



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
Council on Postsecondary Education
OFFICE OF THE POSTSECONDARY COMMISSIONER
560 Jefferson Boulevard Suite 100
Warwick, Rhode Island 02886-1304

Enclosure 8f
February 24, 2016

Barbara S. Cottam
Chair

TO: Members of the Council on Postsecondary Education

**Council on Elementary and
Secondary Education**

FROM: Jim Purcell, Ed.D, Commissioner for Postsecondary Education

Daniel P. McConaghy
Chair

DATE: February 16, 2016

Amy Beretta, Esq.

RE: Approval of RI-SARA application- URI

Colleen A. Callahan, Ed.D.

BACKGROUND:

Karin Forbes

The University of Rhode Island submitted an application to Dr. Michael Walker-Jones, Rhode Island-State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement Coordinator, seeking consideration and approval as a RI-SARA institution. The coordinator reviewed the application and all supporting documentation. The application has been determined to be complete.

Jo Eva Gaines

Marta V. Martinez

Lawrence Purtill

Joyce L. Stevos, Ph.D.

Based upon the coordinator's review, he recommended approval of the application. Once the application is approved by the Council, I will direct the coordinator to transmit to NC-SARA for appropriate action. All transmittals will take place once the RI-SARA application fee has been received from URI.

**Council on Postsecondary
Education**

William Foulkes
Chair

Accordingly, I recommend

Michael Bernstein

THAT the Council on Postsecondary Education hereby approves the recommendation of the Postsecondary Commissioner that the University of Rhode Island become an RI-SARA institution having submitted an application and supporting documentation which meets the requirements and standards set forth by the OPC and NC-SARA.

Dennis Duffy, Esq.

The Honorable Thomas Izzo

Judy Ouellette

Kerry I. Rafanelli, Esq.

John J. Smith, Jr.

Dr. Jeffery A. Williams



**National Council
for State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

*A voluntary, regional approach
to state oversight of distance education*

Indicate Regional Compact:

- Midwestern Higher Education Compact
- New England Board of Higher Education
- Southern Regional Education Board
- Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

**Application and Approval form for
Institutional Participation in SARA**

An institution applying to operate under the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) must submit this form to its home state's portal agency for SARA.

When a state checks "yes" on this form, the state affirms that the applicant institution has followed proper procedures and provided necessary documents to operate under SARA, but this affirmation does not necessarily represent state evaluation of the institution's ability to perform under SARA policies.

An institution seeking approval to operate under the terms and standards of SARA must meet the following requirements:

Applicant Institution affirms meeting the requirement Initial here		State Institution meets the requirement	
		Yes	No
DHD	1. Have its principal campus or central administrative unit domiciled in a state that has joined the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) initiative and be authorized to operate in that state.* Only distance education content originating in the United States or a U.S. territory is eligible to be offered under SARA.** (Attach documentation)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DHD	2. Be a U.S. degree-granting institution that is accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education. (Attach documentation)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	3. For non-public institutions, have a financial responsibility index score from the U.S. Department of Education that is 1.5 or above, or, if its score is between 1.0 and 1.5, successfully demonstrate to its home state's portal agency that it is nevertheless sufficiently financially stable to justify participation in SARA. Public institutions are presumed to be sufficiently financially stable for SARA purposes. (Attach documentation) Public institutions leave this blank.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DHD	4. Agree to abide by the <i>Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education</i> adopted by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, as summarized in SARA policy 5(2)1-9. (See Appendix)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DHD	5. Agree to be responsible for the actions of any third-party providers used by the institution to engage in operations under SARA.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Applicant
Institution affirms
meeting the requirement

State
Institution meets
the requirement

Initial here

Yes No

DHD

6. Agree to notify its home state's portal agency of any negative changes to its accreditation status.

DHD

7. Agree to provide data necessary to monitor SARA activities.

DHD

8. Agree to work with its home state's portal agency to resolve any complaints arising from its students in SARA states, and to abide by decisions of that entity.***

DHD

9. Apply to its home state's portal agency over the signature of the institution's CEO or chief academic officer.

DHD

10. Agree to notify in writing all students in a course or program that customarily leads to professional licensure, or which a student could reasonably believe leads to such licensure, whether or not the course or program meets requirements for licensure in the state where the student resides. If an institution does not know whether the course or program meets licensure requirements in the student's state of residence, the institution may meet this SARA requirement by informing the student in writing and providing the student the contact information for the appropriate state licensing board(s). An e-mail dedicated solely to this purpose and sent to the student's best known e-mail address meets this requirement. The institution should use other means to notify the student if needed.

DHD

11. Agree, in cases where the institution cannot fully deliver the instruction for which a student has contracted, to provide a reasonable alternative for delivering the instruction or reasonable financial compensation for the education they did not receive.

DHD

12. Agree to pay to the state any state fees for SARA participation required by the home state for administering SARA.

DHD

13. Agree to pay its annual SARA participation fee to the National Council for SARA (NC-SARA). This single annual fee replaces any fees that the institution would ordinarily pay to other SARA member states.

*SARA considers the home campus to be where an institution has its legal domicile. Any disputes about which state is the home state will be resolved for SARA purposes by the affected regional compacts or the National Council (NC-SARA), as needed.

**The fact that a foreign institution is owned by a U.S. entity does not qualify distance education originating from the non-U.S. institution to be offered under SARA. Only distance education offerings under the oversight of the U.S. state or territory can be offered through SARA.

***Complaints must follow the Institution's customary resolution procedure prior to being referred to the state under SARA procedures. Grade appeals and student conduct appeals are not allowed under SARA.

Institutional Designation and Affirmation

I, the undersigned representative of (institution name) University of Rhode Island, having the authority to commit the institution to operate under the SARA interstate agreement, hereby certify that this institution meets all of the standards and requirements stated herein required for operation under the SARA agreement.

Mailing address of institution:

University of Rhode Island,
Kingston, RI 02881

Institution OPEID number:

003414

Institution FTE (latest IPEDS):

15,689

Name of principal SARA contact:

Diane J. Goldsmith

Email of principal SARA contact:

dgoldsmith@uri.edu

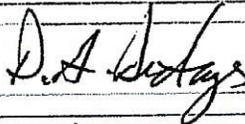
Phone number of principal
SARA contact:

401.874.4218

Typed name of signatory officer:

Donald H. DeHayes

Signature:



Date signed:

2/4/16

Title of signatory
institutional officer:

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

If institutional membership in SARA is denied by the home state's portal agency, the portal agency will provide to the applicant institution a written reason for the denial. The institution may reapply at any time, having corrected any deficiencies, or may appeal the denial to the SARA director of its regional compact. If the denial is upheld by the regional compact, the institution may further appeal to NC-SARA.

SARA State Supplemental Sheet for Institutions

SARA provides a degree of flexibility for states as they implement the agreement. Information about state-specific provisions may be added on this page for items such as fees (if any) to be charged in-state institutions, criteria for consideration of appeals of institutions having financial responsibility index scores between 1.0 and 1.49, etc.

State fee (if any):

SARA Fees for first time applicants
\$8,500.00 for FTE of more than 10,000. (NC-SARA Fee = \$6,000)

State fee schedule:

Annual Renewal Fee for institutions with FTE of more than 10,000 = \$6,000
NC-SARA fee = \$6,000/annually

State bonding requirement of institution (if any):

Financial responsibility criteria for ratings 1.0-1.49:

**University of Rhode Island's Response to the Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of
Distance Education as part of its Application to Participate in the State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreement.**

1. Online Learning is appropriate to the institution's mission and purpose.

URI's mission as a "public learner-centered research university" which serves "Rhode Island and beyond,"¹ has supported the development of online courses and programs directed at both its residential students and students regionally and nationally.

Since the late 1990's online courses at URI have been developed by colleges and departments to provide alternative learning modalities, alternative scheduling options, and summer courses for URI's undergraduate and graduate students. These are students who are accepted through our normal channels, and are primarily residential students with access to all of URI's services and support.

In response to the 2010-2015 Academic Plan, URI developed and launched its first three fully online programs: Master in Cyber Security, Master in Dietetics, and a RN to BS completion degree. These programs were selected after a careful market analysis. Each program has a specific recruitment strategy and students accepted into the programs must meet the admissions standards as determined by their departments and URI.

2. The Institution's plans for developing, sustaining and, if appropriate, expanding online learning offerings are integrated into its regular planning and evaluation process.

URI has three bodies that are responsible for different aspects of planning, sustaining, and evaluating online learning. There are two Joint Committees made up of faculty and administrators who report to jointly to the Faculty Senate and the Provost's Office, and an Office of Online Education.

Strategic academic planning is done by the Joint Committee on Academic Planning (JCAP) made up of faculty and senior administrators. All new programs proposed by faculty are subject to a pre-proposal process within JCAP to provide feedback about the consistency of the program to the University's mission and academic strategic plan. As noted above the 2010-2015 Academic Plan encouraged the development of online courses and programs. The new strategic plan for 2016-21, calls explicitly for the expansion of "post baccalaureate online degree programs and certificates."²

The Joint Committee on Online and Distance Learning meets regularly throughout the academic year to recommend institutional policies and practices for developing, planning, evaluating, and implementing online and distance learning offerings with a focus on quality, sustainability, and connection to the mission of the institution. These recommendations are made to both the Faculty Senate for policy changes and to the Office of Online Education for implementation.

¹ URI's mission can be found at: <http://web.uri.edu/about/mission/>

² URI's Academic Strategic Plan 2016-2021 can be found at: web.uri.edu/academic-planning/files/academic_plan_handbook.pdf

The Office of Online Education (OOE) is part of the Office for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (ATL) which reports to the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and is tasked to work with colleges and departments to facilitate this growth. Over the past three and a half years, the office has been expanded to include a full time director, two assistant directors for online learning –one to provide faculty training and the other to provide instructional development - and a graduate assistant. Those staff work closely with the two faculty developers and the assistant director for Student Learning Outcomes Assessment who are also part of the ATL. ATL also collaborates with Media and Technology services which provides technology training, and University Computing Systems which supports the technology infrastructure including the learning management system.

In addition all proposed new online programs go through the institution's approval process which requires an extensive budget and resource analysis as well as approval by the department and college curriculum committees, the University's Curriculum Affairs Committee and the Faculty Senate. New online programs must also be approved by RI's Post-Secondary Council and Board of Education.

3. Online learning is incorporated into the institution's systems of governance and academic oversight.

All online courses and programs are designed by URI faculty and taught by faculty hired by the respective department. Online courses and programs follow the standard procedures for approvals, designed to ensure the rigor of the offerings. This generally requires departmental approval (in colleges with departments), college curriculum approval, college approval, curriculum affairs committee approval, faculty senate approval, and approval by the President.

All courses at URI including online courses are evaluated by students using the IDEA rating system. Additionally faculty have the option of a peer review using Quality Matters by a trained URI faculty. Per the University Manual, all programs including online programs go through a periodic program review process.³

The RN to BS degree program has a contract with a partner to provide a set of services including marketing, training for faculty, Quality Matters reviews for courses, pre-enrollment support for applicants, and student-support for enrolled students. These services all use information and materials approved by URI. The company plays no role in admissions decisions, course design, or any other academic matter.

4. Curricula for the institutions' online learning offerings are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional instructional formats.

The process for course and program approval as outlined above is designed to ensure rigor as well as comparability to expected student outcomes with similar or identical onsite courses and programs. The RN to BS and the MS in Dietetics degrees are offered in an accelerated calendar with 6 sessions of 7 weeks each. The RN to BS students may begin their program

³ URI University Manual: http://web.uri.edu/manual/chapter-8/chapter-8-9/-8_86_10

in any session. The three programs schedule courses to ensure that students can graduate in a timely fashion. Links to all three program can be found at the website maintained by OOE <http://web.uri.edu/learningonline/programs>. Each program has a website outlining its curriculum, schedule, admissions and graduation requirements,⁴

The OOE offers instructional design support for all faculty designing online courses which relies heavily on the Quality Matters rubric. The instructional design and training assistance offered by the office emphasize the importance of appropriate faculty-student and student-student interaction and how to facilitate those within Sakai, our LMS. The RN to BS degree and the MS in Dietetics each use course templates designed by the OOE to ensure ease of navigation. Course sizes are generally set by faculty to ensure that there are appropriate faculty interaction and oversight of the course. The RN to BS degree sets larger class sizes using a "TA" model so that students are in groups no larger than 30 facilitated by a grad student or coach, which also ensures faculty oversight of the course and supports student interaction.

5. The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its online learning offerings, including the extent to which the online learning goals are achieved, and uses the results of its evaluations to enhance the attainment of the goals.

Online courses and programs are evaluated in the same way as onsite courses and programs. URI uses IDEA for student course evaluations and they are used for every online course. The OOE assesses the effectiveness of support for faculty designing online courses, faculty teaching them, and for students, using surveys, focus groups, and the input from the Joint Committee on Online and Distance Learning.

In response to these assessment, the OOE has redesigned its resources for faculty including a web page (web.uri.edu/teachingonline/), a self-paced online course to train faculty on Sakai, a fully-facilitated online training course, and a self-paced facilitated online course on distance education course design. The OOE is currently doing an in depth analysis of the effectiveness of this training. The OOE also created a web site for online learners (web.uri.edu/learningonline/), an online learning orientation which faculty can add to their courses, a student tips blog, and additional resources on time management and online learning skills.

Retention and persistence in online courses are a major focus of the OOE, enrollment services, the Graduate school, and the departments and colleges offering online programs. All of these offices work together to examine what barriers, both academic and student support, affect persistence and to make changes where appropriate.

6. Faculty responsible for delivering the online learning curricula and evaluating the students' success in achieving the online learning goals are appropriately qualified and effectively supported.

⁴ Dietetics - <http://web.uri.edu/msdieteticsonline/>
Cybersecurity - <http://www.dfsc.uri.edu/academics/psm>
RN to BS - <http://online.uri.edu/>

The Joint Committee on Online and Distance Learning has passed policies to ensure that all faculty teaching and/or designing online courses are qualified to do so. Faculty are deemed "qualified" if they have completed the online pedagogy courses, or have a certificate of training from another source such as the Online Consortium (formerly Sloan-C). Faculty may instead choose to submit a course they are currently teaching for a Quality Matters peer review. Many departments have made these qualifications mandatory, while others require them except in emergency situations.

As noted above, in order to support this, the OOE provides Sakai training on demand in a self-paced mode. Online Pedagogy 1 is offered 6-9 times a year depending on demand. And Online Pedagogy 2 is also a self-paced facilitated course available at anytime to those who have completed Online Pedagogy 1. Lastly the OOE has supported the training of several faculty in using the Quality Matters Rubric for peer review. This review is offered to any faculty who would like to improve their online course. The work of OOE is complimented by the Office of Instructional Technology and Media Services (ITMS) which offers workshops and resources on using Sakai and other technologies such as video conferencing, podcasting, etc. that faculty use in their online and onsite courses. Both the OOE and ITMS have robust websites with resources available to faculty 24-7.⁵

In addition both offices offer individual professional development and consultation to faculty. The OOE has an Assistant Director for Instructional Design who is available to help faculty design new courses or help revise old ones. ITMS provides assistance to faculty with the various technological tools they are using. ITMS also helps faculty create high quality videos.

7. The institution provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in online learning offerings.

The OOE provides a robust set of resources for online students including a self-paced orientation to online learning, a students tip blog, and information on best practices in online learning. Faculty are encouraged to include these resources and the orientation in their course syllabi. The online programs each offer their own orientation to the specific program and online learning.

URI support services including admissions, financial aid, the bookstore, library, help desk, and disability services are set up to work with online programs. Students who enroll in online programs receive an ID with their library access code. As noted above each program has a web site which clearly defines admission requirements, program goals, academic requirements, the calendar, and faculty information.

URI has clearly defined complaint processes for grade complaints⁶; complaints against another student⁷; complaints regarding discrimination, sexual harassment, or sexual

⁵ Office of Online Education – <http://web.uri.edu/teachingonline/>
Instructional Technology and Media Services: <http://web.uri.edu/itms/>

⁶ University Manual: <http://web.uri.edu/manual/chapter-8/chapter-8-2/> section 8.26.13

⁷ <http://web.uri.edu/studentconduct/conduct-system/>

violence⁸; and allegations of consumer protection violations, including fraud and false advertising, violations of state laws, rules or licensing requirements, violations of accreditation standards, or violations of standards established by "NC-SARA" or for complaints about education program quality, or other complaints specified by RI-CPE policy.⁹ Students may use electronic means to file complaints with any of these processes.

The RN to BS degree, which is the only undergraduate degree offered, has a contract with Academic Partnerships to provide student support. Students enrolled in the program are contacted weekly during their first three terms and then as frequently as they request going forward. These contacts are used to provide them with a single point of contact, ensure that they are on track, and refer them to the appropriate resources when necessary.

Student authentication is done through a password protected LMS system. Faculty may also choose to use a video-based remote proctoring system for final exams. The cost of proctoring is minimal, \$17/per exam through a token bought through our bookstore. Arrangements have been made for any students who cannot afford this cost.

8. The institution provides sufficient resources to support and, if appropriate, expand its online offerings.

URI's budgeting process is aligned with its strategic initiatives. Thus resources have been allocated to expand the staffing of the OOE, provide incentives for faculty to design and offer online courses to be offered in the summer, and to support the growth of online programs and certificates. Online programs have been, and will continue to be designed and offered only after a careful market analysis and understanding of how the program furthers the mission of the University. All new online programs must have an approved four-year budget which leads to self-sufficiency.

URI has just created an Information Technology Strategic Governance Committee to ensure that there is an appropriate structure and sufficient resources to support the technological needs of the URI including online learning. In January 2016 URI will complete a two year RFP process to move its LMS, SAKAI, to an external hosting company in order to ensure increased stability, provide for a more secure backup system, and allow for more rapid expansion as needed.

9. The institution assures the integrity of its online offerings

URI is concerned about academic integrity in all of its courses. It recognizes that online courses may require additional procedures to ensure that the student registered for the course is the one registered for it. All of URI's online courses are offered in a password protected Learning Management System. Faculty who give final exams in their classes, may use the services of a virtual proctoring company, Software Secure.¹⁰ This process requires that

⁸ <https://web.uri.edu/affirmativeaction/title-ix/>

⁹ To be posted when RI_CPE policy is available.

¹⁰ Information about the process can be found at: <http://www.softwaresecure.com/product/remote-proctor-now/>. The faculty guide is here:

students verify their identity with a government issued ID to ensure the person taking the exam is the one enrolled in the course. The company also uses a web cam to ensure the student is only accessing allowed materials. The syllabus for any class using remote proctoring informs students of the cost and how to buy tokens at the bookstore.

As not all courses require final exams, URI's Online Pedagogy courses, required of those teaching in online programs, is designed to promote practices that have been found to enhance student learning, it also works to ensure that faculty know their students. We provide faculty with links to best practices in promoting academic integrity, including WCET's Best Practices to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education Version 2.0. These practices include the use of discussion forums so that faculty know their students and recognize their writing styles, a variety of assessments designed to ensure that faculty know their students, suggestions for creating assignments that are personalized, and examples of disaggregated projects and research assignments.

URI's policies and procedures are designed to ensure that all students have an understanding of academic integrity and that faculty understand how to promote it. All syllabi, including that for online courses, must contain language explaining URI's policies on academic integrity (<http://web.uri.edu/teach/syllabus/>). The Orientation for students in online courses and programs which is available in our LMS, SAKAI, deals explicitly with academic integrity in its section 5, *Define Plagiarism and URI's Stance on Academic Honesty*.

URI continues to explore additional methods, both pedagogical and technological to ensure the academic integrity of its programs and degrees.