



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

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Chair

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Secondary Education**

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**Council on Postsecondary
Education**

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Dennis Duffy, Esq.

The Honorable Thomas Izzo

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Kerry I. Rafanelli, Esq.

John J. Smith, Jr.

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TO: Members of the Council on Postsecondary Education
FROM: Jim Purcell, Ed.D, Commissioner for Postsecondary Education
DATE: January 5, 2016
RE: Notice of Change: Establishment of Tracks within the Masters of Oceanography at the University of Rhode Island

Background

The Graduate School of Oceanography (GSO) at the University of Rhode Island is proposing to offer specific tracks within the Masters of Oceanography degree in Fisheries, Coastal Systems, Ocean Technology and Data, and General Oceanography. The Master of Oceanography degree prepares students to solve real-world problems through the application of science and technology. The program as currently offered does not include tracks.

Rationale

The Graduate School of Oceanography is establishing tracks within the Masters of Oceanography degree to provide better professional training in specific areas with the goal of attracting and preparing students to find employment or to enhance their careers in governmental and non-governmental organizations. The Masters of Oceanography program attracts students nationally and internationally who are working in or intend to work in ocean environment assessment, maritime industries, fisheries, science communication, ocean policy and law, and education or who intend to pursue further graduate education.

In developing the tracks, the GSO worked with over 50 regional and national marine-related businesses, and governmental and nongovernmental agencies to ensure that the proposed tracks would appropriately equip current and anticipated employees. In addition, GSO held a workforce development conference with 25 business and agency participants. As a result of these conversations, the GSO modified the original proposed tracks.

Institutional Role

The Masters in Oceanography is an established program and the tracks are consistent with the strengths of the GSO in science, technology and policy.

Program: Descriptions of the New Tracks

Fisheries track combines oceanography education with training in professional fisheries science with a focus on fisheries in developed and developing countries. Marine fisheries science and management requires training in oceanography, statistics, biology and social sciences. The fisheries track prepares students for occupations or advancement in government agencies, fishing industry, environmental consulting and environmental organizations.

Coastal Systems track provides students with a critical understanding of natural and manmade processes in the coastal zone, and socioeconomic track is intended to assist those who are interested in obtaining or enhancing employment in maritime companies (consulting, construction, shipping, resource and energy development), ports, the uniformed marine services (Navy, Coast Guard, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Corps), governmental agencies, and environmental organizations. Students can select focus areas such as mapping and marine spatial planning, oil spill impacts and remediation, coastal eutrophication,¹ the impact of and planning for sea-level rise, coastal ocean energy development, and ports.

Ocean Technology and Data track is intended for students who are interested in oceanographic technology and in obtaining or enhancing careers in maritime industries, environmental consulting, and the uniformed marine services. This track provides training in marine robotics, seafloor mapping, sensor utilization, oceanographic data collection and processing, and maritime policy.

General Oceanography track provides a foundation in all oceanographic disciplines and allows students to select the advanced topics for further study. The advanced topics may be focused on developing or advancing careers in ocean science, communication, environmental law, education or as preparation for further graduate study.

All of the tracks require 30 credits with a minimum of 15 credits in oceanography courses, successful completion of a Master's examination, and maintenance of a 3.0 GPA. In addition, all of the tracks require 6 credits of independent study, which may include an internship resulting in a major paper or equivalent project, and participation and presentation in a student seminar. The remaining courses are specific to areas of professional knowledge within the track. No new courses are required for the proposed tracks.

Faculty, Staff, and Administration

The courses in each of the tracks will be taught by current faculty in GSO and other departments within URI. The program will be administered by the Academic Affairs Office at GSO. No additional staff will be required.

Students

GSO intends to target recent graduates who are interested in obtaining employment or enhancing career options. Specifically, GSO plans to recruit students from the private sector, governmental

¹ Eutrophication is “a system of ecosystem responses to human activities that fertilize water bodies with nitrogen and phosphorous, often leading to changes in animal and plant populations and degradation of water and habitat quality” *The Encyclopedia of Earth*, accessed December 23, 2015.

agencies and the uniformed services (in particular from the Navy, Coast Guard and NOAA Corps). GSO hopes to have 20 students by the end of the second year of the revised program, with the intent of growing the program to 50 students.

Evaluation

GSO plans to conduct an annual evaluation of the program in the first five years concentrating on the effectiveness of recruiting, educational content and matriculation procedures. A survey of students, employers and institutions involved in the Workforce Development Workshop will be conducted. Input received from these sources will be used to recommend changes to the program.

Financial Considerations

GSO is anticipating that tuition revenue will increase with the number of students without requiring any additional financial resources.

RIOPC Review

RIOPC staff reviewed the information on the proposed establishment of tracks within the Master of Oceanography program which was supplied by the University of Rhode Island. The academic changes presented are within the mission, role and scope of the University of Rhode Island and do not require Council approval.