

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. Through its organizational design and governance structure, the institution creates and sustains an environment that encourages teaching, learning, service, scholarship, and where appropriate, research and creative activity. It assures provision of support adequate for the appropriate functioning of each organizational component.

DESCRIPTION

Article XII of the State Constitution gives the General Assembly the power to promote and fund public schools in Rhode Island. The legal authority for the Board of Governors for Higher Education is set forth in Title 16, Chapter 59 of the General Laws of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations (GLRI). The Board is not directly a department of State Government but serves the State as a Public Corporation with membership appointed by the Governor. The Board has jurisdiction over the University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, the Community College of Rhode Island, and the Office of Higher Education. The Office of Higher Education (OHE) is directed by the Commissioner for Higher Education and performs the research and administrative functions required by the Board. OHE is organized into five units: The Commissioner's Office, Finance and Management, Academics and Student Affairs, Legal Affairs, and External Affairs. OHE is in constant contact with the three institutions.

The Board consists of 12 members, 10 of whom are public members chosen by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. They serve three-year terms and may serve a maximum of three consecutive terms. Under a 1993 law the eleventh seat is reserved for an in-state student who serves a single two-year term and attends the University, the College, or the Community College. The twelfth seat is assigned to the Chair of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. The Chair of the Board, who may serve indefinitely, is chosen by the Governor from among the public members. Upon selection, every new member attends a Board Orientation session held by the Chair and the Office of Higher Education staff. Further, board members attend an annual retreat designed to be highly interactive. The Board web site (<http://www.ribghe.org/>) provides a biographical sketch of each member. All members serve pro bono and none has a financial interest in any of the institutions. Current members have experience in the educational, legal, financial, labor, and/or business sectors of the State, and all are committed to the Board's goals.

Most of the Board's work is done in committee. There are five committees, and each meets about ten times per year. The committees are: 1) Academic and Student Affairs; 2) Facilities, which usually meets jointly with 3) Finance and Management; 4) Personnel; and 5) Government Relations. The committees meet with appropriate officers and groups from the schools to consider policy, programs, actions, and budgets. In addition, the Operating Executive Committee, composed of the three Presidents and chaired by the Commission of Higher Education, meets monthly to assess educational needs, develop plans to fulfill the goals of higher education, and discuss policy recommendations.

One of the Board's prescribed powers is to establish a clear, distinct mission statement for each of the three institutions with the goal of minimizing duplication and maximizing efficiency. The Board strives to encourage, approve, and fund those activities that will help each institution achieve its mission. While final funding authority lies with the State legislature, the Board prepares and presents both an annual budget and a five-year budget for the Office of Higher Education and the three institutions. (3.3, 3.9)

An overview of the administrative structure of the University, reproduced in the preface of this document, is provided in the *University Manual* (hereafter simply the *Manual*). The President, the chief executive officer of the University, is appointed by and reports to the Board which annually reviews his performance. The Board delegates to the President the authority and autonomy to manage the University and to achieve its mission and goals (<http://www.uri.edu/home/about/mission.html>). It is prohibited by law from engaging in the operation or administration of the University [GLRI 16-59-4(3) and *Manual* 2-10-10]. Each year, the President must submit to the Board a Management Letter reviewing the University's success in fulfilling its mission (http://www.uri.edu/pspd/planserv/2006_Mgt_Ltr_Final.doc). Appointments are typically for three years and the policy for evaluation is given on the Board web site (<http://www.righe.org/>).

The administration of the University is hierarchical. The President is supported in his management of the University by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Vice President for Administration, the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, the Vice President for Student Affairs, and the Vice President for University Advancement. Other management positions are itemized in Chapter 2 of the *Manual*, which also provides for the formation of search committees in the selection of administrative officers. Faculty and staff are separately represented by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), and personnel policies are accordingly governed by federal Affirmative Action requirements, state personnel regulations, Board of Governors' policies, the *Manual*, as well as the various extant collective bargaining agreements. All administrative officers are subject to periodic evaluation by their superiors. The Vice Presidents are evaluated annually by the President.

The President is advised by numerous bodies, foremost among them the President's Team, comprised of the Vice Presidents, the President of the URI Foundation, and the two Executive Assistants to the President. The President's Team meets biweekly to address management issues. The Joint Strategic Planning Committee (JSPC) was created in 2003 to provide a more effective mechanism for shared governance and institutional strategic planning and evaluation. Its mission is to advise the President and the Faculty Senate (discussed below) about broad policies affecting the general direction of the University, assist in the creation, implementation, and monitoring of the Strategic Plan, review and contribute priority items for the budget, the Capital Planning priorities in conjunction with the long-range Campus Master Plan, the Capital Campaign, and any other issues of a strategic nature. Included in its membership are the President, the Provost and the other four Vice Presidents, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, a representative from the Council of Deans, the Presidents of both the Student Senate and Graduate Student Association, and two appointees from the University staff. The JSPC meets approximately every three weeks. For more information of the JSPC, see *Standard 2: Planning and Evaluation*.

In addition to the structured advisory committees, the President obtains advice from the Vice Presidents at their biweekly meeting and at scheduled meetings with the Executive Committees of the Faculty Senate and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the collective bargaining unit for faculty. The President attends Faculty Senate meetings, and his report is an agenda item. He meets often with student leaders and periodically with the Student Senate and the Graduate Student Association. The President's Advisory Council, established in 2003, meets at the President's call, approximately twice a year, to provide advice, feedback, and commentary to the President on a range of institutional policies, plans, and strategies. The President's Council is made up of leaders of Rhode Island and the nation, many of them University alumni, in order to get a fresh perspective on the external environment and the University's response to a world of accelerating change. There are also several ad hoc advisory committees in academic areas and communications, and these are also an important resource to the executive management of the University.

The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs reports to the President. The Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School, in concert with the Provost, oversees the day-to-day academic administration

of the institution. The Provost's staff, including the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School, Assistant Provost, Vice Provost for Urban Programs, and the Vice Provost for Information Technology Services, meets weekly. This group shares information and advises the Provost on issues of academic import. The University's academic activities are housed in nine degree-granting colleges, each headed by a Dean. The selection of Deans requires an advisory committee appointed by the President under the provisions of the URI-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement. The Council of Deans, chaired by the Provost and comprised of all Deans and the Provost's staff, meets every two weeks to share information with the Provost, work on major academic affairs concerns and issues related to the University's Strategic Plan, and to address policies.

The Vice Provost for Urban Programs is responsible for programs associated with the Feinstein Providence Campus. Responsibilities of the Vice Provost in administering programs associated with the Feinstein Providence Campus are outlined in sections 3.40.10 through 3.40.16 inclusive in the *Manual*.

Among the responsibilities of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School is responsibility for the Graduate School as outlined in sections 3.30.10 through 3.30.16 inclusive in the *Manual*. Administration of the Graduate School is assisted by two associate deans. The Graduate Council has primary responsibility for establishing and maintaining academic integrity of graduate programs. The membership, responsibilities, and operational rules of the Graduate Council are set forth in sections 5.65.10 through 5.65.43 of the *Manual*.

The faculty maintains a critical role in ensuring academic integrity and implementation of institutional policies related to the mission of the University. Indeed, shared governance, which is the central role of the faculty in establishing and maintaining integrity of academic programs, is mandated in the General Laws of the State of Rhode Island, Section 16.32.10, viz.

It shall also be the duty of the President and a committee of the faculty, with the approval of the Board of Governors for Higher Education, to arrange courses of study conforming to all acts of Congress, and prescribe any qualifications for the admission of students and any rules of study, exercise, discipline, and government as the resident and committee may deem proper.

Acting as a whole body, the General Faculty's role in the governance of the University is limited to meeting three times a year to vote on the granting of degrees and to hear from the President. The role of the "committee of the faculty" as set forth by the Rhode Island General Assembly was delegated by the Act of the General Faculty to the University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate on May 2, 1960. The responsibilities of the Faculty Senate as having ultimate legislative power with regard to educational policies are set forth in Article II of the Constitution of the Faculty Senate, and the Faculty Senate's power and duties are enumerated in its constitution, which can be found in Appendix B of the *Manual*. Its activities are assisted by a staff and a number of standing committees. The Faculty Senate is the principal legislative body at the University and plays a central role in reviewing and approving academic programs and policies, subject to the approval of the President and, in certain cases, the Board of Governors. The Senate annually hears reports from its standing committees. It is also the appointing authority for faculty representation to many campus committees. The Faculty Senate has developed a system of faculty evaluation of academic administrative officers by which the officers are reviewed every five years.

The Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC) serves as the coordinating body for all other Senate Committees and prepares the agendas for monthly meetings of the Faculty Senate. As noted previously, the FSEC members all serve as members of the JSPC that is advisory to the President on all University policies and strategic initiatives as set forth in Section 5.70.10 of the *Manual*.

The role of faculty in the governance of individual colleges and departments is covered in Sections 4.32.10 through 4.60.22 of the *Manual*. These sections set forth frequency and membership of meetings and general principles for

the conduct of college and departmental academic business. Some colleges have bylaws that set forth specifics of governance within the college, which are consistent with the general provisions of the *Manual*.

Department chairs have duties that are enumerated in Section 3.21.10 of the *Manual* and in the *Agreement Between the Rhode Island Board of Governors and the University of Rhode Island Chapter of the American Association of University Professors* (hereafter referred to as *Agreement*). Chairs, who remain members of the collective bargaining unit, are appointed for renewable three-year terms and serve as departmental administrators charged with providing leadership for the instructional activities of their departments. By tradition and the *Agreement*, the evaluation of faculty in teaching, research/creative activity, and service is conducted via a system of peer review. Department chairs administer and participate in the evaluation process and make an independent recommendation to the Dean.

Part III of Chapter 8 of the *Manual* prescribes the rights, duties, and responsibilities of the faculty in regard to the development of courses and programs. Chapter 8 of the *Manual* also provides the rules and regulations to be followed in the conduct of instruction, examinations, grades, and other academic matters. The system of Faculty Governance at the college and department levels is minimally governed by *Manual* Sections 4.45.10 through 4.60.15 inclusive. (3.10)

The system of governance at the University makes provisions for student views and judgment concerning matters in which they have interest. Section 9.10.10 of the *Manual*, as last amended on April 10, 2001, authorizes the Student Senate as the representative body for undergraduate students and the Graduate Student Association as the representative body for graduate students. Two key committees of the University, the Faculty Senate and the Joint Strategic Planning Committee, include membership of the President of the Student Senate as the representative of undergraduate students and the President of the Graduate Student Association. In addition to representation on these key committees, other University boards and committees as set forth in the *Manual* have student representatives. Among these boards and committees are: Athletics Advisory Board, Information Resources Council, Student Orientation Advisory Committee, Campus Security and Parking Committee, Graduate Council (four graduate students), Student Rights and Responsibilities Committee, University Conduct Board, University Appeals Board, and the Admissions Advisory Committee. At the level of the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education, students are represented by a full voting member as described previously. In recent years, the student members of the Board have been quite articulate in representing student concerns, particularly regarding the rising costs of higher education and affordability to students.

The University of Rhode Island Student Senate is a Public Corporation chartered independently from the University. It is charged, according to its governing instruments, to:

... foster awareness of the students' role in the University community, investigate student problems and take appropriate action, provide the official voice through which student opinions may be expressed, encourage responsible student participation in the overall policy and decision-making processes of the University community, to enhance the quality and scope of education at the University, to participate in University and Faculty Senate committees, and to provide means for responsible and effective participation in the organization of student affairs ...

The Student Senate has 45 regularly seated members. Each degree-granting college is represented by one senator, as well as University College. Twenty seats are set aside and divided proportionately between on-campus and off-campus residency groups. Five seats are set aside for freshmen. The remainder consist of senator-at-large seats, who represent the student body generally. Qualifications for running and voting for each seat is restricted explicitly to each constituency (e.g., only freshmen may run for and vote for freshman representatives). The body is led by the President of the Senate, annually elected along with a Vice Presidential running mate every spring.

The President of the Senate, by virtue of the office, is also the President of the Student Body and acts as the official voice and representative of the students to all relevant parties. The Vice President acts as the moderator of the Senate and manages internal dynamics.

The Student Senate meets weekly to receive committee reports and to act upon legislation and other matters. The vast majority of the body's work, however, is accomplished through committees among which are divided the Senate's responsibilities, both internal and external. There are eight standing committees, seven of which convene weekly: the Student Organization Advisory and Review Committee (SOARC), Finance Committee, Academic Affairs, Campus Affairs, External Affairs, Cultural Affairs, and the Rules and Ethics Committee. The Executive Committee, which is composed of the President, Vice President, all committee chairs, and appointed officers, is the steering committee of the Senate, and is charged with maintaining the smooth functioning of the body and providing large-scale vision and goals for the Senate.

The alumni are represented by the Alumni Association, whose purpose is to foster lifelong, mutually beneficial relationships among its current and future alumni and the University through programs and services that inform, involve, and invest them as committed partners of the University, its mission, and traditions (<http://www.advance.uri.edu/alumni/association/default.htm>). The alumni are critical members of the University community through involvement in fund raising, their support for state bond referenda, and their collective influence with the state legislature. The Alumni Association Executive Board sets policy for the Alumni Association and works with Alumni Relations staff to plan events and decide which initiatives to undertake. Members of the Executive Board are nominated and elected annually by alumni. The Alumni Association encourages its constituents to stay involved with the University by participating in one of its many committees.

ASSESSMENT

The effectiveness of the organizational structure and governance of the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education is assured by periodic review by the Governor's Office as well as through committees on educational oversight established by the Rhode Island General Assembly. The effectiveness of the University of Rhode Island's organizational structure and system of governance is improved through a system of periodic review by the President and the Faculty Senate. In the last ten years, the system of governance has undergone some revision to improve inclusion of various University constituencies in the strategic planning process. As a result of a review of the now defunct Joint Educational Policy Committee (JEPC) and a system of Presidential Common Agenda Meetings or open forums, the Joint Strategic Planning Committee was established in legislation #02-03-3 on April 10, 2003, as a Joint Presidential and Faculty Senate Committee aimed at including representatives from multiple University constituencies, including top administrators, faculty, staff, and students. During the 2002–2003 academic year, the Faculty Senate Constitution Bylaws and *University Manual* Committee undertook an effort to reorganize Chapter 5 of the *University Manual* to better define Presidential and Faculty Senate jurisdictions as to committees. The rationale for the reorganization is set forth in Section 5.10.11 of the *Manual*.

Based on the work done for this self-study, three areas were identified for improvement: 1) coordination of periodic assessment efforts and the "closing of the loop" among assessment, strategic planning, and implementation of recommended improvements; 2) the fostering of greater interest in University governance and strategic planning among the faculty (with particular emphasis among the junior faculty); and 3) fostering a greater degree of faculty–administrative shared governance at the college and departmental levels, and increasing the level adoption of active participatory strategic planning in the colleges and departments.

PROJECTION

In recognition that coordination of assessment and “closing the loop” among assessment, strategic planning, and implementation of recommended improvements is a key area identified for improvement by this self-study, the FSEC and the President have charged the JSPC to include this coordination function. The Faculty Senate has passed Faculty Senate Bill 06-07-24 and the President has approved it on April 6, 2007, which adds to Section 5.70.10 of the *Manual* the new charge of the JSPC being responsible for the periodic and systematic review of various aspects of institutional effectiveness and ensuring that the results of these reviews are used for continuing improvement. It is expected that in the next cycles of assessment, planning, and implementation of recommendations, the JSPC will be taking a more active role in this process.

The FSEC has discussed the fostering of greater interest in University governance, especially among junior faculty members. It is recognized that the task of staffing the various committees that undertake much of the Senate’s important work is becoming difficult. Current and future members of the FSEC will redouble their efforts to include junior faculty as members of committees, particularly those committees known to provide lesser time commitments to members. The FSEC will work with the Provost and academic deans in assuring junior faculty members that a reasonable amount of service to the University is a positive rather than negative consideration in promotion and tenure decisions.

The Student Senate Bylaws Committee is considering introducing a new position. The Chief Information Officer, as it would be titled, would be charged with the responsibility of “creating and maintaining the Student Senate’s institutional memory, as well as organizing and making available to the Senate all information about the University and the State of Rhode Island relevant to the execution of its purpose and duties . . .” With many long-serving senators graduating soon, the Student Senate feels that it is necessary to create a position that will catalog and make readily available all pertinent information for future Senates and students.”

To address the issue of key decisions being made outside the sphere of awareness of students, a multi-pronged effort may be most successful. The Student Senate will encourage its media organs to be more diligent in their coverage of administration activities. Administrative departments will be encouraged to be more voluntarily forthcoming to the students when larger policy issues are about to be considered. Finally, the Senate will take a more pro-active stance, rather than its current reactive approach, to addressing issues of concern to students, thereby helping to set the agenda of policy discussions even if they have no direct power over their outcome.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

In summary, the University of Rhode Island and its governing board, the RIBGHE, have undertaken efforts of continual improvement of organizational and governance structures and practices as a result of past accreditation recommendations. In this current self-assessment in preparation for reaccreditation, the University community has identified three areas for improvement. As a broad generalization, most in the University community feel that the organization and governance structures of the RIBGHE and the University allow for input by administrators, faculty, staff, alumni, and other clientele, and there is a good mechanism for communicating concerns to decision makers. In the last few years, concern for assessing institutional effectiveness have led to a number of structural changes in University governance (e.g., institution of the JSPC) allowing for periodic systematic review of academic programs and the effectiveness of the entire institution.