Moreover, the statement does not yet appear to be a foundation for what the university does or how it allocates resources.

STANDARD TWO: PLANNING AND EVALUATION

The institution undertakes planning and evaluation appropriate to its needs to accomplish and improve the achievement of its mission and purposes. It identifies its planning and evaluation priorities and pursues them effectively.

The university has undertaken planning and evaluation activities, particularly in the last three years. Thus far it has established structures and methods for planning and evaluation, but it has not effectively developed and implemented an integrated approach to planning, evaluation and budgetary allocations linked to clear academic priorities, despite an appreciation in the self-study that... "[t]he integration of budget and planning in the allocation of resources to strategic priorities is a critical component of the planning process."

Planning:

URI identified six different committees as key structures for carrying out the institution's broad-based planning and evaluation: the Joint Strategic Planning Committee; the Campus Master Plan Review Team; the Space Enhancement, Design, and Allocation Committee; Space Implementation Team; (Ad Hoc) Asset Protection Executive Committee; and Building Committees. Each of these committees has a targeted purview with specific roles and responsibilities. Most include administrators, faculty, and staff as members.

The committee most central to the university's planning and evaluation effort is the Joint Strategic Planning Committee. The Joint Strategic Planning Committee (JSPC) is comprised of the President, who serves as Chair, the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Vice Presidents for Administration, Research and Economic Development, Student Affairs, and University Advancement, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, two administrative staff members appointed by the President, the President of the Student Senate and the President of the Graduate Student Association. In addition, a member of the Dean's Council was recently added to the JSPC. The JSPC meets approximately every three weeks and minutes of its meetings are posted to the Faculty Senate web site.

In summer 2005, the JSPC identified four university-wide strategic initiatives for a new strategic plan: Steps Toward Transformation, 2006-2009: 1) enhance student recruitment, retention, involvement and graduation rates, 2) improve the fiscal health of the university, 3) create a more inclusive environment, and 4) improve the efficiency and effectiveness of research and outreach support. The university's divisions developed goals, action plans, and metrics to accomplish these priorities. However, some have commented that the plan is more tactical than strategic and that academic priorities are not clearly outlined in the plan itself.

The President's 2007 management letter summarized the progress thus far toward the university's four strategic goals. He discusses progress in facilities and in diversifying the financial base as well as research initiatives and he outlines several administrative changes. The full text is found in the appendix to this report.

The JSPC is designated as the key committee for evaluating progress in achieving strategic goals. The charge is to advise the President and the Faculty Senate on broad policies and principles affecting the general direction of the University of Rhode Island. The Committee also assists in the implementation and progress of the President's strategic plan that is intended to integrate aspects of finance, human resources, academic programming, student affairs, fund raising, and capital projects.

The URI Steering Committee conducted a focus group to assess the process of strategic planning. Results of the group suggested uneven progress in achieving the university's aspiration outlined in the self-study: "to promote more broad-based participation and collaboration among University constituents." (p.6). When asked about strategic planning in their respective departments, several people said that there was no formal process and others noted that there was a low level of activity. Many commented that planning was difficult due to continuing resource constraints. For example, one noted that the effort "seems pointless when you know you have no resources or support," Another person was more optimistic and said that the level of feedback was "improving."

A similar range of responses was reflected in the on-line survey responses regarding the strategic planning process. Some 67% of respondents agree or agree strongly that the strategic plan reflects the university's vision and mission. Only 14% disagreed or disagreed strongly with this statement. Respondents were somewhat less positive about their perceptions of effective involvement of university constituencies in the strategic planning at both the university-wide level where 31% disagreed or disagreed strongly and at the college/division level where 28% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In addition, respondents generally disagreed or strongly disagreed (43%) that there is effective involvement of university constituencies at the department level. There is agreement or strong agreement (78%) with university efforts to report the progress of the university's strategic plan through the President's yearly management letter.

Despite the development of a planning structure, the team was concerned with the lack of linkage between the planning process and the university's academic priorities and there are not clear and direct connections among the planning process, the evaluation process, and budgetary allocations.

Evaluation:

Two key assessment processes were focused on in the self-study and site visit: the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC) and the AIIM (Academic Investment and Improvement Model). The URI LOOC was established in 2007 as a joint Faculty Senate/administration steering committee. This was the most recent development in a series of committee and staffing developments: the Student Learning Improvement Assessment Advisory Committee (2004-2007); Division of Student Affairs Assessment Committee (2005-present); College Assessment Committees (2005-present); the Faculty Senate UCGE Subcommittee for General Education Assessment (SAGE) (2005-present); and Office of Student Learning Outcomes & Accreditation (SLOAA) established 2006. And URI has appointed a national leader in the assessment area to oversee these activities.

In addition, URI has been able to garner external support for these learning outcomes assessment activities over the last four years: USDA CSREES Higher Education Challenge Grant (2003); Davis Educational Foundation funding (2004-2007); NSF funding (2005); Wabash Center for Inquiry of Liberal Education (2007); U.S. Dept. of Education, FIPSE (2007).

At the same time, several staff and structures were put in place such as a part-time special assistant to the Provost for assessment, 2004-2006, and a full-time director, graduate assistants, and clerical support hired, 2006. In addition, internal funding was made available for committee work and assessment tool development including: supporting attendance at regional and national meetings on assessment; on-campus workshops, including rubrics development workshops (2006-2007); summer support for the general education assessment committee (2004-2007); and institutional mini-grant awards (2004-2007) totaling \$150,000 (average of \$3000 grant).

The LOOC process has focused on developing rubrics of expectations regarding student outcomes in each course. These rubrics include student learning outcomes, performance criteria, evidence of intentional commitment to address and assess outcomes across the program, and program-level assessment methods and timing. Thus far, the process has been completed and approved by the Board in the following areas: Engineering; Nursing; Teacher Education; Kinesiology; Communicative Disorders; Human Development and Family Studies; Textiles, Merchandising and Fashion Design. The timeline calls for every undergraduate program to complete its first round of reporting to the Board of Governors by the end of 2008. In addition to these programmatic achievements, the LOOC process has been integrated into individual course approaches, as well as interdisciplinary efforts such as an IGERT grant at the graduate level.

Three aspects of the LOOC process are noteworthy: their formative nature; their focus primarily on courses not programs; and the nascent effort to apply the LOOC approach to general education. When the NEASC team met with LOOC members (including faculty members and administrators from across the university), they stated that the LOOC data and information should be viewed as formative evaluations, designed to improve the development and delivery of courses at URI. They stressed that using the LOOC data in a summative process of either course or program evaluation would undermine the LOOC's credibility with the campus community and erode the still-emerging support for the learning outcomes approach. When asked what provided a summative evaluation for programs (or if there was a regular system of program review), LOOC members indicated that the Academic Investment and Improvement Model (AIIM) (described below) played a role here. The general education requirements were revised in 2004, prior to the development of the LOOC outcomes assessment approach. However, the work on the General Education Outcomes Assessment began in the spring of 2005. Peggy Maki served as a consultant during the summer and in fall 2007, the university collected data on a sample of courses (different disciplines, different class sizes).

The university acknowledges in its self-study that its academic program evaluation process is in transition: "Since the last accreditation cycle, academic program evaluation has gone through significant changes. The system for academic program evaluation previously consisted of a quantitative financial analysis called the Program Contribution Analysis (PCA) and a more qualitative process called the Program Quality Review (PQR). After some review of the effectiveness and utility of these individual instruments from 2003-2005, these processes were replaced by a single instrument that included both elements of quantitative, financial cost-benefit and measures of quality. Known as the Academic Investment and Improvement Model (AIIM), this instrument was constructed with campus-wide input and review, including a four-department pilot testing. It is comprised of two 35-question surveys. The first survey was designed to measure the value of the departments or programs in relation to the university's mission. The

100 points available in the Value Survey are allocated to five areas: learning impact; scholarship impact; financial contribution; university image, value and growth; and community outreach. The second survey was designed to measure the success or likelihood of a department or program to carry out its mission. The 100 points available in the Success Survey are allocated to four metrics: commitment and capacity; consistent focus, standards and metrics; adaptability to change and conflict resolution; scope and complexity of program.” (self-study, pp. 7-8)

In November and December 2005, all faculty members were given the opportunity to complete the surveys anonymously. Department Chairs and Deans were provided access to composite data for their units, along with an analysis of strengths, gaps, opportunities, and risks. In spring 2006, the Faculty Senate established a standing committee, the Academic Program Review Committee. Its work is in progress and it has met only twice thus far.

The university’s assessment of the impact of the AIIM process suggests that it has had a desired impact in focusing attention on units’ profiles. Team members asked the department chairs the following question: how are the departments in your college utilizing the results from the AIIM (Academic Investment and Improvement Model)? We learned that the university has implemented strategies for improving the advising system(s), for monitoring teaching effectiveness, especially among the non-permanent faculty, and established a curriculum review for both majors and general education offerings. Also mentioned was that the campus has been engaged in department-wide discussions on the design of the AIIM and its potential utility. However, we were concerned that many faculty were not ultimately confident of the utility of the results. Faculty completion of the AIIM generated discussion regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the program and provided information on how individual departments compared to the rest of the university.

One department chair noted that his area was in the quadrant that indicated a strong program that needed more resources. Subsequently, the department was given more faculty positions so it benefited from AIIM. However, others were not as positive about the instrument: one individual noted that (College name withheld) did not utilize the results of AIIM in its decision-making and did not find it valuable. Some others felt it was a very poorly designed study with limited utility to departments. The team did not find substantial evidence that URI currently uses the results of these studies to improve the academic or research climate at URI. The faculty in strong departments (department name withheld) indicated that they already knew that they were among the most productive departments at URI and that the results were not helpful in evaluating their program. Another limitation noted was that the AIIM survey looks at the number of students being admitted into the department and some individuals indicated to the team that they thought that this fact rewards those entities that continue to admit more and more students. Another mentioned that the AIIM survey focuses primarily on how to develop individual faculty which could be beneficial. Yet several faculty members expressed concerns about the burden of the assessment process with little apparent linkage to resource allocation.

The AIIM allows for internal comparisons, assessing the relative contribution of each unit to the university’s mission. It does not, however, allow for external benchmarks against the same discipline in other universities. Such programmatic and external benchmarks could be helpful.

In the area of student engagement, URI is to be commended for its participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This external benchmarking has allowed URI to assess its students' engagement relative to peer institutions. As noted above, comparable benchmarking in program effectiveness could be helpful.

The team was also concerned about some staffing limitations for the planning and evaluation area. The Office of Planning Services and the Office of Institutional Research are two key support units for the university's efforts in this area. Each office is currently below desired staff levels. In Planning Services, one of two staff members is also responsible for special projects in the President's office that are taking an increasing amount of time and energy. In Institutional Research, one position is unfilled at the moment. In both areas, the staffing challenges may contribute negatively to the rate of progress in the development and implementation of the university's vision for planning and evaluation.

The university is to be commended for undertaking the AIIM development and implementation. However, three important challenges remain: establishing the faculty's confidence in and engagement in the process; establishing a regular process of academic program review built upon the AIIM or some other assessment process; and linking the outcomes of evaluation to budgetary allocations in a more effective manner. The AIIM is the centerpiece of program assessment for the institution, and is to be implemented every three years with the next survey scheduled for the spring of 2008. The earlier seven-year cycle has not been replaced with a predictable cycle of review at the undergraduate or graduate level. This is a missed opportunity for regular, summative evaluation.

STANDARD THREE: ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE

The institution has a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission and purposes and supports institutional effectiveness and integrity.

URI has a clear table of organization and a system of governance intended to facilitate accomplishment of its mission and purposes and support institutional effectiveness and integrity. The authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the governing board, administration, faculty, and staff are described in the institution's organizational design, and each works conscientiously to fulfill respective roles as set forth in the institution's official documents. Through its organizational design, accurately represented by the table of organization, the institution creates and sustains an environment that encourages teaching, learning, service, scholarship, and research and creative activity, and both faculty members and administrative staff believe fervently in their work.

The administration certainly affirms its commitment to shared governance, and the institution's system of governance involves opportunities for participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them. However, the governance structure does not satisfactorily assure understanding and agreement regarding appropriate functioning of each

organizational component. Some organizational components are not necessarily provided with appropriate information to undertake their respective roles, and opaqueness in decision-making impedes substantive communication, thereby limiting effectiveness of governance. In addition, decision-making processes and policies are not always sufficiently clear and transparent to fully support institutional effectiveness.

The Board of Governors for Higher Education is the legally constituted body ultimately responsible for the institution's quality and integrity. The Board demonstrates sufficient independence to ensure it can act in the institution's best interest. The majority of members represent the public interest, all members serve pro bono, and none has a financial interest in any of the institutions. Members understand, accept, and fulfill their responsibilities as fiduciaries to act honestly and in good faith in the best interest of the institution toward the achievement of its purposes in a manner free from conflicts of interest. Board members have a clear understanding of the institution's distinctive mission and purposes, and they exercise authority to ensure realization of institutional mission and purposes, largely through appropriate committees and meetings.

The Board sets and reviews institutional policies, monitors the institution's fiscal solvency, and approves major new initiatives, assuring that they are compatible with institutional mission and capacity. These policies are developed largely in consultation with appropriate constituencies. A concern was cited that since the Board hears primarily from key administrative staff, its knowledge of broader campus issues may be somewhat limited and also may hinder a full appreciation of the institution's qualities and capacity. The Board appoints and periodically reviews the performance of the chief executive officer whose full time or major responsibility is to the institution. The Board delegates to the chief executive officer and, as appropriate, to other constituencies the requisite authority and autonomy to manage the institution compatible with the Board's intentions and the institutional mission.

The chief executive officer through an appropriate administrative structure manages the institution so as to fulfill its purposes and objectives and has established a means to assess effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer manages and allocates resources in keeping with institutional purpose and objectives as mandated by the Board. In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and the administration consult with faculty, students, other administrators and staff. The institution's academic leadership is directly responsible to the chief executive officer, and in concert with the faculty is responsible for the quality of the academic program. However, the institution appears to underutilize academic leadership with respect to planning and resource allocation decision-making. By not fully using the Dean's Council as a leadership council, the effectiveness of governance is somewhat compromised.

The faculty strongly believes in the quality of the institution, and the institution's organization and governance structure ensure that it is the faculty that determine the integrity and quality of academic programming. Programs in all formats and locations are integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution.

Shared governance is legislatively mandated, and the administration has affirmed its commitment to shared governance. Faculty members exercise an important role in assuring the academic integrity of the institution's educational programs. They have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise. Through the Faculty Senate and the Joint Strategic Planning Committee (JSPC), designed to promote broad-based participation and collaboration among University constituents and to develop broad policies affecting the general direction of the University, faculty members believe they can effect change. However, the relatively impermanent nature of faculty representation on the JSPC, due to annual changes in the membership of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, may limit what of substance may actually be discussed and thereby the effectiveness of shared governance. The governance structure is also fragmented; many committees engage in functionally related endeavors that appear to lack adequate cross-articulation with one another, somewhat undermining effectiveness.

The system of governance makes provisions for consideration of student views and judgments in those matters in which students have a direct and reasonable interest, and students demonstrate keen interest in governance.

The team found a traditional governance structure, but suggests that the effectiveness of the institution's organizational structure and system of governance could be strengthened by more engaged participation of academic leadership. In addition, decision-making processes and policies are not sufficiently clear and transparent to fully support institutional effectiveness, which suggests some attention needs to be given to a review of the structure, particularly of the role of academic leadership.

STANDARD FOUR: ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The institution's academic programs are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes.

The University's academic programs are best described as mature and based on traditional disciplines for a land/sea/urban grant institution. More than 125 degree options are available to undergraduates, and there are 48 masters degree programs, and 36 doctoral programs. The number of graduates in the 2005-2006 academic year included 2,015 undergraduates, 87 Pharmacy Doctorates, 493 masters degrees, and 67 doctorates.

The University of Rhode Island's academic offerings are organized around ten schools and colleges (Arts and Sciences (A&S), Business Administration, Continuing Education (CCE), Engineering (EGR), Environment and Life Sciences (CELS), Human Science and Services (HSS), Nursing, Pharmacy, the Graduate School of Oceanography, and the Graduate School.) The university provides opportunity for academic training in most of the traditional academic fields plus it is growing the number of interdisciplinary degree programs. Most programs are

long standing and well established within the institution with strong representation from the traditional science areas to the liberal arts. The Oceanography Graduate program and professional degree programs in Pharmacy, Business, and Nursing are generally seen as standard bearers for the institution. A number of recent interdisciplinary initiatives are thriving at the institution. These include the International Engineering program that combines traditional engineering training with study abroad, internships, and training in one of three foreign languages.

The groundbreaking for the new Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences took place in the spring of 2007. This center will bridge undergraduate and graduate education in the biotechnology, health, and life sciences with the goal of increasing the number of qualified individuals in Rhode Island's biotech industry.

Conversations with the Board of Governors, administrators, Deans, Department Chairs, and faculty all made it obvious that there is a deep sense of commitment to the institution, to quality instruction and to continually improve the academic profile of URI. We found at all levels of administration—but particularly among the faculty—a strong commitment to the mission and to the agenda of providing access to higher education to the population of Rhode Island. In the most recent comprehensive evaluation for re-accreditation held in 1997, there were two issues brought forward to the institution which relate to academic programs. The first issue was that URI needed to provide evidence of success in assessing educational outcomes and, second, that URI must show success in developing a coherent general education program at the university. These two points were subsequently reiterated by NEASC in the 2003 response to a fifth year interim report submitted in 2002. From the self-study and the site visit it is clear that there are a number of efforts underway to address the concerns regarding the general education program and the assessment of educational outcomes that were raised in previous communications with the institution.

The Academic Program

Academic programs at the University of Rhode Island are consistent and contribute to advance their mission and purposes. Discussion with faculty members and review of sample syllabi, programming, and college level program requirements suggest that there are consistent standards for the development of academic programs and a large range of academic disciplines. There is a system of shared governance in place to produce academic oversight that includes academic administrators and the faculty as represented by the Faculty Senate. The Faculty Senate plays a central role in the development and approval of policy that relates to academic programs and in the oversight of program quality. There are a number of university-wide committees that involve a mix of administrators and faculty and which have responsibility for areas such as program and course development and approval, learning outcomes assessment, and program quality reviews. Yet academic oversight, in general, could be more effective as was discussed previously.

Undergraduate Degree Programs

As presented, all undergraduate degree programs are substantial and follow a standard process of presenting introductory material and then incorporating increasing complexity. While focus on one disciplinary area is the norm, there are a number of undergraduate programs that are

interdisciplinary and increasingly attractive to students. Degree programs do differentiate between introductory, intermediate, and advanced courses. A non-random comparison of course outlines for introductory, intermediate, and advanced courses being offered in the fall of 2007 showed clear differences in the level of complexity and work expectations. Course outlines were generally clear in outlining expectations and what the course would contribute to the students' professional and academic growth.

Of the nine degree-granting units at the university, eight offer undergraduate or first professional degree programs leading to Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Science (B.S.), Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.), Bachelor of Music (B.M.), Bachelor of General Studies (B.G.S.), Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (B.L.A.), and Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) with a total of 88 specializations.

A visit was made to the Feinstein College of Continuing Education in Providence that is part of the URI system. This is a relatively new facility that is located in downtown Providence and has been very successful at establishing degree programs that are accessible to those in the Providence area. Some of the degree programs offer all courses in the Providence campus and others do require that students also take courses in Kingston. Many of the programs offered focus on the sciences with some emphasis on biotechnology and laboratory science. The faculty includes some of the full-time faculty members from the Kingston campus and a number of adjuncts and part-timers—many coming from private industry. The Providence campus is experiencing a boom in enrollments and makes a strong contribution to the access mission of the university.

URI has had an Honors program for a number of years. The current Honors program has a 2/3 time Director and two part-time associate directors. The program offers a large number of courses for students who meet GPA requirements of 3.2 or higher. The program is innovative and does important work in introducing interdisciplinary courses and expanding the learning opportunities for the most talented undergraduates at URI. There is a learning community of honors students in one of the campus' dorms. This learning community includes 45 honors students. Close to 600 students take honors courses within a given year.

General Education

The matter of the implementation of the general education requirements is a monumental change for the institution and one that is in its early stages. The revised general education program officially began in the fall of 2004 and it is described as follows:

The revised General Education program requires students to take course work in seven core areas: four “content areas” (natural science, social science, letters, and fine arts and literature) and three “skill areas” (English communications, mathematics and quantitative reasoning, and foreign language and cross-cultural competence). Each course in the program must include sustained attention to and evaluation of at least three of eight “integrated skills” (writing effectively, speaking effectively, using quantitative data, using qualitative data, reading complex texts, using information technology, understanding human differences, and engaging in artistic activity). In addition, each student's general education program must include two courses that include the understanding of human differences. (self-study, p. 21)

The general education requirements are known and have been adopted by all departments as part of their curriculum guidelines. The Faculty Senate had the responsibility of both approving the general education program and also reviewing and approving the courses that would be part of each of the seven core areas. Relatively recently, on January 26, 2006, the Faculty Senate formalized the general education assessment process by establishing a subcommittee of the University College and General Education Committee for the Assessment of General Education. Specifically, the Senate stipulated that the University College and General Education Committee shall be responsible for the assessment of general education student learning outcomes. Efforts at assessment of general education appear to be in the early stages – soliciting representative assignments, soliciting student perceptions about general education, and mining of existing data at the university to get a more complete picture of how general education exists “in practice”.

As indicated in the self-study, the integrated skills aspect of the general education program presents a special challenge for university faculty. The inclusion of specific assignments to give students both practice and feedback on three integrated skills often requires conceptualizing both course design and delivery. To address this challenge, the Provost’s Office, the Faculty Senate, and the Instructional Development Program designed and conducted workshops for instructors in each of the content core areas. These workshops included presentations on integrating each of the skill areas into the content of courses, sample assignments across a variety of disciplines, and suggestions for feedback and evaluation. The university plans to continue to offer these workshops on a regular basis to ensure that faculty who are new to teaching general education offerings are well-equipped to do so.

The general education requirements, as defined, are substantive and uniform across the university. The requirements do include a balance of areas that have been established by NEASC as important. NEASC has also established that general education programs require at least 40 semester hours in a bachelor’s degree program. Three of the programs at URI—Engineering, Pharmacy, and Nursing—fall short of that requirement with 36 credits of general education while the remaining degree programs all are set at 39 credits. The team found, however, that URI fulfills the intent and balance of the general education requirement. There is some concern that there is no plan to monitor, over time, the effectiveness of the courses in the general education curriculum and to re-certify the courses that are part of the curriculum. In addition, there are no consequences built into the system to deal with lack of adherence to general education or to its assessment.

Faculty resources to implement the general education curriculum seemed to be a concern for most of the Deans with whom we met. The team was concerned that more effort needs to go into determining the adequate size of the faculty across the various university programs relative to a changing and expanded student body and the university’s aspirations. The high school population in New England and in Rhode Island is undergoing rapid demographic change and the number of students who will graduate from high school with the essential skills to be successful in college is an area of concern. Further, minority students are a growing proportion of the age-eligible college-bound population and this issue may require a different set of resources from higher education institutions. This is particularly important in the context of a

plan to increase the entering undergraduate class by 10% and a stated commitment to maintaining a mission of access to the institution for the changing population of Rhode Island.

Graduate Education

URI offers a large number of masters and PhD programs. A small number of programs have been eliminated since 1996. Graduate programs benefit from the presence of a large number of faculty members with the appropriate terminal degrees in their discipline and with a steady, and in some areas significant, base of research endeavors. The number of graduates from masters and PhD programs every year is consistent with the total number of students enrolled in these programs. We note that 46.7% of graduate students are currently enrolled fulltime in their programs and thus the majority of graduate students at URI are part-time students.

Graduates from professional graduate degree programs like Nursing, Business, and Pharmacy are in high demand. However, the team was concerned about the adequacy of the process for graduate program review. In general, the institution does not review graduate programs on a regular basis. Several programs are, of course, reviewed by professional accrediting organizations. But for the non-professional programs, the team found a lack of benchmarking of performance to similar disciplines in other institutions. These tasks are generally carried out at most institutions by institutional research or the Graduate School. The lack of periodic reviews or regular monitoring of graduate programs is of concern given recent difficulties experienced by two of URI's doctoral programs during accreditation reviews by professional organizations. Both the School Psychology PhD program and the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies (GSLIS) have been asked to respond to issues raised as part of the review. Issues raised with the programs included the number of licensed faculty available in School Psychology and the use of learning outcomes and integration into planning and evaluation within the GSLIS program.

A recent attempt at reviewing program quality university-wide is the AIIM Survey. This evaluation model was developed by the university in partnership with an external consultant to assess academic program quality and quantitative indices such as the amount of research awards, net revenue generated by the colleges and departments and number of credit hours delivered. The AIIM Success Survey attempted to measure the performance of departments in areas that the university, as a learning community, has given high value. As noted in an earlier section of this report, the survey results have been compiled and made available but the reception to this has been mixed and not readily utilized for any type of strategic planning at the graduate level.

The most current Faculty Senate negotiated approach to academic program quality review focuses on both academic quality and the financial aspects of the program. As proposed, results from these reviews are to inform on resources and to assist decision-making in improving program focus and quality. The body that will carry out this task is called the Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) and it is composed of six faculty members appointed by the Faculty Senate, two representatives of the Provost, and a representative of the President. This body was created by a Senate resolution in the spring of 2006 and it is yet to initiate its work in full.

Another potential area of concern regarding graduate education includes a declining trend in graduate enrollments, and it was not apparent during the site visit that there are plans to counter this trend. The team also noted recent changes in titles and positions charged with the direction of the Graduate School. The current workload of the Vice-Provost in charge of graduate education includes also the undergraduate affairs portfolio and oversight over the undergraduate enrollment management area. This is clearly a large set of responsibilities that require a great deal of articulation in order to be carried out effectively.

Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit

The University of Rhode Island has instituted procedures to maintain integrity in the process of awarding academic credit and degrees. Policies and procedures are clear and widely available. Standards for courses seem consistent and clearly detailed in most of the course outlines we had access to. Policies regarding plagiarism or any type of cheating are included in course outlines and the penalties are clearly stated. The university has made a significant effort at reaching out to faculty and chairs through workshops. University policies on plagiarism and cheating are discussed during student orientation, are discussed as part of ethics programs, and included in the Research Experience for Undergraduates Program.

Assessment of Student Learning

The implementation of the learning outcomes component of general education has proved to be a challenge to the university and it has moved at a slower pace than anticipated. In 2005 an ad-hoc committee of faculty identified a set of five outcomes from the work conducted in courses in the program. Essentially, students would be able to do the following:

- Identify basic concepts and ideas,
- Recognize examples of concepts and ideas,
- Ask appropriate questions,
- Collect reliable information,
- Analyze problems and issues.

The Faculty Senate approved these learning outcomes and they became the basis for subsequent assessment of what students are learning in the general education program. A major milestone in this process was the official establishing of the Office of Student Learning and Outcome Assessment in July 2006. Efforts by this group had begun as early as 2004. This office reports to the Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs and has the primary service responsibility in the area of learning outcomes assessment. It is apparent that the office has provided strong leadership in this area and has strived to integrate learning outcomes assessment throughout the curriculum university-wide. As noted in the section on evaluation, the office has received a number of external grants to support these efforts and has engaged in the process of training faculty so they can develop the skills needed to incorporate assessment in their courses. These activities include workshops, student surveys to collect “representative assignments”, the development of rubrics, and the use of electronic resources such as the “True Outcomes Electronic Portfolio” and a Summit on Student Learning. In addition, the office has administered a successful program of mini-grants to faculty (approximately sixty grants for a total of \$150,000) to encourage the application of Learning Outcomes Assessment to discipline specific areas.

In 2006 the Faculty Senate assigned the responsibility for the assessment of general education to the existing University College and General Education committee (UCGE). On March 1, 2007 a sub-committee, The Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC), to focus specifically on outcomes assessment, was established by action of the Faculty Senate. The membership of the committee is specified in the resolution as including fifteen faculty representatives (four from Arts and Sciences and one from each of the other degree granting colleges). In addition, there are two representatives from Student Affairs, one from Institutional Research, the Director of the new Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation, the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, a representative from University College, a representative from the Instructional Development program, and representatives from the Subcommittee on General Education Assessment, the Curricular Affairs Committee, and the Graduate Council. Further, there are three student members—one graduate, one undergraduate, and one representing the Feinstein Campus. The LOOC committee is charged with developing all university-wide policies regarding learning outcomes assessment, advising the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation, reviewing the process, and facilitating its implementation. Unfortunately, the process of establishing the various committees to carry out this work has not been timely relative to the site visit, and it is thus too early to determine how effective this group will be.

By the time of the site visit there were some significant accomplishments in integrating learning outcomes assessment but these were mostly in academic programs that are both highly structured and accredited by outside entities. Assessment plans have been approved, all the way up to the Board of Governors, for seven programs in engineering, the nursing major, economics, and some of the majors in the Business School. A number of challenges lie ahead as the university attempts to incorporate learning outcomes assessment in the liberal arts where the number of courses is much higher and there is a sizable number of lecturers and part-time faculty. It should also be noted that most of the learning outcomes assessment at URI remains focused on individual courses and little is focused on entire program outcomes. The latter is less problematic to implement in accredited programs where formal documentation of program outcomes is standard. How successful URI will be in establishing whole program outcomes in the liberal arts and traditional sciences remains to be seen.

In addition, there are concerns among the Chairs and Deans in some of the colleges that not enough has been done to engage the faculty in the ownership of the learning outcomes assessment. A number of department chairs expressed strong reservations about their ability to line up resources to support this initiative within their departments. There was little expectation among the chairs we met that resources would be available from the central administration to assist with the assessment activities.

The institutional commitment to deliver a quality education at URI is palpable even though the university faces great challenges—the principal one being its financial resources. While the academic programs at the university remain strong, the team was less sure about the review process. The implementation of the general education program is commendable but many of the monitoring processes put in place have yet to produce results.

There was also concern about the lack of integration of academic planning into the strategic planning process. There is, among the Academic Deans and Chairs, a sense that they do not have sufficient input into academic decision making and that their abilities and experiences are not being properly utilized within the institution in determining how to deploy resources, in particular, faculty lines. Further, a concern was voiced that institutional plans to increase the size of the incoming class could present a threat to academic quality. A sense of frustration was expressed by many of the Deans about their inability to influence the number of students being recruited into majors within their colleges. It was generally stated that, outside of programs capped by clinical placements and accreditation limits, it was difficult to plan ahead for the proper use of existing faculty resources. The appointment of a new Dean of Admissions should attenuate some of these tensions as recruitment of students is done in a more strategic way that takes faculty resources into consideration. The question of transparency in budget allocations and shared management of resources remains an important one that needs to be addressed.

Finally, in the context of tight fiscal budgets student retention remains an important issue. While the freshman to sophomore retention rate is a healthy 81%, the university has been unable to alter the overall graduation rate of 57%. This is significant in the context of stated plans to bring in additional undergraduates every year. Interventions to address the freshman experience through University College are apparently effective; yet once the students move to the degree granting colleges, retention decreases. While there have been attempts to increase retention—creating more campus-based events, new or renovated dorms, targeted financial aid—a more coordinated effort could be explored for specifically addressing retention beyond the freshman year.

As indicated in the self-study—relying on the work of the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation, the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee, and the Academic Program Review Committee—the Joint Strategic Planning Committee will coordinate and promote the university’s efforts on student learning outcomes assessment and academic program review. However, it was not clear to the team how this JSPC may affect change; a review of the minutes of the meetings did not reveal any in-depth discussion on issues of institutional effectiveness. Moreover, a systematic process of program review is not in place. While the AIIM effort has attempted to get around some of the difficulties with reviewing program quality under a prior approach, it does not appear to be a model that includes external review information. The Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) will need to ensure that evaluative instruments such as AIIM be amended to take into account departmental efforts and successes in “closing the assessment loop.”

Beyond AIIM, it also does not appear that evidence of how well students are meeting the learning outcomes expectations of the degree programs is being currently used in program review. In addition, from conversations with faculty and administrators, it does not appear that information from assessment of student program learning outcomes is being used in budget and allocation decisions. Discussions with the JSPC also indicated that the committee has yet to pursue using assessment information in budget decision making. The university should consider taking additional steps to ensure that assessment will be ongoing and that assessment of student learning outcomes will play a role in budget decisions, program review and strategic planning.

STANDARD FIVE: FACULTY

The institution develops a faculty that is suited to the fulfillment of the institution's mission. Faculty qualifications, numbers, and performance are sufficient to accomplish the institution's mission and purposes. Faculty competently offer the institution's academic programs and fulfill those tasks appropriately assigned them.

Faculty Categories and Distribution:

The tenure-track faculty possesses the appropriate qualifications necessary to support the mission of a research university. Of 706 continuing faculty, 98% hold the appropriate terminal degree. With respect to distribution, however, recent increases in the undergraduate population have increased pressures on departments to offer more sections and some departments find themselves hard-pressed to offer an adequate number of courses. In addition, many departments have come to rely increasingly on part-time and adjunct faculty to teach these courses.

URI follows the process of recruiting and appointing tenure-track faculty that is laid out in the collective bargaining agreement. But because of salaries and start-up packages that are low in comparison to peer institutions, and because the cost of living in the Kingston area is relatively high, departments often find it difficult to recruit their top candidates and, in fact, some searches have failed during the past two or three years owing to these constraints.

URI adheres to the contractual agreement between the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education and the Graduate Assistants United/American Association of University Professors. In addition, the university provides orientation and instructional development workshops for all GTAs. Because graduate stipends are low in comparison to peer institutions, and because of a limited number of tuition waivers, departments are often unable to recruit the best graduate students. In addition, out-of-state graduate students funded through research grants are charged out-of-state tuition, putting URI researchers at a distinct disadvantage in relation to other research institutions.

URI complies with the collective bargaining agreement with respect to salaries and benefits, as well as issues related to non-reappointment and termination. As mentioned previously, faculty salaries are low in comparison to peer institutions. URI adheres to the policy on faculty workload as stated in the collective bargaining agreement. This agreement recognizes differences between the functions and goals of colleges and departments and allows for flexibility in determining individual workloads. In general, however, members of the faculty are assigned a three-course teaching load per semester. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis.

The collective bargaining agreement details issues related to annual reviews, promotion and tenure. Annual reviews of assistant professors appear to work well, allowing departments to

guide junior faculty successfully through the promotion and tenure process. In addition, the university has implemented a system for the mentoring of junior faculty. While there is some variation across departments and colleges, junior faculty members appear to find the system helpful. Junior faculty who do not make satisfactory progress in the promotion process can be phased out of the system by the third year of employment. Promotion processes appear to vary by department and college, with some departments requiring external reviewers and others requiring only internal peer reviews. On several occasions, the committee was told that some departments are reluctant to deny promotion and tenure to a colleague because they fear the loss of that faculty line as a result. However, in reality the Provost has approved filling all positions for which there was a negative recommendation for tenure and promotion.

Funds to support the professional development of the faculty are available, but several faculty mentioned to the team that such funds were quite limited. Appropriately, many of these limited resources are targeted toward the support of untenured faculty members, and as a result fewer funding opportunities exist for tenured faculty. A number of faculty members and chairs stated that many members of the faculty pay their own professional travel expenses, while others have ceased to participate in professional development activities.

URI recognizes the rights and responsibilities of the faculty as documented in the collective bargaining agreement.

Teaching:

Teaching is an important component of URI's mission and excellent teaching is highly valued within the university. As a result, "the Instructional Development Program has played a key role in improving teaching at the University." (self-study. p 43) Recent increases in undergraduate enrollment have placed new pressures on departments and colleges and greater attention to enrollment management would help alleviate some of the problems associated with this increase. This is especially important in light of the decision to continue to increase enrollments over the next several years. Faculty and chairs voiced a concern that the ratio of students to faculty is on the rise. The self-study discusses new hires, but many on campus view those as replacement lines, not as new lines to accompany increased enrollment and program changes. Faculty also expressed concern over inadequate classroom facilities—both the number and condition of classrooms. In addition, not all classrooms have the necessary technology required by instructors although plans are in place to upgrade all classroom facilities.

Advising:

Advising responsibilities for new and undeclared students are the responsibility of University College. "Approximately 100 faculty advisors are assigned by their departments to advise in University College," (self-study. p. 44). According to a number of department chairs, this commitment has become a serious drain on faculty already stretched thin by their other obligations, and the quality and efficacy of advising within departments appears to vary significantly. The Learning Assistance Network has been developed to assist faculty with advising responsibilities.

Scholarship, Research and Creative Activity:

According to the self-study, “all faculty at URI are expected to engage in scholarly activities...and evidence of scholarly productivity is also a required component in annual faculty reviews and for successful tenure and promotion.”(self-study, p.45) Institutional support for scholarship, research, and creative activity, however, is not consistent across units, nor is it uniformly a part of the institutional culture. According to some deans, chairs, and faculty, in some instances a teaching load of three courses per semester in conjunction with advising and other service obligations, does not allow adequate time to pursue a research/scholarship agenda. URI recognizes that its failure to maintain systematic records on faculty productivity is a serious problem. In addition, there does not appear to be a central plan to replace faculty computers on a regular and timely basis. Given the importance of technology to the teaching and research mission of the university, this is a concern.

URI should be proud of its committed and talented faculty. The university can also be quite proud of its ADVANCE program for faculty. It is making an important contribution to faculty development cross the university. Moreover, URI can also be justly proud of its beautiful campus that boasts a number of excellent facilities and a strong master plan. In addition, it has focused its limited resources for professional development on junior faculty and it has implemented a university-wide system of mentoring for untenured faculty. However, an absence of long-range academic planning is an obstacle to academic excellence especially in the areas of teaching and research/scholarship. Academic planning at the levels of the university, college and department should inform budget decisions. Similarly a systematic adherence to academic program reviews would also promote academic excellence throughout the institution. Finally, it remains unclear how the JSPC will “guide” continuing improvement of the faculty.

STANDARD SIX: STUDENTS

Consistent with its mission, the institution defines the characteristics of the students it seeks to serve and provides an environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students.

The University of Rhode Island clearly defines the characteristics of the students it seeks to serve. There are special access programs such as Talent Development in place to assure a low barrier to a college education for underserved students. Both undergraduate and graduate admissions policies are clear. The processing and awarding of financial aid works well, but there is a large unfunded gap on the order of \$4,000. This is a burden for many students that assuredly affects retention. In the Talent Development program most of the students are from disadvantaged financial backgrounds and many of these students are of color. The institution is aware that the gap between financial aid and need adversely impacts some in this group, and consequently may adversely impact the ability of the campus to diversify.

Student records are well protected. PeopleSoft is being used functionally. The Enrollment Management function is coherent and apparently responsive to student needs.

URI students are treated with dignity and respect. They appear to be engaged, positive, and invested in their education. There is a clear and improving emphasis on student retention. University College, improvements to advising within PeopleSoft, the leadership minor, special programs such as the International Engineering Program, and student life initiatives generally and specific efforts to reduce substance abuse and enhance mental health make a large difference in the lives of many students.

Currently, Substance Abuse Services, while working effectively, is somewhat fragmented and the institution might review the structure. Some international and transfer students raised concerns about admission processes for them and these areas also should be reviewed.

The institution is clearly student centered and the student affairs staff and faculty is engaged and purposeful in their interactions with students. The interconnectedness amongst student affairs departments is very good, but there are still natural silos which, if softened, could lead to stronger alliances within the Division of Student Affairs and more cross pollination across departments and throughout the university. Student Affairs has made many efforts to integrate itself with the academic side of the institution and there are many positive collaborations occurring. The Dean of University College is invested in these cross collaborations and other academic deans could also consider cross divisional collaborations to effect a seamless learning environment.

Students feel positively mentored by faculty and staff and they feel well supported both academically and socially. Students report access to support services at the Counseling Center, Substance Abuse Services, in the Talent Development program, in the Health Services, and the GLBTQ program to be exceptional. There are concerns, however, that the GLBTQ Center is distant from the pulse of campus and a facility more central to the main campus could be considered.

The campus has made significant inroads in improving the residential experience. The new resident halls and renovations are exceptional and highly desired by students. The facilities are welcoming, well staffed, and reflective of student needs. Similarly, some classrooms have been upgraded and the Ryan Center and the Boss Ice Arena are magnificent. The Hope Commons is a welcome addition to campus and food services are offering interesting and variable options at a variety of on-campus locations. There are some cleanliness issues on campus, particularly in public areas, but in general the campus itself is very beautiful and clean and there are students interacting and utilizing all available spaces.

The issue of there being no “Downtown” was noted as a concern of some students as they feel isolated and disconnected from a wider community. Similarly, students, faculty, and staff complain that there is “nothing to do on campus”. This is not entirely accurate as there is a lot to do on many days, but on Friday and Saturday many students do not feel engaged and they seek excitement and opportunity off-campus, often in a neighboring town. This is frustrating to the town and potentially dangerous as students engage negatively with police and have to drive back

and forth to campus. An infusion of dollars specifically targeted to student-driven weekend entertainment would have a large impact. There is a plan underway to renovate an old dining commons and office area for a Student Fitness and Recreation Center. This would be an important addition to the campus that would positively affect student engagement on campus as well as health and well-being.

From a safety and security perspective the campus has made some substantial changes post Virginia Tech. There is a well-developed Incident Command Structure, an on-call notification list for student affairs staff, and a variety of training exercises for police and student life staff. The Public Safety Department reports to the Vice President for Administration and it might be helpful, in addition, to have a dotted line reporting relationship to the Vice President for Student Affairs to increase communication. Moreover, there is a discussion ongoing about arming police officers. This is a difficult issue for campuses that requires detailed and continual conversations.

Athletics has a new director and he seems clear that student athletes are students first. It is important to note that the Athletics Department is still substantially separated from campus life. The campus is concerned about the lack of involvement by the general student body in athletic events. Perhaps a marketing effort focused on student, faculty, and staff engagement could be mounted. This is a 15 million dollar program that should affect community life, community engagement, and community spirit. The Compliance Officer reports to the President but has an office in the Athletic Department and regularly meets with the Athletic Director. The Compliance Officer needs routine, regular, and ongoing contact with the President or his proxy and the Athletic Department Director. Additionally, the Student Affairs Vice President, to whom the Athletic Director has a dotted line reporting relationship, could effectively serve as eyes and ears for the President in terms of athletics and compliance administration. Finally, the Athletics Department should implement a standardized Athletic Code of Conduct with consistent outcomes for misbehavior in addition to the University's Student Code of Conduct for all students.

The university has highly trained student services personnel and all of these individuals are guided by an institutional set of ethics, a personal ethics orientation, and most respond to a guiding professional standard of ethical conduct. In this regard the University Cornerstones provide a clear and durable ethical orientation for faculty, staff, and students. Students, faculty, and staff have clearly delineated expectations placed upon them and they have access to due process grievance procedures.

STANDARD SEVEN: LIBRARY AND OTHER INFORMATION RESOURCES

The institution demonstrates sufficient and appropriate information resources and services and instructional and information technology and utilizes them to support the fulfillment of its mission.

The library is headed by a Dean of Libraries and has a collection of 1.4 million volumes with a staff of 127 in the combined units of library and information technology services. The library is well used by those on campus and appears to be central to supporting the academic mission. URI is ahead of most of its peers in information literacy. The library faculty has developed a three credit class, LIB 120, that is appreciated by students who take it and also recognized nationally and internationally. However, because of limited personnel, a waiting list is necessary and the library is only able to teach seven sections per semester and offer it online in the summer. Public services faculty members also provide short information literacy instruction sessions in URI 101, with 113 sessions offered this fall. They also work with college writing program courses: 104, 105 and 106. Although they work hard to reach all first year students, they have not been able to support the information instruction needs for students in upper division courses nor have they developed assessment tools for this instruction or for their shorter instruction sessions.

The university publishes policies on the appropriate use of technology including computer and network accounts, files and programs, resource use, proprietary software and copyrighted materials, personal use, security and privacy and enforcement.

The University of Rhode Island benefits greatly from its membership in HELIN, the Rhode Island based academic library consortium. The consortium provides the library online catalog and its management, group buying power, professional development and access to excellent collections. URI is a net borrower of interlibrary loans whereas most land grant universities are net lenders. This is an indication of the scarce collection resources at URI. For a university with a diverse and significant number of Ph.D. and masters degree programs, the small and declining collection is a concern.

The URI Library Special Collections has several interesting programs. These include a “New Leaves Press” where they print broadsides and other items, a poetry contest, now in its fourth year, to highlight the Walt Whitman and other poetry collections and exhibits. The URI Library manages a collection of Rhode Island materials, political papers as well as university archives. Another noteworthy undertaking is the institutional repository, where they scan theses, photographs and other materials important to the University. Many of the projects are accomplished with Graduate School of Library and Information Studies interns, volunteers or hourly staff.

The campus would benefit from setting a strategic direction for the library with related financial planning to support the library’s mission and activities. Funding for collection resources and staffing has varied year after year as the financial situation has changed. A clear vision of the level and breadth of information resources and services appropriate to support the academic mission needs to be developed. The “Making a Difference” campaign calls the University of Rhode Island Library the “heart and soul of the University, central to our mission of teaching, research and service” and may provide an opportunity for supplemental funding. Yet, the library is not mentioned in the university’s strategic plan. Because financial resources have not kept pace with library inflation, especially in journal literature, which is greater than higher education inflation, the team was concerned about projected deficits of over \$200,000 this year and \$500,000 for fiscal year 2009. One million dollars over three years of one time funding was promised to the library, but the last \$400,000 has not yet been funded. With ongoing costs in

personnel, journals and databases, the need for adequate resources will continue to be part of library planning.

In the area of instructional technology, the university offers course software (webct) and work is planned to improve various email and calendar systems. Additional smart technology classrooms are needed and a mechanism to replace out of date equipment. The implementation of PeopleSoft products was accomplished with limited funding and many faculty complain about functionality although improvements have been made recently.

The library has seen a decline in the number of personnel since the last NEASC visit from 66 to 52. The library has accomplished some reorganizations and plan for additional changes to try to meet the needs of users with fewer employees. Help desk and Media Services personnel hours are limited and will need to increase if the planned expansion of enrollment materializes and more classes are taught after 5 PM. All students and faculty interviewed were quick to praise the efforts of the library: offering excellent service under very constrained resources. However, data provided to the committee show that URI is substantially lower than many of its comparator institutions in staffing and collections.

Although students are given basic library instruction in their first year and some take a three credit course in information literacy, the library has not been able to continue to educate students as they gain sophistication and choose and work through requirements for a major and graduation. However, the library continues to see great use of the library building. Reference services have declined a bit over the years, but not as much as other institutions. In addition to face to face reference, the department provides service via instant messaging and has plans to do more outreach to students outside of the library.

The electronic journal and database collections provide consistent resources to students and faculty, no matter where they are located. The main library also provides book delivery as needed.

The physical environment in the libraries is good. There are sufficient seats for studying, group study rooms, a twenty-four hour room and café and a number of computers for students. However, the library does look dated and carpets and furnishings are worn in the main library. Most of the computers are located on the main floor. Additional equipment on all floors would serve the demand for more computers and convenient access to the online catalog. The location of the help desk in the library is fortunate. New equipment in the library's media area and new space for a curriculum collection appear to be well fitted out. The library and IT rely on grant funds such as NOMAD to fund technology; however, these are one- time funds and a replacement plan is needed. It is not clear how much the institution uses information technology to ensure its efficient ability to plan, administer and evaluate its program and services. The library has participated in a national survey of library users, LibQual, and is using data from that survey to understand user needs. A follow-up survey is planned.

Because of resource constraints and without regular and systematic evaluation of the library or information technology, the library has suffered and more attention needs to be paid to planning for its needs in the future.

STANDARD EIGHT: PHYSICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The institution has sufficient and appropriate physical and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes. It manages these resources in a manner to sustain and enhance the realization of institutional purposes.

The University of Rhode Island is comprised of four campuses: the Kingston Campus (the principal location for the University's undergraduate and graduate educational, research, residential and athletic programs); the Narragansett Bay Campus (home of the Graduate School of Oceanography); the W. Alton Jones Campus (a conference center and location of the Environmental Education Center); and the Feinstein Providence Campus (supporting continuing education programs in that vicinity).

The institution's physical resources consist of 4.2 million sq. ft. of building space with a total of 2.7 million square feet dedicated to academic and administrative use. Residence halls and auxiliary enterprises consist of another approximate 1.6 million square feet. Facilities inventory is made up of 300 buildings and municipal-scale infrastructure and utility systems with management and operation falling to Facilities Services, Auxiliary Enterprises, or administration departments.

A Capital Planning and Design Department is responsible for guiding campus development and improvement in accordance with elements articulated in the Campus Master Plan. The Capital Projects Department is charged with managing the University's construction program; currently there are approximately 100 active projects encompassing \$200 million in active contracts. A Safety and Risk Management Office also supports facilities operations. The Office of Housing and Residence Life is responsible for the operation of twenty residence halls and ten apartment buildings with a capacity of housing 6,000 students on the Kingston campus. The Department of Facilities and Operations provides maintenance and repair services. Responsibility for the management and security of university information systems rests within the department of Information and Instructional Technology Services. These departments have demonstrated skill and devotion in providing a supportive and attractive campus supporting the university's mission and purposes.

The Board of Governors as the state's legal entity for public higher education also is empowered to develop and coordinate capital improvement. The Board's Facilities and Finance and Management subcommittee provides oversight of URI's Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). This plan is primarily supported by general obligation bonds, institution-sponsored revenue bonds, state appropriations, federal and private resources, and college funding. Program space requirements are considered in the annual process of updating the CIP. Priorities are set at the university and the plan is forwarded to the Board's subcommittee and, in turn, the full Board of Governors. Agreement at both the Executive and Legislative levels is necessary for most projects. General Revenue bonded projects must also receive voter approval prior to issuance.

The Board of Governors also retains revenue-bonding authority for auxiliary and enterprise endeavors. The Capital Improvement Plan is a comprehensive and effective process to identify and prioritize projects that serve the institution's needs. The institution undertakes physical resource planning linked to academic, student services and support functions needs. Utilization studies as well as project studies are used to determine physical resource requirements manifested in proposed new construction and renovation projects identified and ranked in the CIP. Space planning has occurred on a regular basis as part of physical resource evaluation and planning and is consistent with the mission and purposes of the institution.

Facilities are constructed and maintained in accordance with legal requirements to ensure access, safety, security, and a healthful environment with consideration for environmental concerns. The institution's physical facilities are designed and generally maintained in a manner that serves the institution's needs.

In addition to the annual development of the Capital Improvement Plan, the university participates in the state's Asset Protection Program. Annual appropriations are sought as part of the CIP submission with funding derived from the state-supported Rhode Island Capital Fund. Approximately \$4-\$7 million is provided annually in support of asset protection. Further, the institution has recently entered into an \$18 million Energy Performance Contract for energy conservation projects whereby costs will be paid from anticipated savings.

Identification and prioritization of CIP projects are informed by a comprehensive Campus Master Plan. A small group of administration personnel is predominantly responsible for this prioritization process. This group considers priorities identified in the university's strategic plan in annual updates of the CIP. Of note, the capital plan implementation timeframe is significantly longer than recent strategic plan horizons. Since the plan was completed in 2000, the university has constructed 14 new buildings, built additions on to two facilities, completed major renovations to eight buildings, added over 2,250 parking spaces (1,480 in just the last five years) to the periphery of campus and instituted an integrated parking and transportation system informed by this plan (expansion of parking spaces and the introduction of a campus shuttle coincided with the introduction of parking fees for both resident and commuter students).

Construction is underway for a new Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences (138K square feet) as well as planning for a new College of Pharmacy (130K square feet) and a new library and underwater exploration center (at the Narragansett Bay Campus). Numerous other projects, as identified in the CIP, are currently underway or are planned. A Campus Master Plan Review Team meets monthly to ensure that the Plan continues to guide new construction and is kept current to reflect changing needs of the university and priorities identified in new strategic planning documents. Another means for informing the CIP is program accreditation studies that may identify physical space needs and deficiencies. An impressive number of new construction and renovation projects have recently been completed consistent with the Master Plan and CIP. These projects include: new academic, student services and research space construction; renovation and expansion of existing academic and administrative space; renovation and refurbishment of 13 of the university's 19 student residence halls (informed by a 1998 focused planning study); construction of two new apartment-style residences (with the goal of eventually moving the percentage of full-time undergraduate students residing on campus from a current

level of 47% to 55%); construction of a new convocation/sports center and ice arena; construction of a new dining hall, café and convenience store; and investment in fire safety as well as campus safety and security measures. Currently, there are \$638 million in identified Capital Improvement Plan projects; \$556 million represents continuing projects and \$82 million represents projects added in the most recent version of the plan. The CIP plan identifies projects by priority as well as requested funding source.

For the fiscal years 2008 through 2012, the university has authorization to proceed with 10 major construction and renovation projects totaling approximately \$182.6 million. Over the same period, the university has submitted for consideration by the Board of Governors and the Rhode Island Executive and Legislative branches seventeen additional projects totaling \$210.7 million.

In December 2006, the university purchased 114 acres of undeveloped land contiguous to the institution. Combined with existing undeveloped university owned parcels, the institution now has available 410 acres of contiguous land holdings north of the developed campus. A plan has been developed to advance development of a research and technology park for this site. The North District of campus is being developed as the health and environmental sciences hub of the Kingston Campus and is located immediately south of the proposed research and technology park. Plans are for the park to ultimately include incubator and research space as well as start-up and more established companies. Other potential uses are also being explored for this site.

The university has also been proactive in reviewing its “stewardship” of the campus physical environment by contracting for external review focusing on asset value change and facilities operations success. Selected findings of this 2007 study, that examined 151 buildings or 3.9M gross square feet on the Kingston campus, are as follows:

- Renovations since 1980 have reduced the average “renovation” age of campus facilities although 76% of space remains over 25 years old (“renovation age”).
- The age distribution across departments (types of facilities) is varied.
- Since FY2000, the addition of new facilities has increased stewardship need by 17% as additional square footage is added to the campus.
- Current spending on annual asset protection is below target need; annual deferral increases reinvestment need over time.

In summary, this study concludes - and NEASC team review concurs - that:

- URI’s annual deferral rate is significant and is growing as recurring funding has not kept pace with inflation and the growth of the campus.
- The result is, despite recent capital investment, that a sizable backlog of capital repair and modernization needs exists.

The institution has developed a standard classroom taxonomy identifying appropriate technology and infrastructure support. Funding for classroom upgrades has been provided through a \$5.8 million state-funded technology enhancement project (NOMAD). This funding is supporting upgrades to 33 technology-enhanced learning spaces.

Classroom technology funding has been provided by the state (NOMAD support) resulting in approximately 50% of general assignment classrooms currently being fully technology equipped. It was reported that outfitting of specialized classrooms is the responsibility of departments and

the level of technology integration for such spaces varies significantly. While state funding has been provided for the current round of classroom upgrades, additional base budgeting for the costs of further upgrades is needed as well as for the eventual upgrade of NOMAD financed equipment.

The University's Classroom Management team is a vehicle for input on classroom planning, renovation and new construction. Further, a Space Enhancement, Design and Allocation Committee considers space needs of the community accounting for alignment with the Campus Master Plan (such as efforts to reclaim space along the main quadrangle for classroom purposes) and in communication with the Master Plan Review Team and the University's Joint Strategic Planning Committee.

The institution's technology resources are commensurate with institutional purposes and are designed, maintained, and managed in a manner that serves institutional needs. Technology resources are supported by a committed and competent staff. The institution demonstrates the effectiveness of its policies and procedures in ensuring the reliability of the systems, the integrity of data, and the privacy of individuals.

The institution has implemented a number of PeopleSoft e-Campus system modules. Plans are underway to expand system functionality including automated workflow, e-procurement, imaging, and enhanced report writing. Full use of the system has been limited by an original "vanilla" installation of basic components and what was likely inadequate training and support due to relatively limited implementation support for such a sophisticated system. Further initiatives to ensure security of data are planned for latter implementation.

Based on analysis of the state of information technology holdings and administration, the university is within or above the national norms on most metrics on technology resources. The university projects that it will continue to add current advanced-design classrooms over the next ten years. State investment in university classrooms compares well with other state universities in New England. The current NOMAD project, combined with capital bond funding for Lippitt Hall, the Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences, the Inner Space Center, and the new Pharmacy building and others will support additional technology classroom introductions into these facilities.

The university has an attractive and well-planned campus that supports its mission and purposes. Significant investments in new construction and renovation projects have dramatically improved selected facilities and have been well received by college constituents.

The team questions the ability to sustain the planned (non-General Obligation bond supported) capital program and the ability to adequately support incremental operating costs associated with new facilities during a period of declining state support and limitations on student charges.

In sum, the university has sufficient and appropriate physical and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes. It manages and maintains these resources in a manner to sustain and enhance the realization of its institutional purposes.

STANDARD NINE: FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The institution's financial resources are sufficient to sustain the achievement of its educational objectives and to further institutional improvement now and in the foreseeable future.

The University of Rhode Island's financial resources are sufficient to sustain the achievement of its stated educational objectives. The institution has demonstrated its financial capacity to appropriately serve its various constituents. Financial records indicate that the University's financial resources are appropriately concentrated on its educational activities. Instruction spending constitutes a large and relatively stable portion of functional expenditures. Further, the institution administers its financial resources with integrity. The institution is to be commended for its ability to operate within significant fiscal constraints and for managing its resources in support of its mission and purposes.

Financial stability has been identified by both NEASC and the university as an area of emphasis. NEASC, in communications to the College in 1998, 2001, and 2003 noted that "the University give emphasis to its success in... assuring financial stability... (and) undertaking financial planning in relation to changing economic conditions." The institution has also identified, as one of four major initiatives in its current strategic plan, the need to "improve the fiscal health of the University."

A review of the university's independently audited financial statements (FY2007) indicates that current assets of \$76.9 million exceed current liabilities of \$44.5 million by \$32.4 million. This ratio of current assets to current liabilities is an indicator of the institution's health and its relative capacity to hedge against future financial uncertainties in the short term. Furthermore, between FY2003 and FY2007, net assets increased by \$56.4 million, or 36% over four years; this growth in net assets (totaling \$213M in FY2007) is largely attributable to investment (net of related debt) in capital assets and private funds received. (University Foundation net assets totaled \$105M and Alumni Association net assets totaled \$4M in FY2007.) University unrestricted net assets have increased over this period. This growth in net assets is an indicator of the institution's financial condition (although capital asset increases cannot be generally liquidated to meet current expenditures).

A review of financial metrics is consistent with findings of the RIBGHE that summarized institutional financial performance as follows:

- persistently generates less total revenue than needed to cover operating costs,
- has limited reserves to provide financial flexibility and funds for strategic investment,
- spends comparable amounts as their peers to educate and support each full-time equivalent student,
- relies heavily and increasingly on tuition and fees rather than state appropriations for revenue, reflecting national trends,

- has improved fundraising efforts in recent years but still trails aspirants and peers performance,
- maintains solid debt ratings.

Specifically, Net Operating Revenue Ratio performance has not been strong (often negative) versus industry standard target of approximately 6%. As summarized by the RIBGHE Financial Performance Metrics report:

These results indicate a continuing deficit in operations with the combined state appropriation and other non-operating revenue being inadequate to cover the operating loss. While day to day operations can be maintained for a time by not funding non-cash expenses, at some point the continuing deficit has to be addressed. The alternative is an increasing backlog of deferred maintenance and other liabilities and an inability to generate surpluses for investment in the university's future.

Unrestricted Net Assets, which provide the institution with resources to address unplanned events and to invest in strategic priorities, increased in the past year but are still minimal and significantly below peers. Debt Service Coverage Ratio indicates that the institution has the capability to cover existing debt service from its own revenues and cash flow, as well as to assume additional debt even though total indebtedness has increased significantly in recent years. Net tuition per FTE as a percentage of total educational revenue has increased reflecting national trends and a greater reliance on student revenue for operations. Fund raising and endowment value has increased in recent years to supplement revenues although levels remain significantly below identified peers' performance.

Credit agency (Moody's Investor Service) analysis notes revenues that are relatively well-diversified and adequate coverage of annual debt service requirements from current operations. It also notes low resource availability (expendable assets) and significant new debt assumption in recent years. In summary, it concludes that, "the University is highly leveraged within its rating category, and has limited additional debt capacity without strong offsetting growth in revenues and at least moderate resource growth." The university has approximately \$200M in outstanding debt (including auxiliary enterprises related debt). The university does not have an official Debt Policy; instead, it relies on periodic rating agency reports to inform debt assumption discussions.

Net state appropriations were essentially stable from FY2002 through FY2007 (although allocated funding was less than that originally budgeted over this period). State appropriations support for the current fiscal year (FY2008) represents a \$5.4M, or 6.6%, reduction from the prior year with a further reduction anticipated in the upcoming fiscal year. While state appropriations support for operations has fallen over the past five year period, revenues from student charges and auxiliary enterprises have increased significantly (reflecting both rate and enrollment increases); revenue from other sources has increased as well. Because operating costs have increased over the years and the state appropriations have not increased to cover operating expenses, student charges have played an increasingly important role in funding university operations. The state has invested significantly in university capital infrastructure over this same time period. The University's Foundation and its Alumni Association have been

strong and consistent supporters and have provided \$9.7M and \$2.2M respectively for both restricted and unrestricted purposes to the university in FY2007.

The annual budgeting process and policies are accurately and well documented in the self-study. In addition to administrative efforts in developing the budget, the Joint Strategic Planning Committee, a shared governance committee, provides input into the budget development process. Recommendations are also reviewed by the Faculty Senate. Efforts are made to communicate the fiscal situation to various institutional constituents throughout the budget development process although some parties indicate little ability to influence budget decisions. While the university is appropriately conservative in its budgeting approach, the institution is still vulnerable to significant budget volatility caused by mid-year state allocation adjustments. Further, budgets are developed and student charges are set well prior to adequate understanding of anticipated state support; this results in expenditure adjustments late in the budget cycle. Details of capital investment are noted in the facilities portion of this review document.

The university generally has funded its capital plans through a combination of funds received from university operations, bonds issued by the Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation, state appropriations, general obligation bonds, federal appropriations and private fund raising. The Board of Governors for Higher Education submits a running five-fiscal-year capital improvement plan to the General Assembly and Governor each year. This plan forms the basis for discussions on capital funding for various projects from available funding sources.

The institution does have some physical capacity to further increase enrollments, especially if that growth is accommodated through enhanced utilization of campus resources beyond current peak use periods. The college is also currently adding a significant amount of additional academic and research space (Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences - \$54.5M Total Project Cost; College of Pharmacy Building - \$75M TPC). Future plans include replacement and expansion of chemistry facilities (\$64M est. TPC). It was noted that the plan is to increase out-of-state enrollment by an additional 10% and in-state enrollment by 5% (recognizing that Rhode Island high school graduates are projected to remain level) over the next few years. It is not clear whether models for anticipated revenue from increased out-of-state students (nearing 50% of incoming students) reflect an experienced lower retention rate among this group.

Additional revenue from endowment income is also anticipated to help mitigate the impact of declining state support. The university is just entering the public phase of a \$100 million campaign largely focused on endowment growth. Approximately 50% of funds have been secured to date.

The institution also hopes to generate increasing levels of sponsored research and licensing revenue over time. In support of these efforts, plans for a new Research and Technology Park have been thoughtfully developed and are promising for the future although some short term institutional support will be required (e.g., debt service on basic infrastructure investment).

The team is concerned that revenues from state appropriations for operations (that have not been strong), combined with limited student revenue growth opportunities (restricted by market and access concerns), and other income (that has been growing) as well as proposed new revenue

streams (that have yet to be realized) may not be sufficient to meet identified commitments let alone further institutional improvement as articulated in campus plans. A number of significant cost factors are facing the university going forward. These include: costs associated with anticipated collective bargaining contracts for faculty and staff (historically ranging from 3.0% to 3.5% annually; there is also a recognition that salary compression is a concern); a large number of new faculty positions budgeted in FY2007 alone; financial aid costs as a dedicated portion of instituted student fee increases; increasing debt service costs; operating cost increases due to new facilities being brought on line; and rising costs for health insurance premiums, post employment benefits, equipment, utilities, and fuel. There are efforts to reduce costs in selected areas including administrative costs and efforts to seek additional administrative procedures authority that impact such areas as payroll and purchasing practices; these efforts hold significant promise to improve administrative efficiency and effectiveness.

While the university has done extensive capital planning and periodically undertakes strategic planning efforts, there is not a strong link between strategic, academic and long-term financial planning. This situation was acknowledged and explained by the fact that “strategic planning is relatively young” at the institution. As a follow up to the periodic strategic planning efforts and comprehensive capital planning programs, the institution would benefit from linking strategic and long-term financial planning.

Of significant concern, no long-range financial modeling is available to determine whether anticipated financial resources will be sufficient to meet level service costs, prior commitments, and implement planned institutional improvement initiatives. Such a model would help illustrate the necessary trade-offs that are bound to become apparent in a situation where operations costs are projected to increase while state appropriations are likely to decrease. The only significant remaining variables are student charges revenues (from rate increases and/or changes in student make-up, e.g., out-of-state vs. in-state) and other income (e.g., investment income, annual fund support for operations, potential bond financing support, sponsored research and licensing income, etc.). This model would likely reveal significant pressure on student charges and fund raising for operations support or the need to curtail certain initiatives to meet currently identified cost items.

The university deserves praise for its ability to effectively respond to state appropriation reductions and for seeking opportunities to reduce administrative costs. Further, the institution’s efforts to institute quantitative, as well as qualitative, performance factors to guide resource allocation are to be commended.

The university is encouraged to undertake multi-year financial modeling to determine the sufficiency of financial resources (with underlying assumptions regarding state appropriations, student charges revenues, and other income including private fund raising) to sustain the achievement of its educational objectives and to determine its financial capacity to meet current commitments as well as implement planned institutional improvement initiatives as articulated in its strategic plan. This concern regarding financial stability and the link to strategic planning is consistent with the Commission’s emphasis noted in its 1998, 2001 and 2003 communications with the university.

STANDARD TEN: PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

In presenting itself to students, prospective students, and other members of the interested public, the institution provides information that is complete, accurate, accessible, clear and sufficient for intended audiences to make informed decisions about the institution.

Overall the information about the university is clear and available either in publications or on the website. The catalog is clear and specific and accurately portrays information. Mission, objectives and expected educational outcomes, requirements and policies and procedures are documented and available. Furthermore information about the student body, campus setting, availability of services and resources are well documented. The language describing accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges is accurate.

The Communications office plans to improve the website with a branding project slated for the spring and to allocate more time to support colleges and other departments once the URI Foundation takes on its own publications. This is an important step as information on the website currently lacks standardization and some web pages are out of date.

There are two areas, described in the following, where changes are suggested.

The catalog information about the availability of courses needs to be revised. Standard 10.8 specifies that courses not taught for three years should not appear in the catalog. University policy currently allows untaught courses to stay in the catalog for four years. The issue is scheduled to come before the Faculty Senate this fall and the Senate expects to change the policy to conform to NEASC guidelines.

Although the university publishes information about cost of education, it does not publish the expected amount of debt upon graduation as specified in 10.11. As university officials review its public disclosure, they may want to take a look at ways to indicate average debt upon graduation in their publications.

STANDARD ELEVEN: INTEGRITY

The institution subscribes to and advocates high ethical standards in the management of its affairs and in all of its dealings with students, faculty, staff, its governing board, external agencies and organizations, and the general public. Through its policies and practices, the institution endeavors to exemplify the values it articulates in its mission and related statements.

The University of Rhode Island has published a strong statement on institutional ethics and integrity. The “Cornerstones” are student focused and affirm that URI is a principled community guided by durable values. In this same vein, the university has successfully launched the John Hazen White Center for Ethics and Public Service that serves a wide array of on – and off – campus constituents. This cutting edge center distinguishes the university as an institution that cares about integrity while striving to serve the broadest notion of the URI community.

The university also employs an Ombudsperson who, along with other staff throughout the university, ensures due process, fair hearings, and effective mediation for faculty, staff, and students who feel they have not been heard. The Ombudsperson reports directly to the President.

Truthfulness, clarity, and fairness pervade the institution. There is an air of open discussion and free exchange with students. Free speech is encouraged and academic honesty and integrity is a chief defining principle for both faculty and students. Cheating is not an accepted approach and academic freedom is highly cherished. Furthermore, the university adheres to state ethics rules and regulations. The Board follows state policy but also could consider developing its own ethics and integrity statement.

The institution is committed to assuring that discrimination and hate are not allowed on campus. There are many committees and task force groups that ensure an ongoing discussion. The Office of Human Resources and the Office of Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity and Diversity work together closely and they have begun, in earnest, a program of education, information, and prevention in an effort to reduce hate crimes, bias related incidents, acts of discrimination, and other actions that chill and corrode the environment. These efforts have paid off with a significant reduction in complaints and reports associated with bias and discrimination. While many groups are responding to prevent these problems, the campus-wide Diversity Committee has ceased activity due to the absence of the former chair. This committee should be reinstated.

The institution has a strong Institutional Review Board and adequately protects animal rights. There is a concern that graduate students are not well trained in research ethics at the departmental level and this is an issue that should be addressed. Another issue of concern is the absence of a clearly delineated and evident web presence of all university ethics and integrity related policies and procedures. A centrally available and comprehensive repository would serve the entire community.

Finally, it appears as though there are systems and structures in play that assist employees and student workers to understand and follow rules and regulations associated with money management. It is suggested, to augment these structures, that all personnel – staff and student – who have responsibility for money management be trained on an annual basis.

The team was concerned about how procedures and policies are monitored and assessed. While the Joint Strategic Planning Committee monitors and reviews these areas for effectiveness, oversight could also be assigned to unit heads with annual effectiveness reporting required.

SUMMARY:

The team was pleased to see the progress that had been made since the last visit in general education and to see that structures have been put in place for a comprehensive learning outcomes and assessment program. We also were impressed with the detailed plans in place for construction of new facilities and renovation of older ones. In addition, the institution has made some progress in the financial area and certainly has accepted that financial resources from the state for the operating budget increasingly will be limited in future years.

The institution has strong academic programs in many areas and attracts students from within Rhode Island as well as other states and many foreign countries. Its planned expansion in student numbers will need to be monitored as it relates to faculty lines and varying demands across departments.

Faculty, students and staff are involved in planning and governance issues, but a challenge for the future for the University of Rhode Island is to integrate its academic and financial planning with the strategic planning process and to strengthen academic program review. Some difficult decisions and realistic setting of priorities will be needed.

STRENGTHS:

The team found several strengths at the University of Rhode Island.

The university has a very committed faculty and staff.

Students are enthused about their experience at URI and dedicated to the institution. They cite their admiration for the highly committed faculty.

The campus is very attractive with many renovated and new facilities and has good facilities plans in place to guide it in the future.

URI has some nationally recognized professional programs such as Pharmacy, Engineering, Oceanography, Business and Nursing.

The campus has been quite successful in securing a number of federal research grants.

URI has made significant efforts to diversify its revenue base.

CONCERNS:

The team also expresses the following concerns.

The overall financial situation remains a concern although the campus has taken several positive steps to meet this concern. However, declining state revenues continue and the plans to diversify the revenue base, although positive, will need continual monitoring and readjustment.

The institution needs a much better integration of financial, academic and strategic planning. The strategic plan provides an opportunity here but must be used for a more comprehensive and integrated process. Academic program review on a regular and sustained basis should be instituted. And the role of academic leadership should be reviewed and strengthened. Attention also should be given to the issue of library resources.

The institution must continue to work on the assessment of learning outcomes and embed such assessment in the culture and ways of doing business of the institution. Structures have been established but now the results for these assessments must be used more directly in planning and resource allocation.

Some difficult decisions need to be made in future planning and clear priorities agreed upon and followed.

APPENDIX (PRESIDENT'S 2007 MANAGEMENT LETTER):

“Looking back over the first year of the new plan, it is fair to say that we have met our enrollment projections and made marginal improvement in retention and graduation rates. Especially encouraging is the increase in minority student retention from freshmen to sophomores. As a state entity, the fiscal health of the University took a turn for the worse in terms of support of our operating budget. This decline--now a net decline in actual dollars over the last six years--was offset by increased tuition and fee revenues. We are generally reconciled to the fact that state revenues for operating support will not improve, at least not anytime soon. State investment in the physical infrastructure of the University, on the other hand, continued to grow with the approval by the voters of the new building for the College of Pharmacy. While not all would agree, I believe that our fiscal health does continue to improve overall and that we have a growing confidence that we can prosper even as state support decreases, if we can grow the entrepreneurial spirit and find more creative ways to approach our work. Our success in increasing inclusion is clear. Those of us who have been here for many years see progress in the sheer numbers of women and minorities in programs where there were none before. Our efforts, however, are not enough, and you will see in the detailed report on that goal below that our results are mixed.

As for research, we are well on the way to a new level of efficiency and effectiveness in our work. The approval by the Board of a new vice president for research and economic development and the submission of legislation to create a research foundation are very significant steps. In the meantime, under the leadership of Bob Weygand, we have been granted increased flexibility in our purchasing processes, long a sore point with URI researchers. With the Governor's creation of a study commission on URI research programs, chaired by former Supreme Court Justice Robert Flanders, we hope to see a more concerted state effort to support that important work.

Finally, we have experienced significant turnover in leadership positions within the University, and that will continue into the next year. At the time of this writing, we have brought in a new vice provost for information services (Garry Bozylinsky), a new vice provost for academic affairs (Lynn Pasquerella), a new vice president for research (Peter Alfonso), a new president of the University of Rhode Island Foundation (Glen Kerkian), and we recently appointed David Maslyn as dean of the libraries. The search for a vice provost for enrollment management has been put on hold this year as a result of an unsuccessful search and new budget restrictions, but we are in the midst of searching for a dean of engineering (just begun), a director of athletics (just completed with the appointment of Thor Bjorn), and a director of institutional research. Most importantly, we have started a search for a provost and vice president for academic affairs as Beverly Swan has announced her return to the faculty at the end of this calendar year. This change will have a profound effect on the University, and we will search aggressively for the right person to live up to Beverly's example.”

List of persons and committees with whom the team met:

President
Provost and Vice Provosts
Chairman, Board of Governors
Commissioner of Higher Education
Representatives of the Board of Governors
Deans (including separate meeting with Deans of degree granting units)
Administrative staff (over 20)
Graduate program staff
Development staff
Faculty (over 60 including the department chairs)
Faculty Senate, President and Vice President and other members
AAUP representative
Students (over 40)
Joint Strategic Planning Committee
Self-Study Committee
Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee