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The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee Meeting Wednesday, September 16, 2026 · 12:00 p.m. EDT

The University of Rhode Island
Room 107 Green Hall
35 Campus Avenue, Kingston, RI 02881

OFFICIAL MINUTES

Committee Chair Neil Kerwin welcomed everyone to the September 16, 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 12:01 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)
- Monica Garnes (remote)
- David Martirano (remote)
- Joseph Matthews (remote)
- Marc Parlange (ex officio, non-voting) (remote)
- Kristine Bovy (non-voting) (remote)

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

- Maria Ducharme

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

URI President's Stewardship Council members in attendance:

- Sue K. Adams, Vice Provost, Academic and Faculty Initiatives (remote)
- Marc Antonucci, Vice President, Advancement, URI, and CEO, URI Foundation (remote)
- Abby Benson, Senior Vice President, Administration and Finance (remote)

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- Chelsea Berry, Senior Advisor to the President and Chief of Staff (remote)
- Alyssa Boss, Vice President and General Counsel (remote)
- Brenton DeBoef, Interim Vice President, Research and Economic Development (remote)
- Dean Libutti, Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management and Student Success (remote)
- Matthew McDonald, Vice President, Communications and Marketing (remote)
- Steven Mello, Vice Provost, Academic Resource Management (remote)
- Markeisha Miner, Vice President, Community, Equity, and Diversity (remote)
- Ellen Reynolds, Vice President, Student Affairs (remote)
- Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs (remote)

URI staff members in attendance:

- Emily Diomandes, Deputy Chief of Staff and 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)
- Arun Shukla, Professor, Mechanical, Industrial and Systems Engineering, and incoming Faculty Representative (remote)

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. He thanked Kris Bovy, faculty representative for her service of two years to the committee and welcomed Interim Vice President for Research and Economic Development, Brenton DeBoef.

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 June 22, 2026, Academic Affairs and Research Committee meeting. Enclosure

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

VOTED	THAT the Academic Affairs and Research Committee approve the minutes of the June 22, 2026, meeting of the Committee.
VOTE:	5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
YEAS:	Charles Fogarty, Monica Garnes, Neil Kerwin, David Martirano, Joseph Matthews
NAYS:	0
ABSTAINS:	0

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2. REPORT OF THE CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER Enclosure

Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs

a. Academic Highlights

Provost Wolfe reviewed information presented in the enclosed slides. She reported that the University welcomed 44 new faculty members, noting the strong attendance and enthusiasm at New Faculty Orientation. She also recognized several faculty members for distinguished achievements.

Provost Wolfe reported that the AI Task Force published its second annual report, outlining opportunities and challenges associated with the rapidly evolving use of AI in higher education. The report includes recommendations for teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and University operations, with an emphasis on responsible and ethical AI use.

b. Enrollment Update

Provost Wolfe reported a strong close to the summer term, with more than 8,300 students enrolled, continuing recent growth. Prompted by trustee inquiry, she noted that the success of the summer program is due in part to URI's continuing efforts to increase engagement with students to help them be successful. The Provost noted that the fall semester is off to a solid start, with official enrollment figures to follow the October 15 census date. She thanked the enrollment team for supporting students and families amid ongoing changes to federal financial aid and asked Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success Dean Libutti to provide additional details.

Associate Vice President Libutti provided an update on recent federal financial aid changes, noting that late changes to loan eligibility, borrowing limits, and part-time student access created significant challenges for students, families, and universities. He recognized the financial aid team for their extensive work in implementing the new requirements and supporting affected families, some of whom are now facing higher-cost private loan options. Committee Chair Kerwin thanked the Enrollment Services staff for their response to the significant changes. Board Vice Chair Armand Sabitoni asked whether any students were unable to attend the University due to recent financial changes. Associate Vice President Libutti reported that the impact is still being assessed and that his team was actively working with families to mitigate potential enrollment losses. Libutti will provide an update at the next meeting.

c. Update on Searches and Medical School

Provost Wolfe provided updates on two academic leadership searches. A national search is underway for the next Dean of the College of Business, with Judy Beckman serving as interim dean; finalists for the permanent dean position are expected on campus in early 2027. The search for the Founding Medical School Dean is also underway, along with a separate search for a Medical School Project Director.

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d. Accreditation Update

Provost Wolfe provided an update on URI's NECHE reaccreditation process. The Accreditation Steering Committee is drafting the University's self-study, which will be shared with the campus community in early 2027 and submitted to NECHE in August 2027, followed by a campus site visit in October. She thanked Board Chair Kerwin and Vice Provost Sue Adams for their leadership and participation in the process.

e. Leadership Team on Federal Actions Update

Provost Wolfe reported that URI's Leadership Team for Federal Actions continues to monitor federal developments affecting the University, including those related to accreditation, research funding, financial aid, and immigration. She noted that URI is assessing the impact of these changes, tracking related litigation, and communicating updates and resources to the University community through its Federal Actions website.

3. REPORT OF THE CHIEF RESEARCH OFFICER Enclosure
Brenton DeBoef, Interim Vice President, Research and Economic Development

a. Update on Activities of the Division of Research & Economic Development: Research Metrics for the University, Strategic Planning and Needs Assessment

Interim Vice President Brenton DeBoef reviewed information presented in the enclosed slides. He reported that URI's federal research awards remained strong despite challenges in the federal funding environment, slightly exceeding the previous year's total. He attributed this resilience in part to URI's diverse research portfolio and funding sources, with the Graduate School of Oceanography continuing to lead and with growth occurring in the Colleges of Pharmacy and Arts and Sciences. Interim Vice President DeBoef noted a federal shift toward larger, collaborative grants and highlighted URI's role in the NSF Seafood Economic Development Engine, which received $15 million for its first two years and could receive up to $160 million to support modernization of New England's fishing and seafood industry.

b. Review goals and outcomes of research, scholarship, and creative work of the faculty and economic development efforts and impacts of university partnerships and initiatives.

Interim Vice President DeBoef noted URI's growing industry partnerships, use-inspired research, and collaboration with industry. He reported a 46% increase in patent filings**,** and the importance of protecting intellectual property. Interim Vice President DeBoef highlighted several Bay Campus partnerships, including Saab's testing of underwater robotics, the Naval Undersea Warfare Center's leasing of laboratory space, and Composite Energy Technology's (CET) submarine testing.

Board Vice Chair Sabitoni asked if Interim Vice President DeBoef was working with Peter Rumsey (Associate Vice President, Economic Development, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship). Interim Vice President DeBoef confirmed that they were collaborating to attract companies to the University and to

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secure approximately $14 million in remaining state innovation funding. He noted that URI hopes to pursue the funding to support additional facilities and industry partnerships at the Bay Campus.

4. 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,

(i) Enrollment and recruitment
Barbara Wolfe, Provost and Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs
Dean Libutti, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success

Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by David Martirano and seconded by Monica Garnes, 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 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; specifically, enrollment and recruitment.
VOTE:	5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
YEAS:	Charles Fogarty, Monica Garnes, Neil Kerwin, David Martirano, Joseph Matthews
NAYS:	0
ABSTAINS:	0

12:36 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.

12:46 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 Monica Garnes and seconded by Charles Fogarty, and hearing no discussion, it was

VOTED	That the Academic Affairs and Research Committee seal the

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minutes of the Executive Session that took place on September 16, 2026.

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

YEAS: Charles Fogarty, Monica Garnes, Neil Kerwin, David Martirano, Joseph Matthews

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

5. ACTION ITEMS

a. 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 Summer 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, Academic Affairs

Provost Wolfe asked the Board to approve the awarding of undergraduate and graduate degrees, diplomas, certificates, and honors to be conferred by the President to the candidates who have completed their requirements by the conclusion of this Summer term and who are approved by the faculty of the University of Rhode Island.

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 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 Summer 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: Charles Fogarty, Monica Garnes, Neil Kerwin, David Martirano, Joseph Matthews

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

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b. Consideration of the granting of tenure, effective November 29, 2026, to incoming Associate Dean for Research and Scholarship of the College of Health Sciences, Stephen Sheinkopf, Ph.D., who has met the requirements for tenure at 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 requested that the Committee recommend the granting of tenure for Dr. Stephen Sheinkopf, incoming Associate Dean for Research and Scholarship in the College of Health Sciences. Dr. Sheinkopf joins URI from the University of Missouri, where he served as Professor of Pediatrics and Executive Director of the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment, and previously held a faculty position at Women & Infants Hospital in Rhode Island.

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 Committee recommend that the Board approve the granting of tenure, effective November 29, 2026, to incoming Associate Dean for Research and Scholarship of the College of Health Sciences, Stephen Sheinkopf, Ph.D., who has met the requirements for tenure at the University of Rhode Island, as presented in the enclosure.
VOTE:	5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
YEAS:	Charles Fogarty, Monica Garnes, Neil Kerwin, David Martirano, Joseph Matthews
NAYS:	0
ABSTAINS:	0

c. Consideration of legislation from the Faculty Senate Curriculum & Standards Committee Report #2025-2026-08C, College of Business organizational change to create a new degree opportunity, Bachelor of Science, Interdisciplinary and Applied Artificial Intelligence, 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 requested that the Committee recommend approval of a new Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary and Applied Artificial Intelligence in the College of Business. The in-person program will provide students with technical and applied skills in data analytics, machine learning, visualization, and generative AI, with an emphasis on responsible AI use. Graduates will be prepared for careers in analytics, innovation, and emerging AI-enabled fields.

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Committee Chair Kerwin called for a motion, and on a motion duly made by Monica Garnes 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 degree opportunity, Bachelor of Science, Interdisciplinary & Applied Artificial Intelligence, as presented in the enclosure.
VOTE:	5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
YEAS:	Charles Fogarty, Monica Garnes, 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 Charles Fogarty and seconded by David Martirano, and hearing no discussion, it was

VOTED	THAT the Academic Affairs and Research Committee adjourn the meeting of September 16, 2026.
VOTE:	5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
YEAS:	Charles Fogarty, Monica Garnes, Neil Kerwin, David Martirano, Joseph Matthews
NAYS:	0
ABSTAINS:	0

The meeting was adjourned at 12:56 p.m.

The next URI Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Research Committee meeting is scheduled for October 21, 2026.

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