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**The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees
Academic Affairs and Research Committee Meeting
Thursday, April 9, 2026 · 12:00 p.m. EDT**

**The University of Rhode Island
Beagle Board Room, The Alumni Center
73 Upper College Road, Kingston, RI 02881**

OFFICIAL MINUTES

The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee meeting was held in person, with committee members participating remotely. A recording of the meeting has been posted for viewing at <https://web.uri.edu/trustees/meetings/>.

Committee Chair Neil Kerwin welcomed everyone to the April 9, 2026 meeting of the URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee. He conducted a roll call attendance and determined that a quorum of members was present. He called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

The URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee members in attendance:

- Neil Kerwin, Committee Chair (remote)
- Charles Fogarty, Committee Vice Chair (remote) (arrived at 12:23 p.m.)
- Maria Ducharme (remote)
- David Martirano (remote)
- Joseph Matthews (remote)
- Marc B. Parlange, President (ex officio, non-voting) (remote)
- Kristine Bovy (non-voting) (remote)

URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee member not in attendance:

- Monica Games

URI Board of Trustees Board Chair Margo Cook and Board Vice Chair Armand Sabitoni also participated remotely.

URI President's Stewardship Council members in attendance:

- Alyssa Boss, Vice President and General Counsel (remote)
- Bethany Jenkins, Vice President, Research and Economic Development (remote)
- Lauren Jensen, Deputy General Counsel (remote)
- Kristin Johnson, Vice Provost for Global Initiatives (remote)
- Dean Libutti, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success (remote)
- Matthew McDonald, Vice President for Communications and Marketing (remote)
- Markeisha Miner, Vice President for Community, Equity, and Diversity (remote)
- Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs (remote)

URI staff members in attendance:

- Emily Diomandes, Deputy Chief of Staff and Interim Board Secretary (in person)
- Lorrie McCarty, Staff Assistant to the Provost, Office of the Provost (remote)
- Lynn Owens, Associate Secretary, Board of Trustees (in person)

Committee Chair Kerwin welcomed the group and acknowledged that the University of Rhode Island occupies the traditional stomping ground of the Narragansett Nation and the Niantic People.

Committee Chair Kerwin asked if there were any proposed amendments to the agenda. None were presented.

1. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

a. Minutes of the February 10, 2026, Academic Affairs and Research Committee Meeting [Enclosure](#)

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by Joseph Matthews and seconded by David Martirano, and hearing no discussion, it was

VOTED THAT the Academic Affairs and Research Committee approve the minutes of the February 10, 2026, meeting of the Committee.

VOTE: 4 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Maria Ducharme, Neil Kerwin, David Martirano, Joseph Matthews

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Trustee Fogarty was not available for the vote.

2. REPORT OF THE CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER

Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs

Provost Barbara Wolfe welcomed the attendees and provided an overview of the agenda, which included updates on faculty searches, accreditation progress, and key performance indicators (KPIs) for Strategic Priority 2, Enhancing Student Achievement.

a. Review progress of University academic performance metrics and update on academic initiatives.

Provost Wolfe provided an update on the KPIs for Strategic Priority 2. She highlighted improvements in first and second year retention rates and the steady progress in graduation rates. She noted challenges in closing the equity gap between Pell and non-Pell students. Efforts to address these challenges include expanded advising, the launch of a new mentoring program, and investments in student services and housing.

Provost Wolfe also discussed the goal of increasing graduate enrollment and degree conferrals, noting the growth and opportunities in online graduate programs. As an example, she highlighted the shifting of the DNP (Doctor of Nursing Practice) program from in person to online to increase accessibility.

b. Review of academic efforts in support of student success.

Provost Wolfe turned to the University's efforts on student success and highlighted the recent launch of the Fannon Institute for Student Success, made possible by the generosity of Kent and Diane Fannon. She turned to Dean Libutti, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success, to expand on further updates.

Associate Vice President Libutti provided an update on student success initiatives under the CARES framework, which integrates the Career Center, Academic Enhancement Center, Retention Services, Exploratory Studies, and Student-Athlete Support to improve retention, graduation rates, and career outcomes. He highlighted the significant impact of more than 24,000 advising appointments, over 18,000 student enrollments in experiential learning, and more than 15,000 students supported through tutoring and coaching, contributing to a 96% positive first-destination rate for graduates.

Associate Vice President Libutti concluded that there would be a continued focus on closing achievement gaps, using data-driven approaches to improve student outcomes, and leveraging resources through the Fannon Institute to strengthen retention and graduation metrics.

Trustee Fogarty asked if there was information on the growth of new online programs being implemented. Provost Wolfe noted that the Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) program, which was converted from an in-person to an online program, has seen strong enrollment growth. Associate Vice President Libutti also highlighted the success of the Master of Public Administration (MPA) program. He stated that enrollment growth in online programs will be realized over the summer, noting the enrollment cycle for online programs is different than for in-person. He added that the University's recent marketing campaign for URI Online contributed to record numbers of inquiries and the URI Online team is collaborating with the URI Foundation on outreach to alumni to continue their

education.

c. Update on searches and NECHE accreditation.

Provost Wolfe reported that the search for a new Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences is in its final stages, with hopes of filling the position before the fall semester, and the University Librarian search is ongoing with a target start date before September. She noted that Beth Meyerand recently began her role as Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School.

Provost Wolfe provided an update on accreditation, noting that the University is on track with its reaccreditation process, supported by strong campus participation in surveys and listening sessions, and is currently undergoing data collection in preparation for drafting the self-study report over the summer. She commended Sue Adams, Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Initiatives, for stewarding this process.

3. REPORT OF THE CHIEF RESEARCH OFFICER

Bethany Jenkins, Vice President, Research and Economic Development

a. Update on Activities, Metrics of Success, and Strategic Planning for the URI Research Foundation

Vice President for Research and Economic Development Bethany Jenkins provided an update on the evolution of the URI Research Foundation, established in 2007 to support intellectual property and innovation activities at the university. She noted that due to significant growth in its programs, including Polaris MEP and 401 Tech Bridge, the organization is undergoing restructuring to better focus on its core mission. The intent is for Polaris MEP and Tech Bridge to become a separate entity under the Polaris Team that supports the regional manufacturing and workforce development, and then the URI Research Foundation aligns with URI under URI Innovations for IP and innovation.

Vice President Jenkins indicated that plans are underway to establish the separate nonprofit Polaris entity to manage manufacturing and workforce development initiatives, while refocusing the research foundation on innovation and entrepreneurship under the “URI Innovations” identity. As part of this transition, Pete Rumsey was appointed Associate Vice President for Economic Development, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship.

The Vice President acknowledged that there are improved outreach efforts, including a redesigned website, expanded faculty engagement opportunities, and a dedicated team supporting technology transfer and partnerships. The initiative has generated renewed energy across campus, with ongoing efforts to secure external funding and further develop URI’s innovation ecosystem.

Vice President Jenkins shared that a National Science Foundation (NSF) award is currently pending under the Technology Innovation and Partnership Directorate to help support this innovation ecosystem. She noted that URI is writing grants to support this, and that this is the start of an exciting new chapter for URI's entrepreneurial faculty and students.

Committee Chair Kerwin questioned the anticipated timeline for achieving measurable increases in

bringing intellectual property to market through startups or external partnerships. Vice President Jenkins noted that progress is already underway. She explained that several entrepreneurial faculty have recently launched startup companies, with the team providing support in fundraising efforts, resource alignment, and partnership development. She provided an example of a faculty-led company developing real-time imaging technology for tumor detection during breast cancer surgery, which has advanced to clinical trials in collaboration with Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

Committee Chair Kerwin thanked Vice President Jenkins and relayed that it would be interesting to review the projects and accomplishments in a year's time and how the university is benefiting from them.

Board Chair Margo Cook commended Vice President Jenkins and her team for their leadership in advancing the initiative, noting that by establishing the Research Foundation, the University has created the ability to invest and bring this research into an entrepreneurial environment and potentially bring some of these companies to fruition. Board Chair Cook also suggested inviting university-affiliated entrepreneurs to present to the board and inquired about what the five-year outlook looks like.

Trustee David Martirano discussed the importance of defining a clear strategic direction for the university's innovation and investment efforts, noting that goals may include financial returns, economic development, job creation, and broader support for Rhode Island's growth. He emphasized that aligning priorities and establishing a formal strategy will be essential moving forward. Committee Chair Kerwin suggested that this broader discussion be taken up at a later time and proposed forming an ad hoc working group of the board to provide guidance as the initiative develops.

Trustee Joseph Matthews noted that the College of Engineering hosted a showcase presentation which involved their professors or people that were adjacent with some of their programs and business's similar to Shark Tank. Vice President Jenkins interjected that this was the first technology showcase and that she hoped to hold more than once a year, inviting the investor community.

b. Annual Review of the Academic Affairs and Research Committee Charter. [Enclosure](#)

Neil Kerwin, Committee Chair

c. Annual Review of the Academic Affairs and Research Committee Calendar. [Enclosure](#)

Neil Kerwin, Committee Chair

Regarding Items 3.b. and 3.c., Committee Chair Kerwin reported that the two enclosures define the committee's charter and calendar. He noted that he and Provost Wolfe have reviewed both and feel confident that the Committee has been compliant. He asked the Committee if there were any ideas to alter the charter or calendar. There were none brought forth by the Committee.

4. ACTION ITEMS

- a. **Consideration of the granting of tenure effective December 28, 2025, for Allison Sylvetsky, PhD, who has met the requirements for tenure at the University; and recommendation to the URI Board of Trustees.** [Enclosure](#)

Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs

Provost Wolfe asked the Committee to recommend to the Board the granting of tenure for Allison Sylvetsky, PhD, College of Health Sciences, who has met the requirements for tenure as outlined in the University Manual and the Collective Bargaining Agreement of the University of Rhode Island Chapter of the American Association of University Professors.

Allison Sylvetsky is joining URI as Professor and Chair of the Department of Nutrition in the College of Health Sciences. Prior to joining URI, she served as Vice Chair in the Department of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at The George Washington University, where she received tenure.

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by David Martirano and seconded by Maria Ducharme, and hearing no discussion, it was

VOTED THAT the Committee recommend that the Board approve the granting of tenure, effective December 28, 2025, to faculty member Allison Sylvetsky, PhD, who has met the requirements for tenure at the University of Rhode Island, as recommended in the enclosure.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Maria Ducharme, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Joseph Matthews, David Martirano

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

- b. **Consideration of the awarding of a posthumous academic degree at Spring Commencement 2026; and recommendation to the URI Board of Trustees.** [Enclosure](#)

Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

Provost Wolfe respectfully requested the awarding of a posthumous academic degree at the Spring Commencement for Mr. John “Jack” Heineman. He was pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering in the College of Engineering.

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by Joseph Matthews and seconded by Charles Fogarty, and hearing no discussion, it was

VOTED THAT the Committee recommend that the Board approve the awarding of a posthumous academic degree at Spring Commencement 2026 to John “Jack” Heineman, College of Engineering, as recommended and presented in the enclosure.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Maria Ducharme, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Joseph Matthews, David Martirano

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

- c. **Consideration of the awarding of undergraduate and graduate degrees, diplomas, certificates, and honors to be conferred by the President to the candidates who will have completed their requirements at the conclusion of the Spring 2026 term and who are approved by the faculty of the University of Rhode Island; and recommendation to the URI Board of Trustees.** [Enclosure](#)
Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by Maria Ducharme and seconded by David Martirano, and hearing no discussion, it was

VOTED THAT the Committee recommend that the Board approve the awarding of undergraduate and graduate degrees, diplomas, certificates, and honors to be conferred by the President to the candidates who will have completed their requirements at the conclusion of the Spring 2026 term and who are approved by the faculty of the University of Rhode Island, as recommended and presented in the enclosure.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Maria Ducharme, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Joseph Matthews, David Martirano

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

- d. **Consideration of legislation from the Graduate Council #2025-2026-05C, College of Arts and Sciences to create a new degree opportunity in Applied Science Communication, Master of Arts which has been approved by the faculty and president of the University of Rhode Island; and recommendation to the URI Board of Trustees.** [Enclosure](#)
Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs

Provost Wolfe reported that the new online Master of Arts in Applied Science Communication provides a comprehensive foundation in the principles and practices of science communication and focuses exclusively on effectively communicating scientific knowledge to diverse audiences. This

program will prepare graduates for a wide range of positions in science communication, public information and policy advising for research institutions, museums, and nonprofit organizations.

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by Joseph Matthews and seconded by Charles Fogarty, and hearing no discussion, it was

VOTED THAT the Committee recommend that the Board approve legislation recommended by the Faculty Senate and the President providing a new online degree opportunity, Master of Arts, Applied Science Communication, as recommended and presented in the enclosure.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Maria Ducharme, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Joseph Matthews, David Martirano

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

- e. **Consideration of legislation from the Faculty Senate Curriculum & Standards Committee Report #2025-2026-06C, College of Engineering organizational change to create a new degree opportunity, Bachelor of Science, Environmental Engineering, which has been approved by the faculty and president of the University of Rhode Island; and recommendation to the URI Board of Trustees.** [Enclosure](#)

Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs

Provost Wolfe noted that this was a new in-person degree program offered by the College of Engineering. This program prepares students to apply engineering and scientific principles to protect human health and the environment by designing and managing systems for clean water, pollution control, sustainable infrastructure, and environmental problem solving across the public and private sectors.

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by David Martirano and seconded by Joseph Matthews, and hearing no discussion, it was

VOTED THAT the Committee recommend that the Board approve legislation recommended by the Faculty Senate and the President providing a new degree opportunity, Bachelor of Science, Environmental Engineering, as recommended and presented in the enclosure.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Maria Ducharme, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Joseph Matthews, David Martirano

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

- f. **Consideration of legislation from the Graduate Council #2025-2026-04C, College of Education to create a new degree opportunity in Health Professions Education, Master of Arts which has been approved by the faculty and president of the University of Rhode Island; and recommendation to the URI Board of Trustees.** [Enclosure](#)

Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs

Provost Wolfe stated that this is a new online degree program offered by the College of Education. This fully online program features synchronous and asynchronous sessions in a blended format. This program prepares current and future educators in medicine and health professions to design, deliver, and evaluate effective learning experiences. Graduates will be equipped to lead innovation in medical and health professions to advance inclusive, quality learning environments.

Committee Vice Chair Fogarty asked if these new programs attract existing students interested in further specialization or new students. Provost Wolfe explained that the new degrees would appeal to a wide range of students, including students engaged in clinical precepting.

Committee Vice Chair Fogarty inquired whether the new degree options were intended to increase net enrollments or to provide further specializations. Provost Wolfe noted that these programs would increase graduate enrollment and are not in competition with in-person course offerings.

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by Charles Fogarty and seconded by David Martirano, and hearing no discussion, it was

VOTED THAT the Committee recommend that the Board approve legislation recommended by the Faculty Senate and the President providing a new online degree opportunity, Master of Arts, Health Professions Education, as recommended and presented in the enclosure.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Maria Ducharme, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Joseph Matthews, David Martirano

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

- g. **Consideration of legislation from the Faculty Senate Curriculum & Standards Committee Report #2025-2026-05C, College of Engineering, to implement an organizational change establishing a standalone Department of Biomedical Engineering, which has been approved by the faculty and the President of the University of Rhode Island; and recommendation to the URI Board of Trustees. This will be accomplished by transitioning the biomedical engineering program out of the Department of Electrical, Computer, and Biomedical Engineering and renaming that unit as the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, thereby creating two separate departments.** [Enclosure](#)

Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs

Provost Wolfe relayed that biomedical engineering has strong undergraduate enrollment, successful graduates, and faculty conducting nationally funded research. The program's integration with electrical and computer engineering limits its visibility. As an independent department they will have the ability to tailor the curriculum and enhance its competitiveness in recruiting faculty and students.

Committee Chair Kerwin asked if there were any resource implications or administrative expenses incurred by this change. Provost Wolfe reported that the expense would be for the new department chair, which the Dean of the College of Engineering would allocate.

Trustee Matthews noted that this was an exciting opportunity and asked how many students would be in the new department. Provost Wolfe commented that this area is growing and that there are tremendous opportunities.

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by Charles Fogarty and seconded by David Martirano, and hearing no discussion, it was

VOTED THAT the Committee recommend that the Board approve legislation recommended by the Faculty Senate and the President providing a new Department of Biomedical Engineering, *including changing the current department name from Electrical, Computer, and Biomedical Engineering to Electrical and Computer Engineering*, as recommended and presented in the enclosure.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Maria Ducharme, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Joseph Matthews, David Martirano

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

5. EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Committee may seek to enter into executive session for the following item:

- a. **Discussion regarding matters related to the question of the investment of public funds, which includes any investment plan or matter related thereto, where the premature disclosure would adversely affect the public interest, pursuant to R.I.G.L. § 42-46-5(a)(7); specifically,**
 - **Research support from partner organizations**
Bethany Jenkins, Vice President, Research and Economic Development

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by Charles Fogarty and seconded by David Martirano, and hearing no discussion, it was

- VOTED That the Committee convene into executive session pursuant to R.I.G.L. § 42-46-5(a)(7) for discussion regarding a matter related to the question of the investment of public funds, which includes any investment plan or matter related thereto, where the premature disclosure would adversely affect the public interest, specifically, Research support from partner organizations.
- VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
- YEAS: Maria Ducharme, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, David Martirano, Joseph Matthews
- NAYS: 0
- ABSTAINS: 0

1:05 p.m., upon confirmation from remote participants that no other persons were present or able to hear the executive session, the Academic Affairs and Research Committee convened into Executive Session. Virtual public access was paused.

1:13 p.m., the Academic Affairs and Research Committee returned to Open Session. Virtual public access resumed.

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by Joseph Matthews and seconded by Charles Fogarty, and hearing no discussion, it was

- VOTED That the Academic Affairs and Research Committee seal the minutes of the Executive Session that took place on April 9, 2026.
- VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
- YEAS: Maria Ducharme, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, David Martirano, Joseph Matthews
- NAYS: 0
- ABSTAINS: 0

6. ADJOURN

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion to adjourn.

On a motion duly made by Maria Ducharme and seconded by David Martirano, and hearing no discussion, it was

VOTED THAT the Academic Affairs and Research Committee adjourn the meeting of April 9, 2026.

VOTE: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Maria Ducharme, Charles Fogarty, Neil Kerwin, Joseph Matthews, David Martirano

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting was adjourned at 1:15 p.m.

The next URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee meeting is scheduled for June 22, 2026.

OFFICIAL