February 4, 2008

Dr. Barbara Brittingham, Director
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
209 Burlington Road
Bedford, MA 01730-1433

Dear Dr. Brittingham:

Please consider this our formal response to NEASC's Commission on Institutions of Higher Education concerning the Visiting Team's final report of its visit to the University of Rhode Island on October 21-24, 2007. First, we would like to express our appreciation to the Team and especially to its chairperson, Dr. Sherry Penney. Second, we would like to reaffirm our commitment to the process of accreditation. The preparation of the Self-Study afforded us the opportunity to review our activities since our last review, assess our progress in areas identified for improvement or enhancement and identify areas in need of improvement and change.

As is always the case, there are minor areas where the very nature of the accreditation process may leave room for discussion about the explanation of facts or the interpretation of data. There are only a very few such instances in the report, due to the thoroughness of the Visiting Team. There are also issues that are referenced under more than one standard. We will consolidate those responses and cross-reference them. We will respond to those areas that were of concern to the Team and areas where new information or significant progress has been achieved since the visit. We are attaching documents or reports, where pertinent, to provide more detailed information.

As I indicated in the Preface to the Self-Study, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs M. Beverly Swan has expressed her wish to return to the faculty after serving now for seventeen years in her position. A national search for a new provost was underway when the Team visited the campus in October. That search was completed, and Dr. Donald DeHayes, Dean of the College of the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Vermont, has been appointed as our new Provost. He will officially join the University on April 8, 2008, but joins us weekly during this transition. New leadership will allow us to revisit many of our practices and activities discussed in the Visiting Team report. Provost Swan is working closely with Dr. DeHayes during this transition period.

STANDARD ONE: Mission and Purposes:

The Visiting Team found that the "mission statement is realistic and defines its (URI's) educational dimensions regarding the communities it serves. It indicates that the university is committed to enriching the lives of its students (page 5)."[1] The Visiting Team observed that although the University community and the Board of Governors are committed to "access," the word itself does not appear in the mission statement. This omission is inadvertent since other publications, reports and University documents clearly point to access as a core value of the University. In order to explore more deeply our commitment to access and the University's role as part of the Rhode Island system of higher education, we have established a new Joint Strategic Planning subcommittee on "Access to Excellence." Its membership includes faculty members, Vice Provost Lynn Pasquerella, Dean of Admissions Cindy Bonn, Director of the Instructional Development Program Dr. Bette Erickson, two academic deans, the assistant director of the Special Programs for Talent Development, the Chairperson of the Mathematics Department and the Executive Assistant to the President for Planning Services and Professional Development. This past week the University held a "town meeting" on organizational strategies for improved access to admission, matriculation and graduation. It focused particularly on access for students from under-represented populations. More than 100 faculty, staff and students attended.

The University is also committed to using the Mission Statement more deliberately in its planning, priority setting, and resource allocation (see Planning below).

STANDARD TWO: Planning and Evaluation

As indicated in the Self-Study and recognized by the Visiting Team, the University is actively engaged in planning. The Visiting Team, however, expressed a concern about the need for "a much better integration of financial, academic and strategic planning (page 29)." As indicated earlier in this response, we have already engaged the newly appointed Provost, Dr. Donald DeHayes, in discussions of planning processes, which better match responsibility for the generation of revenue with expenditures.

Academic Planning

Since the Team's visit, new Provost and Vice President Don DeHayes has held several meetings to address the topic of academic planning. He has met with the Council of Deans collectively and its members individually to secure the deans' commitment in a future planning process. He has begun this process in January 2008 by asking them to summarize in a brief written report their college's strengths and potential future priorities. He met with the planning services directors, Ann Morrissey and Abu Bakr, to solicit their assistance in designing

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[1] Page references, where included, relate to the Report of the Visiting Team.

and facilitating a new planning process within the academic division. Beginning in the early spring (2008), Provost DeHayes plans to work closely with the deans to develop a vision, revisit the mission, and define a set of goals and priorities for the Division of Academic Affairs that are consistent with the current Strategic Plan and that will inform the next plan. He plans to hold a two-day deans' retreat this summer on planning. This will allow the University to better incorporate the academic priorities into its overall strategic planning process.

In the future, the new Provost has also indicated that he will work with the deans and in turn would expect them to work with their faculty and department chairs to develop college-wide strategic plans that will further support the priorities of the Division. The resultant academic priorities and strategic plans would align with the broader institutional planning goals and be tied to assessment and resource allocation at the University.

The Integration of Planning, Budgeting, and Assessment

Committed to planning, the leadership in Academic Affairs will use an integrated planning model and timeline for the development of the University's next three year strategic plan, (2009-2012). The overall process would commence with academic planning occurring throughout the spring and summer. The future academic priorities will be used to drive the development of the overall University strategic goals and future goals of capital planning and design, facilities services, and fundraising. Provost DeHayes has indicated that he supports planning and budgeting processes that create incentives for quality, productivity, cost effectiveness, and strategic priorities and that he will engage the deans in this type of analysis and use it to set future priorities and make budgetary decisions. We will develop a budget plan that will align with and support the various other plans.

The University is continuing to improve the integration of planning by further incorporating outcomes assessment and budgeting. The Joint Strategic Planning Committee (JSPC) and I formed a subcommittee on performance-based budgeting. The group began meeting in early January. The subcommittee, which is comprised of administrators including the Dean of the College of Business Administration, faculty from economics and business, the Director of Budgeting and Financial Planning, the Vice Provost (formerly Assistant Provost), and the Director of Planning Services, will develop a set of recommendations to be vetted with the Council of Deans and the Joint Strategic Planning Committee to institute a revised budgeting process in Academic Affairs. That process will better link planning, academic priorities, performance (using learning outcomes and program assessment data) with budgeting and resource allocation. The new Provost will be involved in the development of this new planning and budgeting model as well. The committee is charged by the JSPC with generating a set of recommendations to improve the budgeting process and better linking it with planning by April 1, 2008.

Academic Program Review

A joint committee of the Faculty Senate and I have begun work as of December 2007 to review and revise the method for academic program review and assessment. The committee has met three times to date and will continue to meet every few weeks with the goal of presenting a revised and endorsed process/model for reviewing academic programs. The revised model will continue to incorporate learning outcomes assessment data, productivity and efficiency data, and qualitative analysis. The committee plans to work directly with the new Provost, deans and department chairs to elicit their counsel and support for any changes or revisions to the current Academic Improvement and Investment Model (AIIM—see below). Upon acceptance of a revised program assessment process by the fall semester of 2008, the Provost has agreed to use that program to work with the deans in all areas of academic planning and resource allocation.

The Academic Investment and Improvement Model (AIIM)

The Visiting Team made several observations about AIIM, the instrument used to evaluate academic programs. The comments focused on the newness of the instrument, its proposed uses and its actual uses. This system replaced an earlier system called the Program Contribution Analysis (PCA). The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs noted that the PCA received national attention in a 1995 article in *Science*. The PCA analysis focused on the net revenue contributions of undergraduate and graduate teaching and at URI resulted in the investment in some cost effective programs and the elimination of small inefficient programs. One of the internal criticisms of this model is that it did not consider quality assessment, and significant energy went to refuting the data. In response, the institution developed the new Academic Investment and Improvement Model (AIIM). This model was presented at the 40th International Conference of the Society for University and College Planners in Washington, D.C. in July 2005 and was well received.

While not a perfect model, AIIM reflects the evolution of academic program assessment models and the thoughtful work by the faculty and the administration. It also begins to address the complexity of program assessment that can lead to academic improvements and can be integrated with planning and resource allocation.

The impact of AIIM on academic programs and planning, however, appears uncertain at this time. For example, The Office of the Provost has used the quantitative and qualitative data from AIIM to allocate tenure-track faculty to the various departments and colleges. Further, some departments have used AIIM information in planning and self-improvement. In contrast, other departments continue to question its validity and its impact on improving the teaching and research climate. Both reactions have been anticipated.

These perspectives from some deans and faculty to AIIM signal the need for better communication and understanding regarding the instrument and the

process. We recognize this and are addressing it. The Faculty Senate has established the Academic Program Review Committee, the purpose of which is to review the AIIM model for improvement. The instrument will be administered again in the spring of 2008. Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Donald DeHayes has indicated his support for this system and his intent to use the AIIM in academic planning and resource allocation.

STANDARD THREE: Organization and Governance

The University appreciates the acknowledgement of our commitment to shared governance, to the role of the Board of Governors, and to our "provision for consideration of student views and judgments in those matters in which students have a direct and reasonable interest (page 13)."

The Visiting Team commented that an "opaqueness in decision-making impedes substantive communication, thereby limiting the effectiveness of governance. In addition, decision-making processes and policies are not always sufficiently clear and transparent to fully support institutional effectiveness (page 12)." This analysis calls for better communication and more transparency, which we are addressing. It needs to be said, however, that shared governance at URI works far better than at most institutions where collective bargaining is in place and it has gotten better each year. The executive committee of the Faculty Senate sits on the central planning body and is kept well informed by the various vice presidents of the University, who also sit on the JSPC.

The report identifies an issue with the role of academic leadership in the planning and decision-making processes. I have addressed this along with the role of the new Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs in comments about Standard 2 (page 2). We have a strong commitment to interdisciplinary work and value the Visiting Team's recognition of that commitment.

STANDARD FOUR: Academic Program

The University appreciates the positive descriptions of its academic programs, including our General Education Program, and the positive identification of specific programs both in the report and in the exit interview.

General Education

As was indicated in our Self-Study and in the Team report, the need for a coherent General Education Program was identified as an issue during our last NEASC accreditation visit. Our new General Education program is now in place, and we are in the midst of assessing our success and the degree to which our students are attaining the General Education Learning Outcomes that the University community articulated and approved in early 2006. We have now two cycles of assessment data and are therefore surprised by the report's findings regarding our efforts in general education assessment. "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' (page 16)….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 (page 16)….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 (page 18)."

Assessment of the general education program at URI has attracted a talented and well-respected senior team of individuals from throughout the University. They have been working steadily on this task for the past three years. In fact, one of our most senior and well-respected members, a full professor in the Department of Psychology, has just been granted a sabbatical leave to study the implementation of general education assessment at other institutions of higher learning.

Because student learning outcomes were written for an existing, albeit new general education program, the General Education Assessment Committee determined early that it would be important to verify URI's general education learning outcomes as approved by the URI Faculty Senate. We have completed the pilot phase of this study, which has generated significant conversation. In response, the committee initiated a more thorough study of how well course-level assignments/papers/exams correlate to the general education program outcomes. This past December, the Subcommittee for Assessment of General Education engaged professors in 120 different general education courses (randomly sampled for large, medium, and small class sizes and sections) in submitting student work exemplifying superior, average, and below average responses. The General Education Assessment Committee will analyze assignments and student work during the spring 2008 semester.

The committee also collected survey data regarding student's awareness and attitudes toward general education, which was administered at the same time as the student evaluations of teaching (SETs) to students in all 120 sections. That data has now been captured into SPSS files, and we are beginning to analyze it.

New SET forms will be piloted this spring semester 2008. They will require the faculty members in each course to identify their learning outcome objectives in relation to our general education program in order to have students evaluate them based on their success in meeting these objectives. Faculty members can then submit these materials at the time of promotion and tenure reviews as evidence of teaching effectiveness.

While the implementation of a coherent approach to student learning outcomes assessment in general education is surely a large task, the University does not regard itself as having moved slowly. The Subcommittee for Assessment of

General Education and the administration have moved very strategically and systematically to develop a solid foundation for undertaking any analysis of general education outcomes data. Again, this has entailed pursuit of an iterative process that is largely governed by the academic calendar. Once we have developed solid evidence of current practices within the general education program, we have every intention of enacting a systematic plan to monitor, over time, the effectiveness of our program and of the courses certified to be accorded general education status. We expect to be able to accomplish and enforce this task with a meaningful process within the next 18-24 months. Courses that are not meeting expectations will be reviewed by the Faculty Senate General Education Committee and the Office of Assessment and appropriate faculty will be required to address any areas of deficiency.

Graduate Education

The Team report expressed concern that graduate programs are not reviewed systematically. This same assessment process applies to courses and programs at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Thus, while in the past, it has been true that "the institution does not review graduate programs on a regular basis (page 17)," they will now be reviewed annually under the terms of a Board of Governors' mandate. In addition, beginning in February, the Graduate School will engage graduate directors from across the University in biweekly discussions of *The Formation of Scholars* in order to enhance recruitment, retention and completion rates among graduate students, as well as contribute to strategic planning initiatives.

In 2001, the Graduate School began discussions with the Office of Institutional Research (IR) about gathering data necessary to provide benchmarking for all programs. The lack of staff in IR has made the achievement of this goal impossible to date. However, the University has made a commitment to increase the staffing in IR and will reemphasize the goal of providing benchmarking for all graduate programs (page 17). In addition, the supervision of Institutional Research has been transferred to the Vice Provost for Academic Finances and Academic Personnel (formerly Assistant Provost) who has experience with institutional data sets.

The Visiting Team notes, "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 (page 18)." The Graduate School administered a survey to each graduate program at the University which asked directors to identify their enrollment targets for last year, where they fell short, the reasons for any shortfalls and the plan and resources needed to redress the declining enrollments. These results are currently being analyzed. In addition, the Graduate School has worked closely with the Graduate Student Union (GSU) to provide data regarding competitive stipends for Teaching Assistants and Research Assistants in order to make URI more attractive to prospective students. A new collective bargaining agreement with the GSU has been ratified by both parties and includes salary increases. A proposal has been developed to provide tuition grants or waivers for out-of-state

students who are awarded assistantships. Out of necessity, such proposals get close scrutiny because of the revenue implications in a time of state funding reductions.

The concerns expressed with respect to the current workload of the Vice Provost in charge of graduate education will be addressed with the hiring of a new Vice Provost for Enrollment Management. The initial search for this position failed due to a weak applicant pool. We plan to go out again in the next fiscal year. See Attachments I and II for the job descriptions of 1) the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School and 2) the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management. The incumbent Vice Provost has received a substantial salary adjustment.

Assessment of Student Learning

There are appropriately several references to and observations about our assessment of learning activities throughout the report, primarily in Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation and in Standard Four: Academic Program. We will include our comments on all of our assessment activities below.

Assessment of student learning outcomes is the one area of the report in which we feel our progress was under recognized/acknowledged/valued. Like many of our colleagues around the country, we once thought that assessment of student learning outcomes might be the fad *du jour* and eventually would "go away." The professional accrediting agencies led the charge in demonstrating the value and utility of the outcomes assessment process, and eventually we all moved forward. This has required a significant culture change in how we view teaching and learning.

We now understand and agree that we must continue this important work in a timely fashion. In fact, our Board of Governors, which mandated outcomes assessment for all programs in 2004, expects the completion of one full assessment cycle by all undergraduates programs no later than December 2008. The University will thereafter be obliged to provide annual assessment reports to the Board. To set the foundation of baseline data that is required for any meaningful assessment work, we are now participating in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Education. The Wabash Study Team will be on campus March 24-26, 2008 to conduct informational and focus groups with our students, administrators, faculty and staff to customize our data collection and analyses. We have also extended our analysis of NSSE data by joining this year's administration of the Faculty Survey on Student Engagement (FSSE) through seeking faculty perspectives on the student experience reflected in the study.

We also recognize that we need to use assessment tools in other areas outside of academic programs and to use the results of such assessment activities not only in improving teaching and learning activities but also in planning and resource allocation for the other divisions of the University.

We also want to note that this past November, our Director of Assessment was recognized for the quality of her strategic assessment work at URI when she was appointed as a Teagle Foundation National Assessment Scholar. As one of 20 Teagle Scholars nationally, she is now serving in an advisory and consulting capacity to other college and universities across the country. As further evidence of URI's growing reputation in the field of outcomes assessment, we draw your attention to the fact that McGraw Hill Publishing Company has invited Professor Su Boatright-Horowitz to conduct this February 2008 a multi-day workshop for psychology faculty members from throughout the country on student learning outcomes assessment techniques for large psychology classes.

Upon review of our strategies, we are generally satisfied with our progress with outcomes assessment. We will continue to work diligently in this important area and are confident that we will see long-term improvements in our students' overall learning outcomes.

Link between Assessment, Planning, Evaluation, and Budget

The Visiting Team commented in Standard 2 that, "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 (page 8)." "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 (page 20)."

We are proud of the emphasis we have given to developing the infrastructure to support long-term student learning outcomes assessment, and we are proud of our progress in undertaking meaningful assessment analyses. We are ahead of most other research institutions in these respects, particularly in our adoption of the TrueOutcomes portfolio system and in our participation in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Education to allow us to collect the baseline student learning data that each of our programs need to use in the assessment process. As we acknowledged in our Self-Study, "the university is well and productively along the assessment continuum but is just now reaching the stage where faculty in the majority of departments and programs will be able to collectively study initial learning data, implement any indicated changes, and once again examine student learning patterns (page 34)."

Academic programs began to report their learning outcomes data in the fall of 2007 to their College Deans; the URI Office of Student Learning, Outcomes

Assessment and Accreditation (SLOAA); and to the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education. This initial reporting phase will run through the remainder of this academic year; it is intended to identify best campus practices that might be useful to others at the institution. It also provides the opportunity for departments and colleges to verify initial assessment findings to strengthen the validity and utility of our assessment data.

Thereafter, outcomes assessment reports will be submitted to College Deans and to the SLOAA early each fall semester. (A subcommittee of the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee, LOOC, is currently reviewing and formalizing this policy.) This proposed timing will assist us in aligning outcomes assessment findings with annual resource and budget allocation discussions at various levels of the University. It will also provide data that can be used in program review. As we discussed in the Self-Study report, inculcation of student learning outcomes assessment into the culture of the University has been and will continue to be an iterative process of refining our expectations and using what we are learning about our students' experiences to improve the quality of our institution and of student learning.

I should mention that as of this writing the Rhode Island Board of Governors has reviewed and approved pragmatic learning outcomes, individual assessment plans, data and curricular improvements for all undergraduate programs in the College of Human Science and Services, the College of Nursing, the College of the Environment and Life Sciences, and the College of Engineering. The rest of our programs are scheduled to report over the coming three months. Two of our programs (geosciences and environmental horticulture and turf management) were asked to present their work to a subcommittee of the Board of Governors on Friday, January 25, 2008. The committee was highly complimentary. The faculty's work has been commended by Peggy Maki and will be included in the new edition of her Assessing for Learning.

Program-level vs. Course-level Learning Outcomes Assessment

In Standard Two, the Team states, "Three aspects of the LOOC [Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee] 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…they stated that the LOOC data and information should be viewed as formative evaluation, 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 still-emerging support for the outcomes assessment approach (page 9)." In Standard Four, the Team observes, "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…How successful URI will be in establishing whole program outcomes in the liberal arts and traditional sciences remains to be seen (page 19)."

URI's new Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC) is currently formulating its approach to overseeing the outcomes assessment process. However, several guiding principles of assessment have always been unquestioned and in play in this committee's (and in its predecessor's), deliberations:

- Outcomes assessment at URI refers to an academic program's overall efficacy in meeting its desired aims. URI is pursuing programmatic outcomes assessment not individual course-based assessment. While individual course-based assessment is worthwhile and may contribute to programmatic assessment, it will never be sufficient in and of itself at the University of Rhode Island. Academic programs are the intended unit of analysis.

- We have already seen a number of very strong responses to program assessment planning and follow-through in non-accredited liberal arts and traditional sciences programs. Exemplary programs in these areas at URI include theatre, fine art, music, chemistry, mathematics, environmental horticulture, geosciences, journalism, women's studies, sociology, and anthropology.

- This community believes strongly in the value of engaging in a continuous self-improvement process. To that end, our greatest utility for assessment data is in the formative sense. Collecting evidence of student learning and attainment at the early, middle, and final stages of students' programs will allow us to understand student development and to make course corrections to improve ultimate student comprehension and success.

- It is important to note that there is no actual "LOOC data," as referred to in the Visiting Team report. LOOC, as a committee, will be reviewing certain types of institutional data such as National Survey of Student Engagement, the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, Wabash, and programmatic learning outcomes.

Resources for Outcomes Assessment

"Several faculty members expressed concerns about the burden of the assessment process with little apparent linkage to resource allocation (page 10)." "There are some 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 (page 19.)"

As with other aspects of outcomes assessment, the issue of available resources to support assessment work involves an ongoing conversation. Thus far, some

colleges are offering workload allocation credit to faculty members who are responsible for assessment in their departments. Others are providing summer stipends. Several faculty sabbaticals have been awarded to enable substantive work on assessment. Assessment mini-grants have also been available to departments and individual faculty members for the past three years. This fund is expected to continue. As program assessment translates into discrete initiatives to improve student learning, we expect that the resources will follow.

Recognizing the importance of this assessment agenda, the Provost created and funded the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment and Accreditation through reallocation of existing resources because these activities are a priority. Our ideas and our accomplishments have been recognized through the securing of significant external funds. Examples of such support for our efforts include recent grants from the Davis Educational Foundation and the Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education (FIPSE). This outside support was recognized by the Visiting Team in its report.

STANDARD FIVE: Faculty

The University appreciates the Team's accolades for our faculty in the text of the report and in the identified institutional strengths. We are proud of their commitment to teaching and to their students. Through their scholarship, creative activity and outreach programs, they make significant contributions. We also want to acknowledge the Team's comments about our ADVANCE Program. It has had and continues to have a significant impact on our campus.

The Team reported that it 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 (page 22)." The Report continues to say, "However, in reality the Provost has approved filling all positions which there was a negative recommendation for tenure and promotion." We want to state clearly that we don't want people making wrong decisions because they may feel that a "warm body is better than no body at all." This would not be a productive practice and ultimately would jeopardize the quality of the faculty.

As the Self-Study indicates (Self-Study, page 41), this year I authorized 21 new faculty lines and the conversion of six clinical faculty lines to tenure-track positions. These were in addition to replacement positions. The Team report indicates that, "many on campus view those as replacement lines, not as new lines to accompany increased enrollment and program changes (page 22)." This perception is incorrect. These were new lines and filled in addition to replacement lines. I have allocated nine new faculty lines for the next academic year, and searches are underway for those. These positions are specifically allocated to address the increase in enrollment. I have required the Provost to justify the allocation of these positions using available data. This information was communicated widely on campus through meetings of the Council of Deans, faculty meetings and meetings of the Faculty Senate.

Issues related to planning (page 23) were discussed in an earlier section of this response (see page 2+).

STANDARD SIX: Students

We appreciate the positive comments about our students in the report and in the Strengths section included at the end of the final report. "Students are enthused about their experience at URI and dedicated to the institution. They cite their admiration for the highly committed faculty (page 38)." We are proud of our students, their diversity, and their accomplishments both at the University and upon graduation.

We found the comment about the fragmentation of Substance Abuse Services (page 24) confusing. While the programs and services exist in several units in the Division of Student Affairs (as well as in Academic Affairs), they are all included as members of the "Alcohol Team"' that meets on a regular basis.

We also heard several comments from Team members about issues within Student Affairs while they were on campus and also took seriously comments made in the report. The Team suggested mounting a marketing campaign in Athletics (page 25). That department has hired a full-time marketing director whose major responsibility is the involvement of the student body in intercollegiate events. The Team also advocated the implementation of a standardized Athletic Code of Conduct with consistent outcomes for misbehavior as a complement to the University's Student Code of Conduct for all students (page 25). We have appointed a committee of coaches, students and athletic administrators to develop such a Student Athletic Code of Conduct.

The Team praised the University's Talent Development Program but observed "the unfunded gap on the order of $4000 (page 23), which puts a burden on students." We have identified the resources necessary through reallocation to meet one hundred percent of the unmet student financial need for students in this program. Overall unmet financial need remains an issue for us in spite of our ever-increasing reallocation of funds to our financial aid programs.

We are renovating an old dining hall into a new wellness and fitness center. A major donor is supporting much of this work. The demand for exercise space has increased dramatically, and such a new facility will help to meet that demand and create additional options for students who want "more to do" on campus.

While our assessment activities understandably started in the Division of Academic Affairs, the Student Affairs Division is also measuring learning outcomes (e.g., in our leadership program, in the Office of Student Life and in Health Services).

STANDARD SEVEN: Library and Other Information Resources

The University considers the Libraries to be central and necessary to all aspects of the University's mission. Its maintenance is an area where rapid changes in technology coupled with accelerating inflationary costs present significant challenges. That said, we recognize those funding challenges and strive to address them. We recognize our rankings among our peers and are concerned about those as well. At the request of the Provost, the Library Dean and faculty conducted an analysis of all journals and their use. The Library Dean presented a coherent analysis, and we were able to allocate to the Libraries an additional $450,000 at mid-year (January 2008).

For many years we had a Vice Provost for Information Services and Dean of University Libraries (one person). We decoupled those responsibilities recently because of the rapid growth in technology and diverse responsibilities assigned to that individual. The Dean of Libraries and the Vice Provost for Information Technology Services work closely together.   Although this was not stated in the report, it was observed and commented on positively by the Visiting Team during the visit. It was a condition of the decoupling and the relationship is specified in the job descriptions.

The review on Standard Seven is perceptive and accurate based on the materials that were provided in either the text of the Self-Study or as Appendix materials. The Team was fair, balancing our positive accomplishments within the context of the documented deficiencies that exist within our Libraries.   We are proud of the Team's recognition of, "the Library: offering excellent service under very constrained resources (page 27)."

A few of the initiatives that have transpired during Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 would be:

- The Public Services Department initiated a review of our assessment strategy for LIB 120 and URI 101, to establish a meaningful gauge of our effectiveness to reach the undergraduate population.

- We granted a sabbatical to the Head of Instructional Services to visit other institutions and review their assessment tools and design an instrument for our Information Literacy Program.

- We have established the Education Materials Curriculum Library, with the support of Information Technology Services (ITS) and the NOMAD Grant, and it will be operational this semester. This new facility will assist in the accreditation process for the School of Education by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education whose team will be visiting this semester.

- We are anticipating three faculty vacancies in our Libraries this year, and it is our current plan that these positions and other vacancies will be filled.

The Libraries' managers continue to discuss anticipated savings and increased services based upon reorganization proposals currently under discussion with the Provost's Office. These discussions emphasize the need for an increase in the current personnel to meet critical shortages, which was noted by the Team as inadequate to service a library of this size.

- The physical environment of the Library in Kingston has been brought to the attention of the Asset Protection Team at the University, and these issues are to be addressed during this Spring semester.

- The Special Collections Unit, working with the Pell Family and the URI Foundation, has received a $200,000 matching gift. We have also submitted a proposal for a NEH Grant in the amount of $500,000 to support this Pell Political Papers Project.

- The Library has a central place in the Capital Campaign: Making A Difference. This was pointed out by the Visiting Team.

The Visiting Team report specifically highlights the fact that the University Libraries is not mentioned in the University's Strategic Plan (page 26). While this observation cannot be disputed, it does not mean that the Administration has not been supportive. As stated in the Team's report, the University has made attempts, often successful, at supplementing the budget. The Library will be addressed in the new planning process. The Dean of the Libraries is a member of the Deans' Council, and would be directly involved in establishing the priorities in support of an academic and research mission. This would have significant impact on the potential growth for our Library capital budget, keeping in mind the fragility of the overall budget. The Provost's Office has always been supportive of the Libraries' efforts. The incoming Provost comes from an institution with historically the same scenario for resource allocation as faced by the University of Rhode Island. He is aware of the need to establish a firm budget base with incremental increases for library resources.

The current emphasis on electronic resources has often neglected to take into account the very high costs of these resources. The inflation factors and value of the dollar are having a great impact on our ability to maintain our collections. The Libraries have been aware of these inflationary factors for years and have addressed them through analysis of its collections, but the general user has lost the sense of actual cost of this type of service, which has been complicated by the new packaging of library resources. This year, it was necessary to reduce our electronic journal holdings by $200,000 due to budget constraints. We were able to accomplish this through an analysis of usage statistics by title. At the same time, because of inflationary factors, we needed approximately $500,000 more than budgeted to maintain our subscriptions. As indicated earlier, in our mid-year budget review, we provided the Libraries with $450,000. This will allow us to maintain our current level of acquisitions while at the same time allow us to plan for next year. The 2007-2008 supplement indicates that we are making efforts to address our budgetary issues. In December 2007 the Budget Office

provided the following encouragement: "As you are aware, delivery of the curriculum is of the highest priority and resources, including Library capital, are necessary to address the increased number of students in the Spring 2008 Semester as well as beyond." The current proposal before the Board of Governors is to increase the Libraries budget by $400,000. Unfortunately, this request, if funded, will not increase our purchasing power when we are faced with an average of 33% increase in serials and 17% for monographs. This problem extends beyond the University of Rhode Island. The Faculty Senate Library Committee introduced a resolution to the Faculty Senate on January 31, 2008 advocating ways to continue to disseminate knowledge but perhaps in less costly ways (Attachment III). The resolution was adopted.

The University is making every attempt to look beyond level funding and level staffing in order to support the academic mission of the Libraries. The issues raised by the Team's analysis of our Self-Study are concerns that are generally recognized across this campus. The praise given to the Libraries for its dedication and efforts to maintain a high level of service are also recognized across the campus.

The University has recognized the value of the Libraries as noted by the Visiting Team. The Team specifically highlighted the quotation from our Making a Difference Campaign which states that "the Library [is] 'heart and soul of the University, central to our mission of teaching, research and service….'" This is the goal that we are working toward. We may not get beyond level funding or staffing in the immediate term, but, the outlook for the future, with the Libraries recognized as a critical component for the delivery on our promise of our academic mission, seems positive.

The one area of confusion in the Team's report appears in the first paragraph: "the Dean of the Libraries …with a staff of 127 in the combined units of Library and Information Technology Services." To clarify, the Libraries and Information Technology are staffed and budgeted separately. We have 52 positions assigned to the University Libraries.

STANDARD EIGHT: Physical and Technological Resources

We appreciate the positive comments about the campuses and the identification of the campus and our facilities plans as "Strengths" in the report. As the Visiting Team indicates, the University has experienced a significant increase in new facilities, renovations and additions to existing facilities and improved its parking provisions, and we continue to establish priorities to use best our Asset Protection dollars.

Construction on the Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences (CBLS) continues. A "Topping Off" ceremony was held on November 14, 2007. Groundbreaking for the new College of Pharmacy building is scheduled for late Summer 2008. That building is now designed as a 147k square foot facility.

Fundraising for both facilities is progressing to supplement the support provided by the State.

The new Library and Underwater Exploration Center on the Narragansett Bay Campus has advanced from the planning and design phase to the construction phase. A groundbreaking was held on November 5, 2007.

In addition to the two new apartment-style residences (page 29), we have also constructed and opened a suite-style residence hall for a total of 800 new beds.

The University has continued its "stewardship" evaluation of repair needs, incorporating Kingston Campus data through FY 2007 and is extending this detailed evaluation of facilities investments and service support to its Narragansett Bay and Providence Campuses. The Team advocated this during its visit. This more complete information will be used to gauge the extent of needs to address the backlog of capital repair and modernization to inform the University's strategic planning and budget requests for Asset Protection and Capital Improvement funding as we move forward.

The University has embraced the concept of sustainable design for its recent and current projects. The new residence halls are expected to be LEED Certified and the new dining hall, Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences, the College of Pharmacy and all future projects are expected to be designated LEED Silver.

As mentioned under the Library and Information section, our Vice Provost for Information Technology Services, who oversees all technology, works closely with the Dean of University Libraries. One evaluator commented on this positively during the visit. Their offices, in fact, are in the same suite. In addition, it should be noted that our Vice Provost for Information Technology Services sits as a member of the President's Team.

STANDARD NINE: Financial Resources

We appreciate the acknowledgement of our ability to operate "within significant constraints and for managing its [our] resources in support of its [our] mission and purposes (page 32)." We also understand the Team's identification of our financial situation as a "Concern." Since the visit, the financial outlook in the State of Rhode Island has deteriorated even more, and this year we are participating in a small mid-year rescission. Our increase in enrollment and concomitant increase in tuition and fee revenue will allow us to address this. We are anticipating a further reduction for FY 09; the Governor's budget proposal further reduces state funding by $10m.

We are, as the Team noted, exploring alternative methods of funding and additional revenue sources. Our Tuition and Fee revenue continues to increase due to a planned increase in enrollment. From FY 06 to FY 08, our enrollment increased by over 1000 financial full-time equivalents.

State support for the General Obligation bond project continues to grow. The debt service paid by the State in FY 08 is estimated to be $11.2M.

Our $100M Capital Campaign entered its public phase in October, just prior to the Team visit. By the end of 2007, the University had received over $60M in commitments, with a significant number of "asks" pending. We are confident that we will surpass the $100M goal.

The creations of a URI Research Foundation should allow us to provide better support for our research community, act with more agility on issues related to research and ultimately increase the volume of research funding. Our Board of Governors just approved the transfer of commercialization management from the URI Foundation (as of January 1, 2008, this unit is charged with all fundraising responsibilities) to the new URI Research Foundation. We have made the appropriate appointments in the Research Foundation to manage the commercialization of URI's protected intellectual property. Plans for our Research and Technology Park are progressing, and the academic deans are suggesting "tenants" and "partners" who might participate in this revenue-generating venture.

We are aware of the concern of the Visiting Team about the fiscal health of the University. We share this significant issue with other public institutions in New England, although we don't take "comfort in numbers." As the Team report pointed out, NEASC communicated to the University in 1998, 2001 and in 2003 that "the University gives emphasis to its success in …assuring financial stability…(and) undertaking planning in relation to changing economic conditions." This is an on-going activity as reflected in our strategic plans, our identification of additional revenue sources, our increased fundraising activities and our planned enrollment growth. Enhanced participation in these planning activities by our Joint Strategic Planning Committee, our Financial and Academic leadership and the faculty will increase our chances of success. We recognize that our commitment to excellence and access will put limits on what we can and should do with tuition and fee costs, further underscoring the need to increase our revenue base from additional sources and ensure that we are using all the funds that we do have in a way that will best serve our various constituencies, especially our students.

STANDARD TEN: Public Disclosure

The Visiting Team suggested changes in two areas. First, it pointed out that the NEASC Standards specifies that courses not taught in three years should be deleted from the catalog. The University of Rhode Island policy allows for untaught courses to remain in the catalog for four years. We have inventoried our courses, and there is proposed legislation before our Curricular Affairs Committee to change the UNIVERSITY MANUAL to bring us in compliance with the NEASC Standards. We anticipate that the Faculty Senate will act upon this legislation this spring.

The Team also pointed out that while we publish information about the cost of education, we do not publicize the expected amount of debt upon graduation, as specified in Standard 10.11. With the enhancement of our Institutional Research Office and our participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability, more data will be available, transparent and visible to students and other constituencies.

The Team also commented on the lack of standardization in the campus websites and indicated that the University's branding project should help to solve this issue. We have made substantial progress on the branding initiative and want to provide an update.

URI Branding Initiative

The University of Rhode Island initiated a branding process in July 2006. Over 100 internal and external people attended an all-day workshop featuring outside public relations consultants and communications professionals from the University of Maryland and the University of Nebraska.

Following the July session, I appointed a 22 member branding steering committee composed of faculty, staff, managers, and alumni. The committee was charged with guiding the branding process.

We engaged the consulting firm FORGE Worldwide to work with the University in conducting qualitative and quantitative research with a variety of key University stakeholders (such as prospective students, current students, alumni). FORGE itself also conducted one-on-one interviews with 50 internal and external stakeholders.

Since mid-December (2007), FORGE has made six presentations regarding its finding, its analysis of URI, and its preliminary recommendations. These presentations were made to the Branding Steering Committee, President's Team, Council of Deans, Division of University Advancement, Alumni Executive Board, and key staff from around the campus.

On February 8th, FORGE will present its final recommendations to the Branding Steering Committee. The Committee is charged with submitting a final report and recommendations to Vice President for Advancement Robert Beagle and me.

It is anticipated that the "brand" will be rolled out in March, with a fully developed communications plan in place for pursuing the University's brand identity, integrated marketing, and overall communications. The brand campaign will be designed as a five-year program.

STANDARD ELEVEN: Integrity

The Visiting Team recommended that the Diversity Committee be reinstated.

The issues formerly addressed by the Diversity Committee are currently being addressed by the President's Commission on Faculty, Staff and Students of Color, the President's Commission on the Status of Women, the Disability Services Committee and the ADVANCE group.

We held an all-day URI Equity Forum on Friday, February 1, 2008 (see Attachment IV). A vacancy in the position of Director of Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity and Diversity provided us with the opportunity to review reports and recommendations from several groups in a facilitated forum to explore potential organizational models that would best match the needs and goals of the University now and in the future. We will be able to provide more information on the outcomes of that Forum at our hearing on February 28, 2008.

"There is concern that graduate students are not well trained in research ethics at the departmental level and this is an issue that should be addressed (page 37)." We participate in the nationally recognized Research Ethics Fellows Program, highlighted in a Council for Graduate Schools best practices manual, which trains graduate students and their faculty mentors from departments across the University in the eleven areas of research ethics outlined by the federal Office of Research Integrity. These teams are sent back to their home departments to implement research ethics training. The program has trained more than one-hundred and twenty students and faculty in four years and continues to expand. In addition, the workshops for Graduate Directors will include training on research ethics and a mandate from the Graduate School to provide evidence of research ethic education for all graduate students at the departmental level.

The Team observed as a concern 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 (page 37)." The University is creating a web page delineating all University ethics and integrity related policies and procedures, and this will soon appear on the Research Office home page.

CONCLUSION

As I have indicated in this response, we are addressing in a serious way the items identified as "Concerns." In addition, we have implemented or started to implement many of the suggestions made by the Visiting Team.

We have taken several steps to address the fiscal health of the University. We have accelerated our planning procedures and made a commitment to the integration of all plans as a basis for decision making. We are continuing and expanding our assessment activities and will link the results of those efforts to our planning decisions. We recognize that the fiscal condition of the State and the declining State support will require difficult decisions and the setting of agreed-upon priorities. We are confident that we are positioned to do this.

Finally, let me say that my tenure as President of the University of Rhode Island will end on June 30, 2009 after eighteen years of service here and my twenty-seventh as a university president and chancellor. Despite success on many fronts, some of URI challenges apparent in 1991 and noted again in this report persist today. One of our emeriti faculty members wears a large button which reads, "The University of Rhode Island: Under-funded Since 1892." A sad reality. We have been able to make remarkable progress in transforming this University, but the continuing struggle to match mission with money takes its toll. I am certain that new energy and insight in the offices of President and Provost will reinvigorate our efforts for consistent excellence.

Once again, on behalf of all of us at the University of Rhode Island, we thank the Commission and the Visiting Team for their support of our efforts through this honest and valuable process. We appreciate the positive comments in the Report Summary (page 38) and take seriously the items identified as concerns.

We appreciate the process and the support.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Carothers
President

attachments

c: M. Beverly Swan, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
    Donald H. DeHayes, Incoming Provost and Vice President for Academic
    Affairs