State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION
80 Washington Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Enclosure 5a3.
July 16, 2015

July 10, 2015

To: Council on Postsecondary Education

From: Commissioner Jim Purcell, Ed.D.

Subject: University of Rhode Island Proposal for the Creation of an Undergraduate Minor in American Studies along with a new AME Program Code and Course (AME 204)

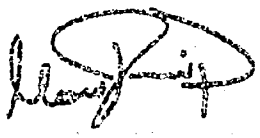
The University of Rhode Island is proposing to create an American Studies minor in the College of Arts and Sciences along with a new AME program code and course (AME 204). This minor would provide a structure for interdisciplinary study across the University with courses for the minor being drawn from arts and humanities, social sciences, sciences and information studies. The university has made developing interdisciplinary programs a priority however, until now, the university did not have an American Studies program which the proposal notes was the first interdisciplinary major found at higher education institutions: "Since its early twentieth-century inception, American Studies has been an open forum for serious, sustained reflection on America's changing ideals and identities. American Studies as such has enabled several generations of students to inquire into the evolving bases of life in and around the porous borders of this country." American Studies examines contemporary and historical societies and cultures from both global and local perspectives with the goal of adding to the greater understanding of the United States.

Rationale

There are several American Studies programs (minors, majors, and concentrations) in New England and the proposal notes that there is sufficient interest in the region that suggests URI should offer a program to meet the demand. Additionally, with URI's focus on increasing interdisciplinary offerings, the American Studies minor can act as a source of coordination for instruction and research.

Institutional Role

Drawing on its roots as a "land, sea, and urban grant institution," URI would be able to bring a unique perspective to an American Studies program by exploring cultural resources available across the campuses and explore the linkages between the earth, maritime and social sciences. The development of the American Studies minor is in keeping with the university's academic plans to foster interdisciplinary study. Since the program will draw from existing disciplines on campus, there is the need to add only the American Studies capstone course. The benefits to be gained from offering an American Studies minor at URI include: addressing the unmet demand for



American Studies courses across URI, the role that American Studies can play as a structural coordinating focus for offering interdisciplinary coursework at URI, and that the university has the faculty and other educational resources to enrich an American Studies program.

Interinstitutional Considerations

In Rhode Island, no other public institution of higher education offers an American Studies program, but six private institutions including Brown University, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence College, Roger Williams University, Salve Regina University, and Bryant University offer an American Studies major, minor and/or concentration. Additionally, American Studies programs can be found at several colleges or universities in New England. URI claims that not only does this prove demand, but also that the American Studies minor could prove to be a regional draw for students who otherwise would choose another institution if URI did not offering this program.

Curriculum

The American Studies minor requires 18 credits (6 courses) of approved URI courses related to the discipline. The required courses include: AME 204 Introduction to American Studies (included with this proposal), and 5 additional courses from at least three different departments (other than AME).

A list of approved courses will be developed annually; students may petition the Program Director to have courses accepted toward the minor. Students will have a range of options (courses from 21 departments) to allow students to develop their own specialized program of study within the minor.

Students

It is expected that students interested in this minor will have majors from across the university. Historically, students in the Arts and Sciences find this minor attractive with most representation from English, Political Science and History and with some interest from Information Studies, Environmental Studies and Diversity Studies. URI expects a diverse student body to choose this program. The coursework will be analytical, interpretative and research-oriented and is expected to appeal to students who will be interested in synthesizing connections between their major and the American Studies minor.

Employment

Students with a background in American Studies find work in law, journalism, teaching, government, museum curation, and business. Students are also prepared for advanced study at the masters or doctoral level. Public sector jobs, government agencies, or publicly-supported institutions often employ American Studies graduates as interpreters, explaining an agency's or institution's function, projects, activities, or history to the public according to the American Studies Association. The proposal mentions that American Studies students have interned at the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Newport Art Museum and have found employment opportunities at historical sites, public and private schools, and in publishing, heritage tourism, historic preservation and information research.

Evaluation

The Director of the American Studies program would evaluate the program on the basis of students' academic performance and the post baccalaureate placement of students who declared and completed the minor.

Staff review

OPC staff reviewed the information on the undergraduate minor in American Studies and course changes at the University of Rhode Island. The establishment of the minor is within the mission, role and scope of the University and does not require Council approval.