

Report of the Providence Campus Undergraduate Initiative Committee

April 25, 2007

The Providence Campus Undergraduate Initiative Committee (PCUIC) recommends that the Faculty Senate approve the following provisional pilot program for the admission of traditional students to the Feinstein Providence Campus:

A provisional (pilot) program for three years, beginning in the Fall of 2008, to admit freshmen directly from high school to URI, with the intention of enrolling in courses at the Feinstein Providence campus. The program would be expanded from the currently approved three majors (Communication Studies, Human Development and Family Studies, Psychology) to include undecided students, as well as students who hope to enter a major for which they can complete the first two years of coursework on the Feinstein Providence campus), with the understanding that many of these students will have to transfer to the URI Kingston campus to complete their degree.

The target is 24 new students per year taking a full time course load during the daytime hours on the Providence campus. Students will be able to complete their general education requirements and at least three beginning-level courses in a potential major, choosing from a reasonable spectrum of course options. The currently offered schedule can accommodate the first two years of study for undecided students as well as those seeking majors, with only minor adjustments, as well as those students seeking to pursue one of the eight majors currently offered at the Feinstein Providence campus. Appropriate advising will be an integral part of this program, so that students do not attend the Providence campus if it would not be in their best interest, and make appropriate choices if it would. Additional services such as student services can be met for this small group of students by existing structures and staff.

As with the current program, admissions are through the Kingston campus and are consistent with university-wide admissions criteria, not drawn from any special pool such as waitlisted or rejected applicants.

An evaluation will be carried out in the third year of the program. If this pilot program proves successful, we will seek formal approval and continuation, with a dedicated budget and plan for increasing staffing levels. If, at that time, the program does not appear to be serving URI student needs, the University will no longer admit freshmen directly from high school to the Providence campus.

Justification:
“Direct from High School” Admission to URI Feinstein Providence Campus

Proposal:

We are petitioning the Faculty Senate for a provisional measure to open admission at the URI Feinstein Providence Campus to students direct from high school who are “undecided” and expanding the list of majors beyond HDF, Psychology and Communications. There is no cost associated with proceeding with this modified approach, other than the time and effort we will put into promoting, recruiting and advising for the program.

As the attached analyses shows, we are **currently** able to accommodate in daytime classes two years of General Education requirements for a substantial number of majors (with the exception of those that require specialized facilities or other support/instructional services only available in Kingston) with the addition of only 19 courses spread out over four semesters. If granted provisional approval to admit these new students, we will commit the resources of our advising staff to assist these students in preparing for admission into the degree program of their choice, recognizing that this may entail transfer to Kingston. As our academic advisors presently assist our non-traditional students in this process, they already possess the requisite knowledge and experience to service these new students.

Committee Progress: We have reviewed and discussed numerous issues, including: whether or not there is a population to be served by this program; the lack of residence halls in Providence; how RIC and CCRI are already serving in-state commuter students; and, finally, the question as to how we define our “urban students,” specifically in terms of their differentiation from the Kingston Talent Development students. Below, we have outlined our position with regards to each:

Needs Assessment: We have reviewed the questionnaires, surveys and interview responses that were previously compiled, and concur that there is sufficient interest in this program amongst our in-state population so as to attract our revised target enrollment of 24 students per academic year. We believe that our inability to do so thus far directly relates to the restriction to the three major programs. New information indicates that while Communication Studies and Psychology are among the most popular majors on both campuses, they generally attract students through introductory courses, and they are not popular choices among potential freshmen still in high school. Moreover, to date the program has not had the benefit of a fully coordinated admissions cycle – i.e. one in which web sites, application forms, support staff, promotional materials, open houses, community outreach, and the like were all in place and in synch. We are optimistic that with all of the admissions/promotions components in place, and the opening of the program to undecided majors, we will attract a much larger group of students. Even if we do not, we will at least know with certainty that the original assessment was flawed and thus be able to re-evaluate our approach from a more informed perspective. Overall, it

seems more logical to proceed along these lines rather than to cease all activities to develop a new strategy without ever having fully implemented the original.

Defining the “Urban Student”: When we speak of the “urban student” that we hope to serve at the Providence Campus is it of critical importance to recognize that this student need not conform to a particular socio-economic profile, nor be representative of any given ethnic or racial identity, nor hail from a specific geographical designation, be it in-state or out-of-state; urban, suburban or rural. Rather, the “urban student” we envision at the Providence Campus is the student who, for a variety of potential reasons, prefers to pursue his/her studies at an urban campus, ideally one with programs and initiatives in place that allow for a free-flowing interaction between the University and the city in which it is situated. Many initiatives are already in place by which the curricula of the degree programs offered in Providence are shaped by and/or responsive to the greater urban community, and plans are under way to continue to move in this direction as we work to fulfill our urban grant mission. Thus, while our first students will most likely be local residents who are perhaps drawn to a commuter campus for personal reasons, this in fact represents only one profile of the “urban student” we hope to serve.

Program Definition and Redundancy: Again, we envision the University having a more dynamic presence, and thus making a greater impact, in the capital city, through urban based programming efforts and applied research initiatives at the Feinstein Providence Campus. Neither RIC nor CCRI offer students the opportunity for applied, research-based and/or collaborative learning in the urban environment. Talent Development’s stated mission, meanwhile, is to offer students of color and from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to attend URI. While some TD students may be interested in our urban campus, we do not see our vision for the Providence Campus and TD’s mission in any way over-lapping. TD aims to provide minority and low-income students with a University education in the degree program of their choice, whereas we aim to provide an urban-based education to students of all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. It is most significant to note that we do not seek to re-create the URI Kingston campus in Providence, but to offer something different and unique. Our goal is to complement, and not compete, with programs being offered in Kingston.

Funding and Faculty Support: The program’s budget projects that through the tuition revenues generated by traditional-aged students, we will be able to further develop our urban-based curricula and maintain a mix of full- and part-time faculty similar to that of the Kingston campus. Moreover, in keeping with the urban university model, particular care would be exercised in recruiting part-time instructors from the surrounding community so as to bring valuable applied experience into the classroom and to strengthen university-community ties. Internship placements for students and research opportunities for faculty are just two examples of how collaboration between the URI Feinstein Providence Campus and the public and private sectors of Providence could be mutually beneficial.

The budget projections also include a small number of out-of-state students, in regards to which the issue of our lack of residence halls has been raised. In keeping with the vision

outlined above, we recognize that we are at present time only able to accommodate commuter students, and we do not anticipate ever becoming a residential campus in the traditional sense. However, we have researched other urban campuses and feel that we do have the potential to attract out-of-state students as our urban curriculum grows and develops over time. There are a number of urban colleges and universities that may be classified as either exclusively “commuter” or, alternately, “low residency” institutions which do, in fact, attract out-of-state students on the basis of the quality of their degree programs. In the latter case, these institutions either manage or contract with a housing provider in the urban community and offer housing to a limited number of students, usually during their first year. In keeping with the urban university model, the expectation is that students will independently move into housing in the surrounding community in their upper-class years. We believe that the “low residency” model offers great potential for the Providence Campus as we work towards our long-term goals.

Conclusions: The initiative to admit students just out of high school to the Feinstein Providence Campus both responds to a present need and positions the University for a future opportunity. At the current time, we believe we can serve a sub-set of the in-state population that is not interested in immediately joining the Kingston campus. Long-term, we intend to attract a new and different group of target students who might not otherwise have considered URI at all. We do not merely seek to fill seats. Rather, our ultimate goal is to support the University’s urban grant mission and to attract a new group of students.