

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND  
**JOINT CLASSROOM STEERING COMMITTEE (JCSC)**  
Annual Report to the Faculty Senate for 2013-14  
June 2014

The Joint Classroom Steering Committee (JCSC) shall serve as a steering group to the functional areas that manage and have responsibility for classroom upkeep and planning (MTS, Enrollment Services, and Business Services). The committee shall be responsible for the development of plans for all aspects of classroom planning and management, including, but not limited to, the development and management of a single classroom data-base, the establishment and updating of design standards, scheduling and planning, assessment of needs for classroom refurbishments and setting priorities, maintenance and ongoing management of classrooms and the coordination of resources for classroom upkeep and improvement. This committee shall also monitor progress and the execution of these plans. The Committee held meetings on October 26, December 7, January 17th. The following summary is the progress that occurred relative to the committee's oversight.

The Committee met on the following dates this year: September 26<sup>th</sup>, October 31<sup>st</sup>, November 1<sup>st</sup>, December 20<sup>th</sup> of 2013 and January 14<sup>th</sup>, February 27<sup>th</sup>, and May 6, 2014.

**Highlights from committee meetings and work:**

In September, the committee requested a progress report of the summer activities to install the various classroom improvement projects for which it had approved funding the prior year. All technology projects were completed as planned and most facilities upgrades were accomplished with some deferment of improvements to Pastore, due to timing of other infrastructure issues being addressed. The committee will continue to monitor the completion of these improvements.

The committee spent a good deal of its time organizing studies to provide greater information and data about the conditions of classrooms and faculty perspectives about those classrooms and their use of technology. The results of these studies are intended to provide better data and information to make more informed decisions about priorities in planning for classroom improvements and the use of resources.

The committee commissioned the Office of Campus Planning to conduct a classroom utilization study. Campus Planning worked with Rickes Associates to conduct the study of general assignment classrooms. In September, the committee reviewed their initial report. A thematic summary of interviews was distributed describing type and size of classrooms and their desired targets for utilization.

**Classroom utilization study - *Initial recommendations*** – (Summary highlights from report):

Scheduling:

1. **Both students and faculty expressed a desire for more two-day, 75-minute classes.** Pedagogically, this follows a shift in curriculum to incorporate more team- and problem-based learning requiring longer class sessions to more

effectively accommodate group work. Currently, these blocks are offered primarily on Tuesday/Thursday, while the Monday/Wednesday/Friday scheduling pattern is structured for 50-minute blocks. URI could develop additional two-day, 75-minute scheduling blocks that span the entire week. There are several models that could be used to create these blocks. A simple model is to pair Monday/Wednesday and Tuesday/Thursday blocks, leaving Fridays for discussion sections or longer, single session courses. Another model utilizes various two-day combinations, such as Tuesday/Friday, Wednesday/Friday, and Monday/Thursday, to distribute courses across the week.

2. **URI should consider extending the academic day into the evening hours** to more efficiently utilize classrooms and to offer students additional scheduling choices. Similarly, weekend classes are an opportunity to offer class sections to students who are working during the week. Students and faculty suggested both of these scheduling options as a way to increase use of classroom space as well as provide scheduling flexibility and alternatives to help students complete graduation requirements.
3. **Hybrid or “blended” courses** could be more formally scheduled in the future—those that are online but physically meet for some class sessions – are expected to grow in the future. Currently, blended courses are typically scheduled for an entire semester in a classroom, even though the class does not physically meet every session. A more formal schedule of in-class meetings would allow URI to pair blended classes into the same classroom, alternating physical meeting days within the same block. Separately, a trend toward four-credit courses offers an opportunity to utilize online technology where three credit hours are taught in person, and one credit hour is taught online.
4. To facilitate scheduling classrooms for ad hoc use and events, URI could make classroom schedules available online for viewing. Final scheduling could continue to be centralized.

#### Physical classroom environment

1. A desire for flexible classrooms was consistently expressed by faculty and students alike. Instructors would like furniture that can be easily reconfigured to support various teaching styles and group work and classrooms should have ample circulation space. Team- and problem-based learning is increasingly a part of the curriculum. This teaching and learning style calls for a particular classroom set up. Flexibility is a key element in these classrooms, with furniture configured in “pods” where groups of students are clustered together. Technology and screens are located around the classroom, allowing the instructor to circulate the room with no distinct “front” of the classroom. The instructor is then a collaborator with the students, shifting the model from lecturer to facilitator. Team-based learning (TBL) classrooms were requested by URI faculty and students to encourage this shift in pedagogy.
2. As URI upgrades classrooms, particular attention should be given to including amenities and tools that support teaching. This includes multiple whiteboards/chalkboards (or sliding boards), multiple screens that do not interfere with boards, functioning room darkening shades, and operational clocks (sometimes on multiple walls). Natural light, air circulation, and temperature control were also cited as very important.

3. Classroom standards should be developed that incorporate these aspects.

### Technology

1. The recent classroom technology upgrades were commended in virtually all of the interviews. The faculty noted that the consistency, availability, and overall reliability of technology have allowed them to readily incorporate it into their teaching. Several elements were identified by faculty as part of a required “suite” of technology, including a ceiling-mounted projector, smart board, and document camera. Both faculty and students felt that a permanent computer at the instructor station should be standard, along with equipment to connect PC and Mac personal laptops and tablets.
2. The initial report findings were deemed helpful and would be considered along with other information in planning for the future. Concern was expressed about the limited degree of faculty and student participation in the Rickes study. The committee decided to conduct their own survey of faculty to ascertain feedback on current classroom conditions and use of technology.

### Faculty development regarding technology

1. Training for the faculty should occur on two levels. The first is basic “how to” training to help faculty develop a comfort level on how to use the hardware and software in each classroom. Secondly, and more importantly, is providing faculty with concepts and tools to integrate technology into the curriculum in an effective and innovative way. Several faculty members interviewed conveyed their hesitancy with admitting they are uncomfortable with technology. This general sentiment was also reflected by URI students, as they noted the abundant availability of technology in classrooms as a result of recent upgrades, yet many faculty are still “teaching from textbooks.”
2. Faculty participation in current technology training is quite low. An approach that is effective in reducing the intimidation factor is peer-to-peer “trainings.” These currently occur and are born from conversations between faculty members, resulting in an informal tutorial, likely in a faculty office. URI may consider formalizing peer trainings and compensating faculty to lead workshops.
3. To encourage research and experimentation, URI could offer incentives to encourage innovative faculty members to develop technology-rich curriculum. The charge for these instructors could extend to include faculty trainings on developing courses using specific technology. Incentives may include a stipend, summer pay, or a course release.

### **Highlights of the JCSC faculty survey on classrooms:**

Faculty were asked about their current preferences in classroom arrangements. 183 responded out of 749 surveyed.

1. One third expressed a preference for U-shape and another third preferred theater style, while one third indicated it did not matter.

2. Fifty-four percent felt the seating configurations in the classrooms they teach in were flexible enough.
3. Fifty-seven percent were satisfied with the lighting control in their classrooms, while 26% indicated lighting control was below expectations and 16% were more than satisfied and this was indicative of the worst classroom in which they taught.
4. Temperature was the most significant factor of dissatisfaction with about 60% of respondents dissatisfied and this was indicative of the worst classroom in which they taught.
5. Noise seemed to be a factor for 40% of faculty respondents, with the remaining 60% satisfied or more than satisfied, and this was indicative of the worst classroom in which they taught.
6. 75% indicated they don't use technology beyond a projector and sound system.
7. The survey elicited specifics on various particular classrooms and problem areas and the specific uses of other kinds of technology by the 25% of faculty who indicated they use more than a projector and computer.

### **Classroom standards project**

The committee endorsed the development of a set of classroom standards through the work of a professional consulting firm. The committee envisioned these standards would serve as a guide for future improvements to better ensure that classrooms are improved with consistency and attention to thoughtful standards. The standards in progress serve to detail materials and conditions relative to different types of classrooms (small, medium, large, auditorium, seminar, interactive, case study, lecture, etc.) with regard to lighting, general attributes, flooring, furnishings, acoustics, special needs, AV systems, windows, HVAC system, Signage, Accessories, instructor's stations, and other related elements. The standards were reviewed initially in draft form in May and the committee provided feedback. They will continue to be developed and consideration will be given to the extent of their use in classroom planning.

### **Classroom security and locks**

In early fall, the committee heard from Jerry Sidio, Director of Facilities about the problem with some of new locking mechanisms that had been installed, where they could only be locked by opening the door and securing locking by swiping from the outside. This was of concern to the committee in a lockdown situation. It was reported that the locks would all be replaced/upgraded to meet future security needs.

Summary of report: on Classroom Security-

1. Project to provide interior lock control to the 102 General Assignment Classrooms that have electronic locking hardware, using three different approaches based on existing locks.
2. 58 classrooms have wireless systems that must be replaced.
  - a. Estimated cost is \$150,000. Funding has not been identified to complete this work.
  - b. The Fire upgrade project is replacing locks where doors are replaced. Washburn Hall GA classrooms will incorporate this approach.

3. 32 classrooms have online systems
  - a. URI electricians and locksmiths developed a “button” that will lock the rooms once installed.
  - b. Swan and Bliss classrooms are complete. Other classrooms will be completed as they can be scheduled. Project completion in FY15.
4. 12 classrooms have unique systems
  - a. 8 Ballantine classrooms were converted by URI locksmiths.
  - b. 4 Pharmacy classrooms have proximity locks - will be converted by locksmiths in FY 15. Some additional engineering is required.
5. Instructions on how to lock doors have been posted in all classrooms except CBLS. Custodial staff is working with Access Control to resolve the correct language on CBLS doors and was to be completed by the end of June 2014.

**Priorities for classroom improvements in technology funding: budget \$300,000**

The committee explored the needs as advised by the technology staff and faculty feedback to the committee on the most critical technology needs for general assignment classrooms. Due to failing projectors in Swan Hall and Pharmacy, the following technology projects were endorsed by the Committee for this year’s funding allocation.

- **Swan Hall Classroom Project - 16 general assignment rooms:**  
**\*Includes:** All digital equipment suite with projector, document camera, Blu-ray player, dedicated podium computer, wireless connection to the projection system for mobile devices, VGA/HDMI connections for faculty laptops, integration with classroom monitoring server, and new projection screen.
- **Pharmacy auditorium 170-** projector and spare projector
- **Document Camera** purchases for use by all faculty

(The projectors removed from Swan will be used as temporary spares)

Additionally, the Provost approved the following technology enhancements, (technology funds, not part of the JCSC 300k allocation)

**Chafee 235 Repair** - \$14,000 repair to the cabling and equipment in Chafee 235 to fix intermittent system failure.

**Installation of new VDI computer stations** in the Memorial Union computer lab (50) and in the library LL4 (30) for a total of \$93,492.

**Priorities for classroom improvements in facility areas (furniture, lighting, paint, carpet, etc.) – budget \$300,000**

- Per the collective decision by Languages, English and Communication Studies, new Learn2 arm tablet units will be installed in Swan 309, 311 & 313.
- The completion of upgrades of Quinn & Tyler by fitting out Quinn 314 and Tyler 109 with new tables and chairs.

- New tables for room 316 in Washburn to accommodate the changes that the fire protection project is doing.
- The tables and chairs from Swan will be brought over to White Hall, rooms 204 & 206, to replace the old tablet arm chairs in those classrooms. Some minor work will be performed in rooms 204 & 206 to accommodate this new furniture.
- These furniture upgrades will cost \$123,531. Additional funds will be expended from the division of administration and finance to remove the old furniture and provide the renovations necessary to accept the furniture.

Concerns were discussed at a May meeting with Vice President Valentino about the reduced funding allocation the committee was allowed this year, under its commitment by the division of Administration and Finance to allocate \$300,000 per year. The committee had been informed that fund sources had been fully expended on other building projects and critical needs. VP Valentino assured the committee the future commitment of \$300,000 per year to be at the JCSC's allocation.

The committee agreed it was important to meet during the summer months in order to accomplish their scope of work. Plans are to meet at least twice during the summer to focus further on classroom standards, and the utilization and scheduling and to develop a process for soliciting and determining priorities for classroom improvements and funding.

### **2013-14 Committee**

President's appointee: *Ann Morrissey, Chair*

Provost's appointee: *Robert Bullock*

Faculty Senate Appointees: *Peter Paton, Babram Nassersharif, Mario Trubiano*

Enrollment Services: *Dean Libutti, Ken Sisson*

Instructional Technology/CMT: *David Porter, Janie Palm*

Campus Planning and Design: *Ryan Carrillo, Tom Frisbie-Fulton*

Business Services: *Vern Wyman*

Facilities: *Jerry Sidio*

