STANDARD FOUR: ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

The institution's academic programs are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes. The institution works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the academic quality and integrity of its academic programs and the credits and degrees awarded. The institution develops the systematic means to understand how and what students are learning and to use the evidence obtained to improve the academic program.

INTRODUCTION

From its degree-granting colleges in Arts and Sciences (A&S), Business Administration, Continuing Education (CCE), Engineering, Environment and Life Sciences (CELS), Human Science and Services (HSS), Nursing, Pharmacy, the Graduate School of Oceanography, and the nondegree-granting, service-oriented University College and Graduate School, the University of Rhode Island offers a rich variety of academic programs and opportunities to undergraduate and graduate students to prepare them to be involved citizens and lifelong learners. The University's academic programs are best described as mature and based on traditional disciplines for a land/sea/urban grant institution, but opportunities abound for students to take advantage of interdisciplinary studies and individualized programs. For example, undergraduate study in engineering at a land grant institution is a traditional offering as are language studies in German, French, and Spanish; the innovative, prestigious International Engineering Program combines studies in these traditional disciplines (as well as the recently implemented offering in Chinese) in a five-year program including internship and study abroad opportunities with corporate partners as well as partner universities in Europe, Latin America, Canada, and, now, Asia. With respect to graduate studies, the outstanding Graduate School of Oceanography (GSO) is home to the Archaeological Oceanography Program, led by renowned explorer Robert Ballard. Students in the Master of Arts in History program can avail themselves of links to these oceanographic resources through the program's Archaeology and Anthropology option. Within CELS, another area of strength at the University is resource economics. Natural resources science and marine affairs offer students additional opportunities to augment graduate studies with the Coastal Institute's Coastal Fellows Program from NSF funding through its IGERT program. Further, University initiatives have led to the spring 2007 groundbreaking ceremonies for the new Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences, which will be the hub of imaginative undergraduate and graduate education, and cutting-edge research and modern workforce development for economic growth in Rhode Island's biotechnology, health and life sciences sectors. These are just a few examples of the innovative initiatives underpinning the courses of study in the University's degree programs.

In the 2005–2006 academic year, the University awarded 2,015 undergraduate degrees, 87 Pharm.D. degrees, 493 master's degrees and 67 doctorates (http://autocrat.uri.edu/fileadmin/ir/infobank/programs/PDF/DEGREES_2005-2006.pdf). More than 125 degree options are available to undergraduates. The master's degree is offered in 48 areas of study and the doctorate in 36. Admission requirements are documented in the University of Rhode Island *Catalog* (http://www.uri.edu/catalog/) , and the admission processes are centrally administered. These requirements, as well as retention and completion efforts, are more fully discussed under *Standard 6: Students*.

Guided by a curriculum process that is consistent with the University's mission of being faculty-driven and student-centered, academic programs reflect a commitment to traditional fields of study as well as to meeting the challenges of new realms of inquiry. Regular review by discipline-based accrediting agencies (Appendix 4.1 Professional Program Accreditation Information) or internal oversight ensures that programs of study are current.

As can be expected in any large institution, however, there are some programmatic difficulties. The University has notified the Commission that the programmatic accreditation review reports of the School Psychology Ph.D. Program by the American Psychological Association, the Graduate Program in Library and Information Sciences, and the Doctor of Audiology Program by the American Speech–Language Hearing Association have raised some

issues (documents available in the workroom).

Issues in the School Psychology Program included a number of resource-related concerns currently being addressed. For example, over the past two years, two new faculty members have been hired to fill previously vacant positions in the program and another faculty hire is anticipated for 2008. In addition, a part-time clerical position has been assigned to the program for administrative support and resources have been provided for child-sized furniture and for assessment instruments for use in clinical contexts. Curricular aspects of the program are being addressed by faculty members.

The Graduate School of Library and Information Studies (GSLIS) has been asked to address concerns regarding planning and evaluation processes and the integration of current technologies into the curriculum. In response, GSLIS is working closely with the Director of the Office of Assessment and will adopt the TrueOutcomes Portfolio System in an effort to incorporate data from student learning outcomes into the planning and evaluation process. Faculty will also engage in a systematic effort to integrate electronic communications technologies into courses as both content and delivery mode. Collaborating with the Instructional Development Program and the Office of Instructional Technology, faculty will engage in strategic planning, followed by training and utilization of enhanced classroom technologies.

With respect to the Doctor of Audiology program, the University has discontinued the program because of issues primarily related to the ability to devote sufficient resources to maintain an accredited program in this area. Students already matriculated in the program were assisted in transferring to other accredited programs to complete their studies.

Curriculum changes (Appendix 4.2 Undergraduate Program Changes 1995–1996 to 2005–2006) are controlled through Faculty Senate processes as supported by its Curricular Affairs Committee for undergraduate programs and the Graduate Council for graduate programs (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/Committee_Members.html) (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/Curricular_Procedures.html). Our commitment to excellence in curriculum development is reflected in the successful implementation of a new General Education program in the undergraduate curriculum and the significant progress toward campus-wide delineation of student outcomes and assessment of student learning (Faculty Senate, General Education Program effective fall 2004 available at [http://www.uri.edu/facsen/GENED_Program_May04.html]). The undergraduate courses of study specifically include, through the General Education requirement, seven competencies and skills imperative in today's generally educated student. Delivery of these undergraduate program requirements is administered separately from graduate program requirements, but both are supported by structures designed to ensure coherence in instructional methods and procedures. For both undergraduate and graduate programs, new program approvals flow from the Faculty Senate's approval process to that of the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education (RIBGHE). Consistency in quality across programs is maintained through Faculty Senate and Graduate School approval processes that are documented on the web (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/).

As discussed more fully under *Standard 2: Planning and Evaluation*, recent initiatives to improve the academic program quality review process have resulted in the University's Academic Investment and Improvement Model (AIIM) (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/AIIM_Home.html). Development of this model was undertaken with an outside consultant and thereby included an external perspective based on input from program review processes implemented at other institutions. The March 2006 Report of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee documents the replacement of the former program quality review system with the AIIM model (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/FSEC_Report_5.pdf). Program quality data were collected from faculty and department chairs with review and further input by deans and other administrators using an electronic questionnaire in fall 2005. These program quality data were then combined with the University's financial data (PCA) to allow for review of both qualitative and financial considerations concurrently. For a discussion of the PCA, see the NEASC Evaluation Team Report from the visit of October 5–8, 1997, particularly the evaluation sections of Standards 2, 4, and 10; and the Swonger and Mead 1998 publication (available in the workroom). The Provost's Office made the results of this process available to academic deans and department chairs and has used them in various ways to provide a feedback loop to academic units. An additional projected use of the AIIM is to combine its results with those found through the University's

process for Assessment of Student Learning in order to provide further direct feedback to departments. Development of the University's mechanisms for student learning assessment is ongoing and more fully discussed under later sections of this report. The AIIM is currently undergoing review by a new Academic Program Review Committee of the Faculty Senate (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/CHAPTER_506.html#5.86.10) and (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/FSEC_Report_5.pdf). Evaluation of this program is also discussed under *Standard 2: Planning and Evaluation*.

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS

DESCRIPTION

All undergraduate students, regardless of degree program, study broad areas of human knowledge, theories and methods of inquiry specific to their disciplines. By requiring both General Education courses and a rigorous program of study in a major, the undergraduate degree programs lay the foundation for understanding the fundamental complexities of the human experience and for a thoughtful and active engagement with the world. Typically, students are required to take at least 39 credits of General Education plus one credit of URI 101: Transitions and Transformations. The *University Manual* documents, and the RIBGHE has approved, reduction of the General Education requirements by no more than 3 credits to accommodate program-level accreditation issues (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/8.20-8.27.html#8.20.20, http://www.ribghe.org/gened_9900.htm); the memorandum dated June 26, 2007, from the Commissioner of Higher Education to President Carothers indicating approval (available in the workroom).

Each college provides programs of professional education in selected disciplines or interdisciplinary fields. Study options vary from traditional liberal education to programs that are heavily vocationally oriented. These major requirements are described fully in the 2006–2007, which is available both in printed form and online. Of the nine degree-granting units at the University, eight offer undergraduate or first professional degree programs leading to Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Science (B.S.), Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.), Bachelor of Music (B.M.), Bachelor of General Studies (B.G.S.), Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (B.L.A.), and Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) with a total of 88 specializations. Appendix 4.3 shows the undergraduate degree programs offered by each college together with an outline of their requirements. All undergraduate programs include a General Education requirement, a major or concentration, and the possibility of pursuing further knowledge through unrestricted electives; however, specific requirements vary by program. The *Catalog* documents that, at the baccalaureate level, curricula for each program include substantial requirements at the intermediate and advanced undergraduate levels, with appropriate prerequisites indicating requirements for sequential progression and synthesis of learning.

The University also offers a number of special academic programs (see Table 4.1). For example, Talent Development (TD) strives to "recruit, support, and retain students of color and disadvantaged students from in-state" through programs and support services. Examples of other special academic programs include the Honors Program, which offers motivated students opportunities to broaden their intellectual development and strengthen their preparation in major fields of study, and the Feinstein Center for Service Learning, which promotes the integration of service with academic study in order to enhance student learning and involvement with communities and their agencies. The Office of International Education and the National Student Exchange Program offer University students the opportunity to study at more than 180 participating colleges and universities in 55 states, U.S. territories, and Canadian provinces. The University also boasts a particularly distinctive five-year academic program, the International Engineering Program (IEP), which leads students simultaneously to B.S. and B.A. degrees in both engineering and German, French, Spanish, or Chinese.

In the fall of 2005, the Feinstein Providence Campus began accepting students directly from high school into three majors: Human Development and Family Studies, Psychology, and Communication Studies. In the spring of 2007, the Faculty Senate authorized expansion of this program to include undecided students, as well as students who hope to enter a major for which they can complete the first two years of course work on the Feinstein Providence Campus, with the

TABLE 4.1: SPECIALIZED ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Program	Website
Talent Development	http://www.uri.edu/talent_development/
Honors Program	http://www.uri.edu/honors_prog/wordpressHonors/
Feinstein Center for Service Learning	http://www.uri.edu/volunteer/
International Education and the National Student Exchange	http://www.uri.edu/international/
	http://www.uri.edu/international/NSE/index.htm
English as a Second or Foreign Language	http://media.uri.edu/Movies/vll/esl/els.html
	http://www.uri.edu/artsci/els/
New England Land Grant Student Exchange	http://www.nebhe.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=21&Itemid=57
Ocean Studies	http://www.uri.edu/catalog/cataloghtml/courses/ocg.html
Rhode Island Interinstitutional Exchange	http://www.ribghe.org/studentexchange.pdf
Internships and Experiential Education	http://www.uri.edu/univcol/internships/?page=Home&include
Summer Sessions and Research Programs	http://www.uri.edu/diversity/Sites/summer.html
Student Leadership Development	http://www.mu.uri.edu/leadership/leadershipinstitute.html
Army Reserve Officers Training Corps	http://www.uri.edu/admission/viewbook04/resources/CollegeRequirements.pdf
International Engineering Program	http://www.uri.edu/iep/

understanding that many of these students will have to transfer to the Kingston Campus to complete their degree. This is a provisional pilot program for three years, beginning in the fall of 2008 (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/FS_08m_507.html).

APPRAISAL

The Self-Study Subcommittee on Academic Programs examined academic programs' catalog descriptions and web sites for all undergraduate programs in terms of: 1) rationale; 2) clarity and order in stated requirements; 3) inclusion of General Education requirements;, 4) inclusion of a major concentration requirement; 5) inclusion of substantial requirements at the intermediate and advanced undergraduate levels; and 6) opportunities for students to accumulate unrestricted electives. Tables were developed summarizing this information, and are available as Appendices 4.4.1 through 4.4.9. The tables show considerable variability in the clarity and comprehensiveness of programs' descriptions. Some programs provide detailed explanations of rationale, objectives, and missions. Others primarily describe just the curriculum of the program offered. A few provide little, if any, descriptive comments. *Catalog* and web site information often differ and whereas the *Catalog* provides a consistent format for presenting undergraduate programs within colleges, there is considerably more diversity in the format and content of program web sites. There are some excellent examples of program descriptions that delineate clear and succinct rationales, objectives/goals, and missions. Those programs that are accredited by various professional societies (e.g., Landscape Architecture, Nursing, Engineering, Pharmacy) are more likely to be described in a comprehensive way.

In summary, this appraisal suggests that the University's undergraduate degree programs provide a substantial and coherent introduction to broad areas of human knowledge, have appropriate rationale, and are clearly presented in official publications. All programs provide a General Education requirement; a major requirement; substantial, progressive requirements at the intermediate and advanced undergraduate levels; and opportunities to pursue unrestricted electives when possible. There is a degree of variability among the stated rationales for undergraduate programs across catalog descriptions and program web sites. Although all programs appear in the *Catalog* and all have web sites, some programs provide more detailed and comprehensive explanations of rationale, objectives, and missions than others.

PROJECTION

The University recognizes that, in an era of proliferating (digital) information sources, it is increasingly important to provide accurate, consistent information about its programs to those who will make use of them. Further, in an age of increasing accountability, it is important to provide rationales and explanations of the outcomes and benefits its programs are intended to provide. The evaluation indicates the University could usefully improve its efforts in both of these areas.

There are already ongoing efforts at the University that will help address these issues. One, the Branding Initiative, will be instrumental in helping to achieve consistent and accurate academic program information from all University sources. Begun in 2006, the Branding Initiative's broad goals are "to determine the University's core strengths and to communicate those strengths to its most important stakeholders" (http://www.uri.edu/uribrand/). As part of the initiative, those responsible are coordinating a comprehensive review of all sources of information of every sort about the University with a view to identifying discrepancies, gaps, inconsistencies, and inaccuracies. Information about academic programs will be covered in the review, and once errors are identified, steps will be taken to correct them.

Even more important for academic programs is the effort the University is making in outcomes assessment. Described more fully later in this section, outcomes assessment involves, among other tasks, identifying the intended outcomes of a program as well as the means used by the program to achieve them. This information is being developed for all programs as part of our efforts to improve program quality, but as it is acquired it will be used to explain programs and their components to all stakeholders, internal and external.

GENERAL EDUCATION

DESCRIPTION

The University's General Education program has been the object of sustained faculty and administrative attention since the University's 2003 interim report to NEASC. That report was drafted shortly after the Faculty Senate adopted far-reaching reforms in how the program was conceptualized and in how it would be delivered to students. Although the interim report provided considerable detail on the specifics of the reforms, a brief review is appropriate here.

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

The identification of the integrated skills and the decision to require each course approved for General Education to include at least three skills necessitated a review and reapproval process for the entire slate of General Education courses. At the time of the interim report, that process was in its initial phases. In its current state, the General Education program is well established and offers students ample opportunity to explore new areas of interest, to gain knowledge and skills necessary for further study at the University, and to develop those habits of mind that are essential to engaged citizenship and lifelong learning. Appendix 4.5 presents examples of courses meeting knowledge and skill areas of the General Education program and the competencies which students are afforded.

APPRAISAL

The integrated skills aspect of the General Education program presents a special challenge for University faculty. The inclusion of specific assignments to give students both practice and feedback on three integrated skills often requires

reconceptualizing both course design and delivery. To address this challenge, the Provost's Office, the Faculty Senate, and the Instructional Development Program designed and conducted workshops for instructors in each of the content core areas. These workshops included presentations on integrating each of the skill areas into the content of courses, sample assignments across a variety of disciplines, and suggestions for feedback and evaluation. Although these workshops were well received and well attended, there is ongoing need to conduct them on a regular basis.

A second continuing issue is the assessment of student learning outcomes in the General Education program. Although the program articulates some broad aspirations for students, the University is keenly interested in assessing student learning "closer to the ground." Efforts toward that end are substantial, ongoing, and documented in later sections of this report.

In spring 2005, one semester after the revised General Education program was put into effect, an *ad hoc* group of faculty solicited student responses in a small sample of General Education courses. Students reported on their perceptions of the appropriateness of the course content (given the General Education descriptions), their acquisition of both General Education skills and content, and changes in their interest in the content and skill areas. They also described assignments that they thought were good examples of those that led to the acquisition of General Education.

As a result of this pilot process, a larger group of faculty met through summer 2005 to articulate more accessible learning outcomes for each of the four content areas. The group proposed that as a result of General Education, students would be able to do the following in each of the content areas in both academic and nonacademic settings:

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

These learning outcomes were approved by the Faculty Senate and are now the bases of assessment of student learning in the General Education program. In addition, the Senate formalized the assessment process by establishing a subcommittee of the University College and General Education Committee for the Assessment of General Education (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/BY-LAWS%204.69.html).

This group currently is engaged in a multifaceted effort to assess student learning in General Education. One facet of the process involves soliciting "representative assignments" from a sample of General Education courses along with student work (artifacts) submitted in response to those assignments. At the conclusion of the collection process the assignments will be sorted by the cognitive task they require and student artifacts will be used to develop inductive rubrics for assessing performance as adequate or inadequate in light of the General Education learning outcomes. The status of this analysis and the steps discussed below are available at the Assessment web site (http://www.uri.edu/assessment/sub/uri/outcomes/general/tools.htm).

Another facet of the assessment process involves soliciting student responses regarding their experience in and knowledge of the General Education program. The questions address issues of perceived learning, perceived change in interest in or engagement with General Education skills and content, and knowledge of the requirements for and purposes of General Education. Responses were collected as part of the University's Student Evaluation of Teaching process in both the fall 2006 and spring 2007 semesters. The evaluation is ongoing.

The third facet of the assessment of General Education is the mining of existing data at the University to get a more complete picture of how General Education exists "in practice" rather than in its *Catalog* or brochure descriptions. Data are being assembled by the Office of Institutional Research, the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation (SLOAA), and Enrollment Services to answer questions about the role of non-continuing faculty in the

General Education program, the distribution of integrated skills in students' encounters with the program, and on the actual completion of General Education requirements (when courses are taken, how many are taken in addition to those required, etc.) by the University's students. Although this process has only just begun, it promises to yield a wealth of information about student learning in General Education, students' perceptions of the program, and the commitment of the institution to the delivery of a high quality General Education program.

PROJECTION

Ensuring a high quality General Education program is an ongoing challenge. Without regular attention to General Education goals and skills, courses inevitably slide toward a more exclusive disciplinary focus. To meet this challenge, the University will maintain its commitment to the support of faculty teaching General Education by continuing and, perhaps, expanding the series of workshops addressing the "integrated skills" as the Office of the Provost has done with a consistently budgeted amount of funds each year. These workshops are not only a source of sound, challenging assignments, but they also serve to remind the University community of the particular character and intent of General Education courses. In addition, chairs in those departments that offer General Education courses will provide information and support (General Education guidelines, sample assignments, syllabi, etc.) to newly hired part-time and full-time faculty.

The University also will expand the General Education assessment process. In addition, the Faculty Senate and the University College and General Education Committee will develop a means for the systematic dissemination of General Education assessment data. "Closing the loop" in this way will spur instructors and departments to rethink their General Education curricula and provide the larger community some insight into "best practices" in General Education.

A final consideration for the future is assessing the effect of size on General Education sections. Although the University assigns some of its best teachers to teach General Education courses, some of these classes enroll more than 300 students (data available in the workroom). Although many of these sections are paired with recitations or laboratories, others are only three "lectures" per week. The University must gauge the effectiveness of these large classes, especially in regard to the integrated skills and the higher order student learning outcomes. The current assessment process, including student responses to their General Education experiences, should help with this evaluation.

THE MAJOR

DESCRIPTION

Depending upon the program and degree (e.g., B.A., B.S., Pharm.D.), students are required to have from 30 to 125 credits of study within the major. The level and complexity of courses, from introductory to advanced, is evident in their sequencing. Departmental review and oversight, as well as professional accreditation standards in many cases, ensure that programs of study leading to a major are an appropriate mix of introductory and advanced courses. In addition, the University requires students to have a minimum of 42 credits in courses numbered 300 and above. An increasing number of programs have capstone courses or experiences, and many programs have required or elective internship experiences for advanced students to connect theory and practice. As noted in the section on undergraduate programs, details on major requirements are available to students through the *Catalog*, on departmental web sites and via worksheets prepared by many departments. Where learning objectives exist, they often are delineated in these materials.

Six completely new undergraduate majors were added in the last decade: African and African-American Studies (offered jointly with Rhode Island College), Film Media, Public Relations, Writing and Rhetoric, International Business, and Biomedical Engineering. Most majors remain discipline-specific, but a few are interdisciplinary including African and African-American Studies; Chemical and Chemical Oceanography; Comparative Literature Studies; Film Media; Latin American Studies; Physics and Physical Oceanography; Public Relations; and Women's Studies.

Professional programs are designed to provide both curricular content and practical learning experiences that reflect current practice in the field of specialization. The curricula of these programs reflect current standards of practice defined by professional organizations as evidenced through program accreditation by appropriate professional bodies. Appendix 4.1 lists the accredited programs, the date of the last accreditation and the location of the relevant materials.

Upper-level courses in many professional programs involve labs, practica or other forms of hands-on experience. In the College of Human Science and Services, for example, internships are encouraged in the Textiles programs and required in all others. In the College of Nursing, students assume increasing responsibility for care of clients each semester in practicum courses and in the College of Pharmacy, the final academic year consists entirely of practice experiences. In all cases faculty provide careful supervision of students and maintain close relationships with the field supervisors or preceptors. The pass rates on the content/practice parts of licensing exams reveal high degrees of success. In addition, college faculty carefully examine student outcomes to ensure that graduates are prepared to meet the demands of practice.

APPRAISAL

Faculty in all degree-granting colleges are attentive to the requirements of their majors, prompted both by accrediting agencies and internal review. Evidence of this can be seen in the steady stream of proposals for course- and program-revisions that work their way through the curricular process. Revisions range from the "routine," such as a change in a course prerequisite or number to the "significant," including new courses, changes in major requirements or restructuring of curriculum.

Assessment of student learning outcomes is being developed by major across all academic units. As noted in the March 18, 2005, Draft Action Plan of the Preliminary Working Group on Student Learning Outcomes, the University's efforts focus on two primary venues for examining student learning: 1) the breadth of integrated skills developed through the General Education program; and 2) the depth and application of increasingly sophisticated knowledge through departmental majors (http://www.uri.edu/assessment/media/public/page_files/uri/documents/plans/Utah_White_Paper.pdf). Assessment of General Education outcomes has begun and assessment of undergraduate majors and graduate programs will follow.

PROJECTION

It is well understood that external evaluation provides important feedback for accredited programs and, because of professional accreditation standards, each professional program now has a well-articulated assessment plan in operation that connects curriculum to practice. But many academic programs at the University are not affiliated with a specific profession nor do they have an affiliated accrediting organization. Regular internal program review is important for these programs as well. It is vital that the University continue to expand rigorous self-study and evaluation procedures to its non-accredited majors. The new Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation has been established to help do precisely this. Aided by the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee, the Office is coordinating and promoting comprehensive review and assessment of all the University's academic programs. These activities are discussed more fully in the Assessment of Student Learning later in this standard.

GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS

DESCRIPTION

The size and number of graduate programs has changed only slightly between 1996 and 2006. In 1996, the University offered 50 master's programs and 32 doctoral programs. In 2006, the University offered degrees in 48 master's degree programs and 36 doctoral programs. Masked by these numbers is the consolidation of a number of programs, the suspension of others and the introduction of yet others. Since 1996, the University also has offered post-baccalaureate certificate programs in a number of areas ranging from Fashion Merchandising to Thanatology.

In 1996, the University awarded 496 master's degrees and 82 doctorates; in 2005–2006, 493 master's degrees and 67 doctorates were awarded. In 1996, there were 3,125 graduate students enrolled at the University (2,071 in-state; 779 out-of-state; and 275 international). Fall 2006 data show that the University enrolled a total of 2,631 graduate students (1,767 in-state; 636 out-of state; and 231 international). The enrollment of male graduate students has declined from 45.3% of the total in 1996 to 35.7% in 2006, while female graduate students now make up 64.3% of the total as compared to 54.7% in 1996. Diversity among domestic students has increased somewhat, with 1996 data showing the enrollment of 58 African American students, 11 Native Americans, and 57 Hispanic or Latino/ Latina students. Data for 2006 show the enrollment of 67 African American students, 10 Native Americans, and 67 Hispanic or Latino/ Latina students. While the number of students in several categories has shown a slight decrease over the ten-year period, the largest difference is in the number of non-degree-seeking part-time students with 971 students assigned to this category in 1996, and only 617 in 2006. The number of full- and part-time degree-seeking students has shown a much smaller decrease during this same period, from 1,971 in 1996 to 1,891 in 2006. (Appendix 4.6)

The introduction, implementation, and maintenance of standards of graduate programs rest with the Graduate Council and the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School. Policies established by the Graduate Council form the framework for all graduate programs at the University and are published in the *Graduate Student Manual* (http://www.uri.edu/gsadmis/TOC.html). Policies central to the admission and matriculation of graduate students, as well as details specific to each graduate program, are also summarized in the *Catalog*.

While variation in the selectivity and award of financial support for graduate students exists among graduate programs, University-wide admission standards are maintained by all. The weighting of the various parts of the application package also varies among individual disciplines, with objective test scores (GRE, GMAT, MAT) being an important element for some while not required for others. Often the use of these scores is related to the measures used by external accrediting groups for professional or practice-oriented programs.

All graduate programs and graduate courses must be approved through a University approval process that begins in the department or program and moves through the college's curricular process before arriving at the Graduate Council. If approved by the Council, the proposal is forwarded to the Faculty Senate and finally to the President. Some actions, including new degree programs, require the approval of the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education (RIB-GHE). Proposals for new programs must include a rationale for offering the program, the needs addressed by the program and the resources required by and available to the program, including library and information technology resources. It is important to note that a majority of the University's graduate programs are associated with academic programs that have successful records in attracting external funding. Benefits derived from these funds (materials, facilities) supplement other forms of support and are not commonly available to programs that are undergraduate only.

Nearly all members of the graduate faculty have either earned doctorates or an accepted terminal degree. Professional programs include graduate faculty who have considerable on-the-job expertise that is important in scholarship and graduate training in those disciplines. Graduate faculty members are expected to maintain currency in their fields, seek external funding where appropriate to support their work and that of their students and to disseminate knowledge in appropriate venues. Graduate programs are typically enhanced by the addition of highly qualified adjunct appointments who come from institutions of higher education, hospitals, state and federal agencies, museums, and industry, and who are appointed for limited terms to serve specific student needs. Some graduate programs are further strengthened by the presence of Research Professors and Professors in Residence, who teach few formal courses compared with regular faculty. Because professors of these designations engage in significant projects that attract considerable external financial support, contribute a substantial number of publications to peer-reviewed journals, seek patents, and engage in outreach activities, they are valuable role models for graduate students. The University's Faculty Instructional Activity Report (FIAR) automatically enters credit-hour equivalents (CHEs) for graduate-student mentoring and provides

space for recording CHE equivalence for University-supported and externally supported research; each affords a reduction in formal teaching expectations.

The fundamental structure common to all University graduate programs is a requirement for rigorous course work beyond the bachelor's level that forms the basis for the original research or scholarly work that will result in the thesis or dissertation. Non-thesis master's programs require a comprehensive examination, documenting the achievement of the candidates, and the writing of a major paper. All graduate students declare a detailed program of study approved by the Graduate School to ensure that a student will have an appropriate mix of course work, research, and independent study leading to a high level of subject competence. Program requirements routinely consist of a set number of course credits that support the area of the student's intended research. Although professional or practice-oriented programs may require a group of courses common to most students, in other areas the courses required may vary substantially from one student to another and may be selected largely on the basis of the student's intended specialization within a field. In either case, course sequences are routinely designed to allow the student to move from a more broad and general consideration of material to an in-depth treatment of the material in the student's area of specialization at a high level of complexity and sophistication. Course work, seminars and tutorials provide the opportunity for substantial mastery of the subject matter of the program area. Comprehensive examinations that are required in all Ph.D. programs demand that students demonstrate this mastery. Organization and utilization of this knowledge form the context for the research carried out by the student. The dissemination of new knowledge gained in this process is accomplished through the preparation and publication of the research. All dissertations are published by University Microfilms, and much master's and doctoral research is published in scholarly publications. Thus, students in research-oriented graduate programs build their intellectual capabilities through course work and are challenged in their creativity and resourcefulness in their thesis research. Maintenance of these standards of excellence is documented through Graduate School approval of all students' programs of study and thesis and dissertation committee memberships comprised of appropriately qualified graduate faculty.

APPRAISAL

Graduate education at the University of Rhode Island is a mature enterprise that has developed well established procedures consistent with national norms, forming a supportive framework for the education and training of graduate students. However, effectiveness and outcomes assessment has yet to be undertaken broadly across all programs. Nonetheless, the procedures inherent in graduate education—with all programs requiring comprehensive examinations, and many requiring oral and written defense of theses or dissertations—lend strong support to the notion that desired student learning outcomes are being met. Further, accreditation by outside bodies of many professional graduate degrees provides further evidence supporting both the sufficiency of resources dedicated to these programs.

The infrastructure that supports both research and graduate education, particularly graduate education in the sciences, has been improved markedly with the completion of the Coastal Institute buildings in Kingston and on the Narragansett Bay Campus and the passage of state-wide referenda in support of the construction of such new buildings as the Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences, the Oceanographic Information Technology Center, and the College of Pharmacy. External support for interdisciplinary efforts that have a positive effect on graduate education include both the successful Rhode Island IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence program (RI–INBRE http://www.uri.edu/inbre/) and the NSF Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship award (IGERT—one of approximately 100 nationwide). The recently initiated Research Ethics Fellows Program, initially funded by the Council of Graduate Schools, draws faculty and graduate students from a broad range of programs and creates a climate for the responsible conduct of research while bringing together graduate students and faculty in University-wide discussions of issues that are common to many programs (http://www.uri.edu/research/compliance/educandtrain.htm). Graduate education also has benefited

from the University's emphasis on the creation of centers to promote interdisciplinary research and the encouragement of partnerships (http://www.uri.edu/outreach/Outreach_Partnerships.htm).

While the University shows considerable strength in its graduate programs, there are areas that require increased attention. Although many of the professional programs are regularly evaluated in order to meet the requirements for accreditation, assessment of remaining programs is in a state of transition. Development of assessment procedures will benefit graduate programs by augmenting the procedures already used to delineate and evaluate student learning outcomes at the graduate level. Finally, centralized data collection under a newly enhanced institutional research function will improve the ability to perform these reviews.

While the productivity of the graduate faculty remains substantial, evidenced for example by the amount of research funding obtained and graduate degrees awarded, graduate programs would benefit by an increase in support staff and other resources in order to continue to accomplish program goals. Steps already taken to address issues in this area include the hiring of a permanent Vice President for Research and Economic Development whose sole focus is on support for research productivity; passage of Rhode Island State legislation establishing legal authority for a research foundation; and an effort to improve the efficiency of research fund management with the merger of pre- and post-award accounting and budgeting functions under the new Vice President for Research and Economic Development.

The University continues to struggle in the competition to attract qualified graduate students. The comparatively low stipend levels for graduate assistants no doubt contributes to the difficulty, though providing health benefits to graduate students, and now to all post-doctorates as well, raises the competitiveness of the total package offered to graduate students. In addition, the focus on recruitment and retention of graduate students now falls under the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. This reorganization allows for consolidation and strengthening of enrollment efforts.

Although some gains are apparent in the diversity of the graduate student body, increased efforts are necessary in the recruitment of students from under-represented groups. While the University's participation in the Northeast Alliance for Graduate Education for the Professoriate (NEAGEP) (http://www.neagep.org/) and in the Sloan Foundation's program for students from these groups is likely to result in increased diversity of the graduate student body, greater success will be dependent on the increased and broad involvement by members of the faculty (http://www.sloan.org/main.shtml). To that end, the Provost's Office offers travel funding for faculty willing to add recruitment visits to travel plans. A cornerstone of the recruitment efforts under the NEAGEP grant funding is the Graduate School's Office of Graduate Diversity Affairs, which requires faculty participation in recruitment efforts.

PROJECTION

In order for graduate programs at the University to continue to grow in strength and stature, issues raised in the appraisal section must be addressed. The University has initiated procedures to establish review of academic programs with the AIIM and expansion of assessment procedures has already begun with undergraduate programs. The University's assessment efforts will be enhanced by an expanded Office of Institutional Research. In this way, reviews will be based on accurate and readily accessible data that can provide quantitative measures of such important program characteristics as selectiveness (relationship between application numbers and offers of admission), yield (relationship between admitted students and those who enroll), student persistence and time-to-degree, and student learning outcomes. These measures will form a context in which to evaluate other, more qualitative information.

Increases in stipends for graduate teaching and research assistants must remain a high priority. The addition of a health insurance benefit for teaching and research assistants has brought the University closer to parity with other similar institutions in the region, but the stipend level continues to place the University at a competitive disadvantage. The University will implement a recruitment strategy that will attract increased numbers of students to its graduate programs. One part

of this strategy will require significantly improving brochures and increasing attention to the graduate section of the University web site. Another critical component of the strategy will be the increased involvement of faculty members in recruitment activities. In these activities, directed attention will be paid to the recruitment of students of color. The University will continue its participation in programs such as the Excellence through Diversity program of the New England Board of Higher Education, the Northeast Alliance for Graduate Education for the Professoriate, and the Sloan Foundation's Minority Ph.D. program. Increased faculty involvement and the use of such approaches as summer internships for rising college seniors will be critical to the success of the University's participation in these and other programs designed to attract students from under-represented groups. Because graduate education is so closely tied to the activity and reputation of the faculty, the University will continue to develop a climate that nurtures the scholarly success of its faculty.

INTEGRITY IN THE AWARD OF ACADEMIC CREDIT

DESCRIPTION

The University has a procedure of systematic review to ensure integrity in the award of academic credit. Opportunities for comment by all parts of the University community are included in relevant processes and procedures. Academic regulations are maintained in the *University Manual* (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/MANUAL_05.html) and the *Graduate Student Manual* (http://www.uri.edu/gsadmis/TOC.html). Oversight for relevant sections of these manuals is shared by Faculty Senate and University Committees, with final approval for all change by the President. The committees are: Academic Standards and Calendar Committee (ASC); Curricular Affairs Committee (CAC); Constitution, By-laws, and *University Manual* Committee (CBUM); Council for Research (CFR); Honors Program and Visiting Scholars (HPVS); Teaching Effectiveness Committee (TEC); University College and General Education Committee (UCGE); Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC); Library Committee; Graduate Council; and Enrollment Services Advisory Committee. *Ad hoc* committees also review unique academic issues. A recent example is the Methods of Instruction subcommittee of the CAC, which reviewed the use of web-enhanced and web-based courses and drafted a policy, subsequently adopted, that provides for CAC oversight (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/Online_Courses.html). Further evidence of systematic review can be found in Chapter 8 of the *University Manual*, where recent updates and changes to academic regulations are cited in each applicable section. A relevant example of such a change can be found in 8.26.13 Grade Change/Appeal process, which was approved during the 2005–2006 academic year in Faculty Senate Bill 31 (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/8.20-8.27.html).

Information regarding changes to academic regulations is communicated through approved Faculty Senate minutes, distributed by printed copy and email to various academic offices and available on the Faculty Senate web site at (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/AllReports.html), as well as annual updates to the *University Manual* and *University Catalog*.

Academic regulations are in place for naming, proposing, and approving academic programs of study, courses and awarding of credit (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/8.20-8.27.html). These include the review and award of transfer credit, study abroad, internships, independent study, service learning activities and prior learning assessment. Policies, processes and procedures for determining scholastic standing, probation, dismissal and readmission are well established and are used by all colleges at the conclusion of each academic term. Each academic dean's office reviews students who are not in good standing and notifies each in writing as to his or her status as well as the necessary and appropriate steps needed to return to good standing or to appeal. Readmission policies are clearly stated on the readmission form and stated in the *University Catalog*.

Academic deans' offices review each readmitting student individually and undertake advising by the dean's office staff prior to readmission. The award of credit for study abroad, internships, independent study, service learning and prior learning assessment is governed by *University Manual* policy. The Office of Internships and Experiential Education and The Study Abroad Office, in collaboration with academic departments, develop and approve programs of study that award academic

credit for appropriate experiences. The award of transfer credits from any of these experiences is subject to the same policies and procedures as all other undergraduate transfer credits. The award of credit for prior experiential and/or non-collegiate sponsored learning is awarded in accordance with *University Manual* policy cited above. In addition, students seeking credit for Prior Learning are required to register for PLA 100, Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio Development (http://www.uri.edu/catalog/cataloghtml/courses/pla.html), a one-credit course offered through the Feinstein Providence Campus. When completed, the student's portfolio is forwarded to a designated departmental "reader" who reviews the portfolio and makes specific course and credit recommendations to the department chair.

The award of individual course credit is largely the responsibility of the individual faculty. Guidance, general policies and procedures and a detailed list of "approved" grades are included in the *University Manual* (8.52.10 – 8.56.10-11, http://www.uri.edu/facsen/8.50-8.57.html). Faculty are encouraged at the department, college and University level to include grading criteria in their course syllabi. Although recent statistics of cheating and plagiarism (http://www.uri.edu/es/forms/pdf/faculty/ReportofCheatingorPlagiarism.pdf) show a decline in reported incidents, detecting academic cheating and plagiarism continues to pose a challenge for faculty (http://www.uri.edu/judicial/studenthandbook.pdf). University procedures designed to address these concerns include workshops with department chairs, discussion at both undergraduate and graduate student orientations, and discussion at the Research Ethics Fellows Program and the Research Experience for Undergraduates Program.

All courses offered at the University, regardless of format, location, or technology, are subject to the same standards as courses offered on the Kingston Campus (*University Manual* Chapter 8, Part I, online [http://www.uri.edu/facsen/8.30-8.46.html]). Undergraduate courses using web-based instruction currently undergo additional scrutiny through a review process by the Faculty Senate (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/Online_Courses.html). Classes offered as intensive short courses are subject to the guidelines cited above and additional regulations can be found in 8.32.10–8.32.13 of the *University Manual* (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/8.30-8.46.html). Students enrolled in courses offered at off-campus locations and in online courses interact with permanent University faculty or faculty who are qualified in the same way as those teaching in on-campus locations.

The award of undergraduate transfer credit is the primary responsibility of the academic dean's office in each college at the University. The acceptance of graduate transfer credit is granted on a limited basis and only when the request is recommended by the student's major professor and the Graduate Program Director and approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. Specific policies and procedures regarding the acceptance of graduate transfer credit can be found in the *Graduate Student Manual*, 7.20 – 7.28 (http://www.uri.edu/gsadmis/Section_3.html#S7.20).

Policies and procedures for the review and awarding of undergraduate transfer credit can be found in Chapter 8, Part 1 (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/8.10-8.19.html) and Appendix F of the *University Manual* (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/APPENDIX_F.html), the *RIBGHE Transfer Guide for Students* (http://www.ribghe.org/transferguide.htm) and the *University Catalog* (http://www.uri.edu/catalog/cataloghtml/ugraduateadmission.html). Determination of undergraduate transfer credit is made by a combination of academic deans' review, department chairs' review, a formal prior approval process (http://www.uri.edu/es/forms/pdf/enrollServ/0000_OffCampusStudy.pdf) and/or articulation agreements. The *RIBGHE Transfer Guide for Students* details the articulation agreements between the University and the Community College of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College. In addition, University College provides a web site of recently approved courses (http://www.uri.edu/univcol/approved/). Students, advisors, and academic deans are able to search this site by academic institution to assist in them in the search for courses that may meet the academic needs of students seeking transfer credit, though this web site does not supersede the University's prior approval process.

Enhancements in the award of transfer credit were also made possible with the implementation of PeopleSoft (e-Campus). The e-Campus system has the ability to "automate" the award of transfer credit for specific institutions. To date, transfer articulation rules have been programmed into e-Campus for Rhode Island College and the Community College

of Rhode Island. This allows for a faster and more consistent awarding of transfer credits. Changes in the articulation agreements among the three state institutions of higher education can also be programmed directly into e-Campus, ensuring consistent interpretation and application of these agreements (http://www.ribghe.org/transferguide.htm).

Review of the award of all academic credit remains the responsibility of the dean's office of the degree-granting colleges, ensuring that errors in programming or data entry are detected and corrected.

APPRAISAL

As cited above, the University has processes and procedures for systematic review to ensure integrity in the award of academic credit. That systematic review has served the University well historically and continues to do so currently. It is not, however, without criticism. The current process to change academic regulations is time-consuming. Faculty Senate review requires that proposals be submitted well in advance of expected implementation. This sometimes results in the delayed implementation of changes. However, thoroughness and community input during the review process are considered highly valuable.

The academic regulations in place for the award of credit, including undergraduate transfer credit, are communicated and implemented through training opportunities sponsored by academic deans, individual training sessions, and an annual review recently instituted by the Office of Enrollment Services. These mechanisms have been used to provide the necessary information and to determine the level of consistency in the application of policies and procedures among the academic colleges. Regarding graduate transfer credit, policies documented in the *Graduate Student Manual*, Section 7.20 (http://www.uri.edu/gsadmis/Section_3.html#S7.20) are applied during the program of study approval process. To date, training is provided on an ongoing basis for all colleges, and reviews with five of the degree-granting colleges have been completed. The University is as well considering adopting a centralized transfer advising process to increase the consistency in implementing these procedures.

It can be noted that in the fall of 2003, implementation of the PeopleSoft e-Campus system for the maintenance of all student academic records was completed. The implementation process provided a unique opportunity for the University to review the many business practices related to the maintenance of student records. This resulted in the streamlining of some practices and a redesign of others. For example, prior to fall 2003, grades were submitted by faculty on mark-sense sheets that required manual review and scanning prior to the official posting of grades. While this process was well understood and implemented by faculty and Enrollment Services staff, it was time-consuming and problematic for faculty when commitments took them away from campus during grading. Faculty can now access e-Campus through the secure password-protected web site 24 hours a day from any location (grades have even been submitted from as far away as China). In addition, the time frame from when grades are submitted to when they are accessible by students has been reduced from approximately one week to two days. Students also have the benefit of accessing their grades through their personal e-Campus accounts weeks before receiving their grades in the mail.

PROJECTION

The University will continue its process of systematic review of all areas affecting the award of academic credit. Centralization of some student-records processes, such as the posting of transfer credits, is being examined as a means of further ensuring consistency and adherence to articulation agreements. A pilot program with the College of Arts and Sciences and University College is underway. Further enhancements to the student registration process, grading process, and schedule for posting grades will continue to be implemented as the University develops and upgrades the e-Campus system and responds to continued enrollment growth.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

DESCRIPTION

The University's dedication to building a new culture for learning has, in many ways, provided the impetus for its adoption of student learning outcomes assessment. As the institution has sought to move from a teaching to a learning culture, colleagues have engaged in the important discussions of what students should know and be capable of doing, and at what levels of performance, by the completion of their degrees. Improvement in student learning is a goal that University faculty, staff, and administrators understand and support.

In July 2006, the Provost established the University's Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation (SLOAA) to support this growing campus effort. Under the administrative purview of the Provost's Office, SLOAA is staffed by a full-time director with part-time institutional research support from a faculty member on a course release and part-time clerical assistance. Extra-mural grant funding allows for a graduate assistant, student programmers and technical support. The office's mission is to develop and support an annual cycle of outcomes assessment and continuous program improvement, and in so doing, to promote improvement in student learning through curricular and program delivery innovation.

Institutional Leadership and Commitment: Assessment Mini-Grants. Over the past three years, approximately $50,000 has been available annually from the Office of the Provost, through institutional and extra-mural foundation funding, for a variety of assessment planning and implementation projects, a list of which is online (http://www.uri.edu/assessment/sub/uri/guidance/mini-grants.html). The majority of this funding, secured by writing a short proposal and follow-up report, has been used by faculty and chairs for summer recontracting and as course buy-out funds to allow for the development and implementation of assessment plans at the unit and program levels. This amount has been supplemented liberally by individual deans and department chairs in order to accomplish the overall task.

People. A sizeable and well respected team of faculty, staff members, and administrators contributes to the cross-campus effort. Active committees, charged with assessment of student learning outcomes, meet regularly in many departments, in all of the degree-granting colleges, within University College, as a subcommittee of the University College and General Education committee, and in the Division of Student Affairs. The University-wide Student Learning Improvement Academic Advisory Committee (SLIAAC), with representatives from all major academic and student affairs units on campus, was established in 2004.

Recently, SLIAAC-initiated legislation, passed by the Faculty Senate and signed by President Carothers on April 6, 2007, established a formal joint Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC) for the campus (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/FSEC_Report_06-07-5.pdf). LOOC has now replaced SLIAAC as the University-wide assessment committee. Appointed membership is broad and includes undergraduate students; Student Affairs staff and administration; faculty representatives from each college; representatives from Institutional Research and Instructional Development; the Faculty Senate; and the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs (http://www.uri.edu/assessment/sub/uri/guidance/contacts.html). This structure ensures that resource requirements for advancing the effective assessment of learning outcomes are directly addressed and that other areas critical to overall student outcomes, such as co-curricular activities and initiatives, also will be given an appropriate voice. Committee charges include creation of policies and timelines for learning outcomes assessment, guidelines for reporting and distributing of data, identification of strengths and limitations of existing assessment practices, recommendations for resource allocations to enhance assessment and creation of an ongoing review of the learning outcomes assessment process and findings.

These collective institutional efforts in outcomes assessment have now attained sufficient momentum to begin to contribute to the regional and national conversations. Various teams of faculty and staff have participated in an array of venues to present multiple topics in assessment practice (http://www.uri.edu/assessment/).

Tools. The University has implemented a variety of structures and mechanisms to sustain an infrastructure that will foster a meaningful outcomes assessment process. Substantial funding has been obtained through a number of avenues to provide for faculty development opportunities and faculty conference participation. The University assessment web site, although relatively nascent, will eventually serve as a primer on assessment, a database of University programmatic outcomes, a repository of FAQs and answers and University-specific information and findings.

Electronic Assessment Portfolio. Over the past several years, the University has maintained a site-wide license for *TrueOutcomes*, an assessment-rich, online electronic student portfolio system. This software, which runs on a powerful relational database that connects with the institution's PeopleSoft enrollment data, assists programs with collection of student performance evidence, survey and test responses, and data analysis and mining. Programs in five of nine academic colleges are or will be using *TrueOutcomes*, each in different ways. This tool has been very useful to accredited programs, particularly in the School of Education and the College of Engineering as they pursue systematic assessment and improvement. Nonaccredited programs will now be adopting the tool as well.

The University of Rhode Island has an important leadership position within the state in fostering a sustainable infrastructure for assessment. Over the past couple of years, various members of the University have been invited to give technical and functional workshops on *TrueOutcomes* for faculty and administrators from other Rhode Island public institutions of higher learning. In July 2007, the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education, based on the recommendation and experiences of the University and the recommendations of the other two institutions, adopted *TrueOutcomes* as the state's student portfolio application for higher education. Effective immediately, all three public institutions will now be using the system for assessment purposes. The University will be hosting the entire application for the state on URI servers and the University's faculty and staff will be providing training workshops for the other institutions. Additionally, the chairs of both the state's technical and functional implementation committees are University administrators: URI's Director of University Computing Systems and Director of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation, respectively.

Framework of Expected Learning Outcomes. The University is developing a tightly woven framework of institutional expectations that characterizes the culmination of an undergraduate education at both the curricular and co-curricular levels.

University-wide and General Education. The General Education program description on the Faculty Senate web site articulates the expected benefits for students as a consequence of the interaction between their General Education courses and their major programs of study. These five core statements succinctly capture the University's expectations of its college graduates from this land grant university (http://www.uri.edu/assessment/sub/uri/outcomes/university/university.html). They are reflective of the current Mission and Vision Statements, emphasizing the development of critical, independent thinkers who have the capability to solve problems and challenge authority. They also provide a useful framework in which to couch our college-wide, General Education, student affairs and program-level outcomes.

Program level. All eight academic colleges over the past three years have successfully developed undergraduate expected student outcomes at the program level and in some cases at the college level as well. As of this writing, faculty in approximately 80% of undergraduate programs have approved and adopted expected student outcomes for their majors and either have mapped or are mapping their curricula to the outcomes. All departments are engaged in preparing formal assessment plans, prescribed by the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education. The report format is found at http://www.uri.edu/assessment/media/protected/uri/oncampus/forms/OHE%20Program%20Assessment%20Form.xls . Plans detail all programmatic learning outcomes, performance criteria, the opportunities available for students to gain proficiency in specified outcomes, the direct and indirect methods that will be used to assess student attainment, the expected versus the actual level of achievement, analysis and interpretation of data, actions taken to improve learning, and the timetable for reassessment.

Student Affairs. The Division of Student Affairs has adopted division-wide student learning outcomes that are organized into domains and sub-domains, many of which contribute directly to student learning and accomplishment in the academic realm. For further information, see discussion of *Standard 6: Students*.

Public Disclosure of Expectations. All of these documents are slated for review by Dr. Peggy Maki, assessment consultant to the State of Rhode Island, over the 2007–2008 academic year. They will then be presented formally to the RIBGHE during 2007–2008 and made public on Rhode Island Office of Higher Education and University web sites. These documents are expected to have direct applicability to the University's Joint Articulation Agreement with the Community College of Rhode Island. As of 2007–2008, the expected student learning outcomes for the institution, each academic program, and for General Education will be listed in the online edition of the *University Catalog*. They are also expected to be presented in admission materials.

Systematic, Broad-based Approaches to Assessment of Student Learning. Four operational principles guide the adoption of assessment at the University. First, early-stage institutional assessment questions should revolve around summative findings. Second, study efforts should be directly useful to the faculty and students involved and therefore, must be driven by the faculty. Third, assessment at multiple levels—course, program, General Education, student affairs, institutional—should be ongoing and comprehensive as it unfolds over a planned, multi-year cycle. Fourth, assessment committees should utilize multiple measures of student learning. Committees are advised to incorporate existing academic processes in order to integrate outcomes assessment activities with core academic and program improvement activities and to minimize the need to invest limited resources in specialized research functions. In general, programs make use of a blend of direct and indirect methods. These include: evaluation of representative samples of student work collected at planned points during the curriculum; student reflections on their learning process; capstone projects; milestone exams, performance on nationally normed exams; internship; employer and mentor evaluations; panel review of student portfolios (electronic and paper-based); student self-perception surveys; and alumni and employer surveys.

Program Review. Assessment of student learning is an important criterion that contributes to a program's overall value, success, and relevancy in the University's Academic Investment and Improvement Model (AIIM), the tool that is used for program evaluation (available in the workroom). Factored into the Academic Success Pyramid, a program's engagement with outcomes assessment is weighted in the "Consistent Focus, Standard, and Metrics" dimension. Up to six of twenty-four points are assigned to indicate the degree to which departments measure success of student learning. Two points are assigned if a department has a formal, written set of desired student learning outcomes and measures whether its students have achieved those outcomes. Another two points are awarded if the department conducts a formal review of course delivery quality that is regularly practiced for most courses. The final two points are earned if student expectations and satisfaction are measured regularly in a manner other than through the University Student Evaluations of Teaching.

APPRAISAL

The University has made substantial progress in its efforts to adopt a culture that systematically defines and assesses its academic effectiveness. Many programs, most notably the University's accredited disciplines, are now regularly implementing direct student assessment mechanisms and using the evaluation data to improve the student learning experiences. The majority of programs are at the developmental stage, where they have completed the fundamental planning, mapping, and aligning that characterize a strong assessment effort. At the other end of the spectrum, there are still some departments that have yet to engage productively in the work of assessment. Progress will entail additional institutional leadership and collegial encouragement over time. The Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee, by developing local guiding principles for assessment practice, will also be able to impact departmental practices.

Individual program, General Education, and overall institutional outcomes were developed through separate and largely unrelated processes and by different individuals, but the resulting programmatic frameworks align well with one anoth-

er and are representative of the University's Mission and Vision Statements. Since the University regards assessment of outcomes as an iterative process, faculty and staff will have regular opportunities to refine the articulation of frameworks at the various levels.

As mentioned above, the University is well along in assembling the institution-wide infrastructure, which nurtures and sustains a culture that is effective in understanding and improving student learning. Overall, faculty acceptance and commitment to assessment is growing. An effective mix and range of people and units are involved in assessment committees at the University. Committed support and leadership exists in the President's and Provost's Offices, at each of the dean's levels, and in a majority of departments. The Faculty Senate has identified proactive leadership and guidance for outcomes assessment. There is growing recognition of the role that the Division of Student Affairs plays in fostering certain student skills and attributes. In fact, synergistic efforts are emerging between academic programs and the Division of Student Affairs.

While program assessment requires departmental leadership, it also requires an overall plan that has been approved and implemented by the full faculty. Currently there is variability in the practice of outcomes assessment University-wide. Important institutional benefits accrue when departments identify and "own" their own assessment processes. This means that assessment plans and mechanisms are adopted only after substantial deliberation and will be changing on a regular basis as the campus acquires a finer grasp of the questions it must ask and the data that will be useful in moving forward. Additionally, many units have expressed the need to access institutional research support as they devise locally developed assessment instruments and seek meaningful and reliable interpretations of their data. At present, there is insufficient staffing in Institutional Research and in Enrollment Services to permit easy access to institutional data and effective yet simple research design. While departments will still need data to verify their thinking, the planning process itself has already been valuable to the University and its students. Many faculty members have noted informally that their assessment discussions and planning processes have led to very engaged collegial conversations, which in turn have led to course and curricular realignments and new expectations of student learning.

PROJECTION

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. At the program and institutional levels, this cycle unfolds over a period of years, not over a few months. Given the complexity of the institutional system and culture, the University likely will require another three to six years before all assessment threads are woven into a unified, long-term whole that is representative of and useful to faculty, staff, and students. See the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education estimate of timelines from initial discussion of assessment methods development at (http://www.uri.edu/assessment/media/public/page_files/uri/documents/plans/Rhode_Island_Board_of_Governors_for_Higher_Education_Mandate.pdf).

Beginning in the fall 2007, the University will be joining 21 other institutions nationwide in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Education, a four-year longitudinal study designed to learn what teaching practices, programs, and institutional structures support liberal arts education and to develop methods for assessment. This study will be particularly useful to the University community by developing both baseline and benchmark data on our students for future use in more focused, programmatic studies. It will also provide the University the opportunity to compare the efficacy of its practices with those of other peer institutions (http://www.liberalarts.wabash.edu/nationalstudy).

The University is cognizant of the need to broaden and deepen its growing culture of assessment. In this vein, the University held the first annual Summit on Student Learning in August 2007 for approximately 75 faculty, staff, students, and administrators. The day was devoted to a series of discussions designed to elicit an agenda for studying and improving patterns of learning and achievement among students. Dr. Charles Blaich, the Director of the Wabash National Study

of Liberal Arts Education, was a speaker and facilitator. The day also provided the campus kick-off for the University's participation in the Wabash National Study. This summit was a collaborative effort of the Office of the Provost; the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation; the Instructional Development Program; the Office of Institutional Research; and University College.

Faculty and staff are now poised to learn a substantial amount from one another by sharing assessment instruments, rubrics, data, and interpretations of patterns in student learning. Given the developing, on-campus expertise, the University will institute regular annual assessment workshops to examine particular case studies in student learning, led by its faculty and staff. It will be particularly fruitful to tie the data and interpretations to the growing knowledge base on how people learn. This route will effectively involve students in strengthening the connection of outcomes assessment to their learning by involving them directly in the process of refining expected outcomes and soliciting their thoughts on how they might best demonstrate achievement of specified expectations for learning.

The University also recognizes the need to devote more attention to the development, validation, and refinement of useful and low-cost assessment tools and practices that can be shared throughout the institution. The University's efforts will be aided by piloting nationally recommended practices at the local level as well as evaluating and implementing locally developed methods and instruments. The Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) will need to ensure that evaluative instruments such as AIIM be amended to take into account departmental efforts and successes in "closing the assessment loop." In sum, the University will benefit from a campus-wide, multi-year assessment plan that will serve as a template for programs and departments and will allow those same units to tie in with broader institutional assessment efforts. This is a task that the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC) will take on.

Institution-wide adoption and maturation of assessment will require steady institutional resource allocation to drive data analysis and to effect program improvement, if they are indicated by the findings. New resources are not expected to be readily available. Instead, the University will explore other external funding mechanisms and also undertake a certain reallocation of funds. This will involve steady conversation between the faculty and the administration. The appropriate venue for such topics will be in the LOOC. The University recognizes that by the very nature of the task, its efforts to ensure institutional efficacy and to drive improvement of student learning are a vital and ongoing part of the institution's mission and is committed to continuing to strengthen institutional efficacy through the vehicle of outcomes assessment over the coming years.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Although the University's procedures focusing on the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of academic programs are varied, the key components to its future success are student learning outcomes assessment and academic program review. Student learning outcomes assessment coupled with academic program review will provide the information and direction necessary for focused change. Relying on the work of the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation, the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee, and the Academic Program Review Committee, the Joint Strategic Planning Committee will coordinate and promote the University's efforts.