

STANDARD TEN: PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

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

DESCRIPTION

Recognizing its obligations to provide accurate information to all of its stakeholders including students, prospective students, faculty, staff, alumni, the legislature, local communities, and the general public, the University maintains a comprehensive communications and publications program that encompasses all aspects of University life. The institution provides information about itself using a wide range of communication modes. Particularly important, and in contrast with the situation reported in the last self-study, electronic forms of communication, including the web, are playing increasingly predominant roles.

The University will publish notices in a variety of appropriate publications regarding the comprehensive evaluation for continued accreditation being conducted by the Commission. These notices will invite public comment relevant to the University's qualifications for accreditation in accordance with the Commission's Policy and Procedures for Third-Party Comments During Comprehensive Evaluations.

Primary responsibility for the communication, publication, and marketing activities of the University rests within Division of University Advancement, in particular the Department of Communications and Marketing and the Publications Office. The Department of Communications and Marketing is the central clearinghouse for information about the University. Among other activities, the Department of Communications and Marketing staff write and distribute press releases to the media and contribute to *inAdvance@URI*, a biweekly email newsletter containing University news and alumni updates that is distributed to more than 54,000 alumni, faculty, students, and friends. The staff also contribute to the alumni magazine *Quad Angles*, printed five times per year and distributed to more than 93,000 alumni, as well as manage and maintain the University's broadcast news voicemail system. The Department abides by the Freedom of Information Act, the Open Records, and the Open Meetings laws in providing access to information and documents by the media and the public.

The Director of Communications, in consultation with legal counsel, balances the public's right to know with an individual's right to privacy. The Director of Communications and the Director of Security exercise supervision over the distribution of criminal statistics and safety information. The Department of Communications and Marketing serves a central role as liaison with other University units in responding to inquiries from the various publics.

The University Publications Office is responsible for production, design, and editorial oversight for accuracy, timeliness, and consistency of major University materials (in print and online) that cross departmental lines, e.g., the *Catalog* (<http://www.uri.edu/catalog/>), Undergraduate Admission and Orientation materials, major University events materials, e.g., commencement and the honors colloquium, contribute to and oversee production of *inAdvance@URI*, *Quad Angles* alumni magazine, as well as a variety of other materials for Alumni and Development operations. *InAdvance@URI* and alumni email communications are scheduled through the Publications Office. The Publications Office is responsible for the editing, design, and production of the alumni web site and serves in an advisory capacity for the University's web site. Electronic samples of the *Catalog*, *Viewbook*, *Quad Angles*, official campus maps, Visual Standards Guide, and more can be found at (<http://www.advance.uri.edu/pubs.htm>).

The University web site has become the primary communications vehicle, where visitors can find comprehensive information about the University, its mission and objectives, its campuses, academics, research and outreach, news and events, student body and employment. The Internet has improved communication with prospective students and pro-

vides sufficient information for prospective students to make informed decisions about their education. Essentially all official University publications available in printed form are also available through the University's web site.

The University publishes its mission and objectives both in the *Catalog* (<http://www.uri.edu/catalog/>) and separately on its web site (<http://www.uri.edu/home/about/mission.html>). The *Catalog* includes statements about accreditation of all academic programs and lists current faculty by department and program, names and positions of University administrative officers, and names and affiliations of members of the governing board. Financial statements and audits are available online through the University's Controller's Office (http://www.uri.edu/controller/financial_reporting.shtml). Budget overviews and planning documents are also available online at <http://www.uri.edu/pspd/>.

The University's Home Page provides prominent links to the Undergraduate Admission Office (<http://www.uri.edu/admission/>), a Just for Students page with navigation to student activities, as well as to pertinent links including those regarding finances, academics and student services (<http://www.uri.edu/home/students/>). In addition to its printed recruitment preview and other publications, the Undergraduate Admission Office makes its *Viewbook* and application process available online (<http://www.advance.uri.edu/offsitepages/admission/default.htm>). The *Viewbook* provides an accurate description of the student body, availability of academic and other support services, range of co-curricular and nonacademic opportunities for students, and institutional resources from which a student can expect to benefit.

The main sources of information describing degree requirements as well as policies, procedures, and requirements related to admission, the transfer of credit, student fees, charges and refund policies, items related to attending or withdrawing from the institution, academic programs and other educational opportunities can be found online in the *Catalog*, the Undergraduate Admission web site (<http://www.uri.edu/admission/>), the Graduate Admission web site (<http://www.uri.edu/gsadmis/>), and Enrollment Services web site (<http://www.uri.edu/es/>).

Rules and regulations for student conduct and information regarding obligations and responsibilities of students and the institution are outlined in the *University Manual* (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/MANUAL_05.html) and on the Division of Student Affairs web site (http://www.uri.edu/student_affairs/).

The primary means by which students access course information is through the e-Campus schedule of classes. Here students can only view courses that are current and able to be scheduled. *Catalog*-based course descriptions are easily accessed on the web site. The course listings in the e-Campus schedule of classes are updated yearly to ensure accuracy. (<http://www.uri.edu/ecampus/>). The Feinstein Providence Campus describes its offerings, including summer session, in collaboration with the Provost's Office (<http://www.uri.edu/prov/index.html>). The W. Alton Jones Campus in West Greenwich, Rhode Island describes its own campus offerings and educational programs (<http://www.uri.edu/ajc/>). As prescribed by the *University Manual*, with rare exception, courses not taught for four consecutive years are to be removed from the *Catalog*. In fall 2007, the Curricular Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate will review this policy.

Expected educational outcomes and institutional goals for students' learning are published in the *University Manual* (http://www.uri.edu/facsen/MANUAL_05.html) and will be included in the *Viewbook* and *Catalog* starting in the fall of 2007. Outcomes for specific academic programs are also available through a link from the online *Catalog* to the URI Student Learning and Outcomes Assessment web site.

The institution publishes extensive information about the total cost of education, including the availability of financial aid on its Enrollment Services web site (<http://www.uri.edu/es/menus/finaid.html>). The institution publishes retention and graduation rates on the Institutional Research site, including the typical length of study, but does not publish the expected amount of student debt upon graduation (<http://www.uri.edu/ir/uriinfobank/retention>).

APPRAISAL

The new electronic communication technologies now available have certainly increased the University's ability to provide timely and comprehensive information to increasingly growing numbers of users. The University successfully disseminates information on program excellence and student, alumni, and faculty achievements through many sources such as official news releases, the University web site, and the electronic newsletter *inAdvance@URI*. Further, almost all University documents, including those formerly available only in printed form, are now available through the University web site.

The electronic technologies have also enhanced the University's ability to keep current information that is vital to many of its constituents. Of significance to students, information on the semester schedule of courses, including current availability and room or time changes, is now available to them through e-Campus, the online registration system. Changes are reflected instantaneously.

Yet these new technologies, relatively easy to use and cost-effective, have also created problems of decentralization. Almost every unit and division has its own web site. Many units send their own newsletters. The task of presenting consistent, authoritative information about the University has become an issue. While the University has made progress in implementing a Visual Standards Guide, University-wide web policies and templates, a repositioned University home page and the start-up of a University-wide branding initiative, challenges remain to implement consistency and accuracy of content across a broad spectrum.

The University-wide Web Strategy and Planning Committee implemented standards and policies for University web pages, along with templates for departments to encourage consistency (<http://www.uri.edu/home/help/www.html>). The development of standard policies on usage and appropriateness of content is a positive move. An effort, supported by the President's Team and the Council of Deans, is currently underway to increase the participation level of all University units. The Advancement Division engaged the RDW Group to redesign and reposition the University home page. Redesign of lower-level pages to conform with the new home page is being coordinated by the Department of Communications and Marketing with University Computing Systems and the University Webmaster. The Visual Standards Guide (<http://www.advance.uri.edu/visualstandardsguide/default.htm>), created by the University Publications Office to ensure consistency in logo usage and colors, was a positive addition to the overall communications plan. Adherence to the standards has been improving.

While materials produced in the University Publications Office are reviewed for complete, accurate, and clear information, a systematic review process for materials produced by individual colleges, departments, or individual offices both in print and online would further ensure accuracy of all communications.

The University launched a branding initiative in July 2006 to position itself in the marketplace and more clearly define its distinctive offerings. The initiative is currently in its research and exploration phase. Focus groups have been conducted and telephone and online surveys are currently being implemented to better understand stakeholders' perceptions and expectations (<http://www.uri.edu/uribrand>).

PROJECTION

An enterprise-wide budget of expenditures for all communications/publications and integrated branding will be constructed so that the total institutional investment in marketing/public relations/recruiting/alumni relations can be evaluated against other institutional priorities.

The University must provide a more comprehensive and ongoing communications program for its students, faculty and staff. Materials produced by individual colleges, departments and offices, in print and for the web site, will benefit from a systematic review process for consistency, accuracy and timeliness.

The institution has made a personnel and monetary resource commitment to support the ongoing branding and integrated marketing activities. The branding process will include a proposal for improved consistency of content and image of the University presented to the institution's various publics. Better positioning (and inclusion) of public and professional perceptions of the University's status and achievements would allow current and prospective students to judge more accurately the quality of their educational programs.

The results of the branding program are expected to produce a clearly defined, long-term identity and image that is consistent with diverse stakeholders. Students, prospective students, faculty, administrators, alumni, government officials and the general public would share a unity of vision about exactly what the institution represents. Branding can be instrumental in establishing points of differentiation in key competitors, thus helping to distinguish the University in stakeholders' minds.

The brand developed will be the foundation for an ongoing, University-wide, integrated marketing effort that is expected to address some of the consistency issues resulting from decentralization of communications. It will provide more consistency in message and look and more accurately depict the institution's offerings, thereby providing greater clarity for its constituents.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

To serve its many constituents and to discharge its responsibilities to the public, the University disseminates information using a wide range of communication modes that are increasingly electronic. This increased use of electronic means has enabled the University to become more effective at providing its public accurate information in a timely manner. Under the guidance of the Joint Strategic Planning Committee, the University will endeavor to make all its communication activities consistent and comprehensive.