

### **Session 3: Consensus Recommendations and Challenges/Questions/Issues that Remain**

**How does URI demonstrate a comprehensive commitment to serving the distinctive social, economic, and ecological opportunities and challenges of the Ocean State that can serve as a model for the world?**

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What outcomes are you looking for with regard to the following questions?

- A. How can our programs be developed/focused to further contribute to economic development and societal well-being? How can research and scholarship be translated and help to better deploy the intellectual resources of students and faculty?
- B. What systems or processes would facilitate the development of partnerships and desired changes?
- C. How does the University parlay its capacity in marine ecosystems and coastal communities/economies and use its expertise to advance economic development?

#### **Consensus recommendations**

- URI has an incredible opportunity to help develop and guide policy in the state of RI due to its small size, dense and diverse population, and unique coastal/marine geography. The University can be reconfigured within the state and nation to be a leader in “green” issues, and has the added advantage of having access to matching opportunities from state and federal government. There are many resources here at URI that can be brought to bear on these policy challenges if we can bring together basic and applied research for outreach, policy, and education needs of our state.
- URI needs to develop centers or institutes modeled after successful existing ones, such as the Coastal Institute (i.e., going from local to global problem-solving; projects all over the world; great outreach and educational programs that attract international students, who take their learning to develop resources in their own nations). Currently, resources within the University exist in silos across the colleges and we have to unleash these resources through collaborative structures, such as centers or institutes. Centers should include evidence-based policy and practice that allow URI to engage in essential research and educational activities that include faculty, staff and students. Areas that URI has the expertise to address are in the natural sciences (marine and coastal in particular), health care, and education reform (Central Falls Project). Centers need to respond to both local and global issues. The centers should be multidisciplinary, multi-institutional, and must have the active involvement of students. Centers should

not be funded by the university or the state, but must be developed through sustainable public/private partnerships. Preferably, we need to develop effective functions rather than creating more bureaucratic structures. This should happen from the bottom up rather than from the top down.

- URI has to communicate our current expertise and resources to the public and constituencies so that the capacities of the university are recognized. Currently, the state does not know about our capacities to help solve problems. We need to figure out who we are, develop some focused centers/institutes/themes, and then communicate this expertise to others through effective marketing and public relations mechanisms.
- We need to involve both our undergraduate and graduate students in these efforts. Students currently are not very involved in efforts to translate research at the University into policy and practice to solve state-wide problems. They can be a wonderful resource for the university as well as the state, and can raise the public awareness of URI's resources and raise the level of public education about critical state challenges. In addition, in these days of budget cutting at the state level, our students might be able to provide services that will assist state departments in fulfilling their missions.
- We need to tie research, teaching, and service missions together in projects within the state. Areas that we may have the expertise to begin developing "themes:" coastal and marine sciences; educational reform; health sciences; small business development; tourism; labor, employment, and poverty issues.
- Could the Research Park be a mechanism by which we could organize, support, and present our expertise to the state? Could it support incubators for applied research, policy development, and practice in focused areas?

### **Challenges/questions/issues that remain**

- *There are many structural problems in the state of Rhode Island that must be overcome in order to resolve challenges the state faces:*
  - RI is tied for 1<sup>st</sup> place in unemployment rates and we have a prison system that is growing and wasting (mostly young) human potential.
  - Literacy levels among RI citizens are low. We need to have an educated public to identify and develop solutions to the state's challenges. The high schools are not doing well to prepare students for their educational experience and this presents a challenge for local colleges.
  - Very few integrated approaches exist across state government and private and non-profit agencies in dealing with poverty, unemployment, health care, education, etc. There is no real intellectual leadership in the state

regarding these issues and efforts are scattered across multiple units with no coordination, discourse, or sharing of resources. There is a lack of data-based policy development and practice in the state.

- People who make policy in the state are limited to very few people who sit up in the general assembly. The public must be educated on who is in power and the concept of separation of power. Interest groups write legislation. The extreme concentration of power in the state is detrimental for understanding and developing solutions for problems the state is facing.
- We have such a lack of support from the state to work on the challenges and educate the students at the university. We need to “save ourselves” to still do what we do despite our economic challenges.
- *There are many policy and structural problems at URI that serve as barriers to effectively organizing resources and people into responsive centers/partnerships.*
  - Difficulty in accounting for faculty workload, credits, overhead, especially as these affect teaching across disciplines
  - We need to assign GRA’s more competitively to focus areas
  - Interdisciplinary education needs to be streamlined so that students may graduate in a timely manner
  - Due to tuition increases and the need to attract out of state students to balance our budget, we are shortchanging RI students and missing out on opportunities to build public support for our services at URI.
  - Students need to be a part of policy and change as it happens. Students are in a great environment to learn but they often do not see the connections between their academic work and how it can be applied to solve state and world problems. We need to connect knowledge and practice among our students better.
  - We may need to change General Education requirements at URI and require students to take certain classes in central “theme” areas. We need to raise expectations of what core knowledge areas students need to have in order to function effectively as applied researchers, policy developers, and problem solvers with regard to major challenges in the state and world.
  - Grant Accounting needs to be more helpful rather than obstructionist in assisting faculty with grants for their work.
  - We have no infrastructure for supporting the work of faculty and students in policy and practice oriented centers. There should be more support for faculty and students to engage in opportunities that would give them

hands-on experiences in the field. These opportunities may need to be designated as professional services that can be paid for (not research). We have to build infrastructure which we do not currently have to support this work.

- Any action needs to have a plan and follow through or we should not do the work. We have a history of not having follow-through so we need to be very thoughtful going forward, especially in developing the theme areas of expertise.
- The culture at URI needs to change from “I have to protect myself” to “How can I assist you so that we can get this done together?”