



Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee Meeting

Wednesday, February 12th, 2025

**Rhode Island College
600 Mount Pleasant Ave
Providence, RI 02905, Room 400
Meeting Minutes**

Chair Michael Mello called this meeting to order at 4:30 pm and acknowledged that a quorum was present.

Council on Postsecondary Education Present:

Michael Mello, Chair
Lawrence Purtill
Jeffery Williams

Rhode Island Council of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC) staff present:

Gregory Ebner, Assistant Commissioner of Academic Student and Success
Jailene Colon, Part-time Administrative Assistant

Rhode Island College (RIC) participants:

Jennifer Boulay, Interim Director, Hope Scholarship
Shelia Fleming, Interim Provost Vice President of Academic Affairs
Cindy Kozil, Vice President for Student Success

Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) participants:

Elizabeth Del Sesto, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs
Blair Harrington, Interim Dean, Business, Science, Technology and Mathematics
Kelly Morrissey, Dean of Financial Assistance & Scholarships
Barbara J. Nauman, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs
Amy Kacerik, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs

Additional Attendees:

Caleb Roseme, Chief Operating Officer of Empower Training Academy

1. Acceptance of the Agenda

Chair Mello called for a motion that the Academic and Student Success Committee accept the agenda for the meeting of February 12, 2025.

On a motion made by Jeffery Williams and seconded by Lawrence Purtill it was:

VOTED:	THAT	The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee accept the agenda for the meeting on November 20, 2024.
	VOTE:	3 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
	YEAS:	Lawrence Purtill, Jeffery Williams, and Michael Mello
	NAYS:	0
	ABSTAINS:	0

2. Approval of the Minutes

Chair Mello called for a motion that the Academic and Student Success Committee approve the minutes of the meeting that took place on November 20, 2024.

On a motion duly made by Jeffery Williams and seconded by Lawrence Purtill it was:

VOTED:	THAT	The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee approve the minutes that took place on November 20 th , 2024.
	VOTE:	3 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
	YEAS:	Lawrence Purtill, Jeffery Williams, and Michael Mello
	NAYS:	0
	ABSTAINS:	0

3. Discussion Items

a. JAA Programs (CCRI)

Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs at the Community College of Rhode Island, Elizabeth Del Sesto, presented thirty-one Joint Admission Agreements (JAAs) with Rhode Island College (RIC) that have undergone CCRI's internal curriculum review process and were approved during the Fall 2024 semester as Associate in Arts transfer degrees. The reported programs are now approved and are scheduled to go live in March.

b. Creation of Associate in Science Criminal Justice (CCRI)

Interim Dean of Business, Science, Technology, and Mathematics, Blair Harrington, led the discussion on the creation of the Associate degree programs and the certification program. Interim Dean Harrington explained that the

Criminal Justice program was previously combined with Legal Studies; however, they are now separate programs.

The Interim Director went on to further discuss that the Associate's degree in Criminal Justice was designed for students who wish to enter the workforce after earning their Associate's degree, as well as for those who want to continue their education beyond an Associate's degree. Interim Dean Harrington explained that they collaborated with the University of Rhode Island and Roger Williams Law School on this effort. The Interim Dean also reported that a diverse advisory board was established consisting of fifteen committee members including four chief's of police, four department chairs from Johnson & Wales University, the URI, and Roger Williams University, as well as members from the Attorney General's Office.

Interim Dean Harrington, along with CCRI's Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs, Barbara Nauman, emphasized that these new programs are stackable. On April 2, 2024, CCRI hosted a Criminal Justice Day, which resembled a career fair for high school students. During this event, guest speakers were invited, and students had the opportunity to engage with professionals in a field of interest to them.

c. Creation of Associate in Science Legal Studies, Paralegal (CCRI)

Interim Dean Harrington informed the committee that the Certificate and Associate's in Legal Studies and Paralegal Studies are stackable programs. The Associate's program provides an opportunity for students to transfer to a four-year college afterward.

d. Creation of Certificate Program: Legal Studies, Paralegal Studies (CCRI)

Interim Dean Harrington reported that a second separate advisory board was formed, consisting of attorneys, paralegals, and legal assistants. The Interim Dean explained that the current curriculum had too much overlap in content. In response to this and the recommendations from the advisory board, a new course—Legal Research and Writing 1 and 2—has been added, which includes a work-based learning experience to help students determine if this field is right for them.

Regarding the terms of transfer, it was reported that RIC and the URI do not offer programs that are transferrable for these new degrees and certificates. CCRI would like these programs to be accredited by the American Bar Association, which is possible with the assistance of Roger Williams University.

e. Update on Hope Scholarship – Presentation (RIC)

Interim Director of the Hope Scholarship at Rhode Island College, Jennifer Boulay, gave a presentation and answered several questions regarding the Hope Scholarship. The presentation highlighted the percentages of students impacted by the scholarship. Currently, 395 students are eligible for the scholarship, with 15 more students pending. They project a total of 412 students, considering that 10 students declined the Hope Scholarship. Interim Director Boulay stated that of those 10 students, some are late in completing their FAFSA applications, and the College is working with many of them to finalize their FAFSA. The remaining students in that group have met all Hope requirements except for fulfilling the 2.5 GPA requirement. These students may appeal for the Spring semester if they are able to meet the Hope GPA requirement.

During the student profile data portion of the presentation, Interim Director Boulay stated that the percentage of first-generation students dropped from 38% to 13%, explaining that this reduction is because this year was the first time they recruited first-generation students in high schools.

Council Member Jeffrey Williams inquired about the percentage of students of color at the school, which was listed as 38%. He and Chair Mello requested that this percentage be broken down by race. RIC's Vice President for Student Success, Cindy Kozil, mentioned that they have 390 more Rhode Islanders in the freshman class, a 12% increase from last year.

Interim Director Boulay continued by highlighting RIC's five priority practices: Pathways, Advising, Scheduling and Orientation, Student Support, and the Sustainability of the Hope Scholarship. One of their new initiatives is called the Hope Ambassador Program, which is in the pilot stage until 2030. The program's goal is to increase awareness of the Hope Scholarship among RIC students and incoming students. Additionally, these students gain skills in branding, identifying and leveraging their personal strengths, advocacy, and marketing their leadership on resumes and in interviews.

Chair Mello asked if the projected cost represents what the state of Rhode Island will pay, and if so, how Federal Aid factors into that. Vice President Kozil clarified that the Hope Scholarship had broad positive effects on operations at RIC – extending well beyond just the students who earn the scholarship.

Council Member Lawrence Purtill commented that they want to ensure the sustainability of the Hope Scholarship, and he noted that the Hope Ambassador Program seems to be helping maintain that goal.

Chair Mello inquired about a ten-year projection in terms of the number of students. Interim Director Boulay responded that students are only eligible for Hope if they are just starting school and cannot be transfer students. Vice President Kozil added that if students receiving the Hope Scholarship perform well, the number of eligible students could increase.

Chair Mello emphasized the importance of maintaining the sustainability of the scholarship and commended the program for its current success. Interim Director Boulay responded by explaining that, through data, they can track high school populations and project how that will look in ten years. Chair Mello acknowledged this, stating that the data looks very positive. Council Member Purtill pointed out that if the numbers grow quickly, we could see significant changes.

f. Discussion of Update Report on Promise Scholarship (CCRI)

CCRI's Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, Amy Kacerik, and Dean of Financial Assistance and Scholarships, Kelly Morrissey, led the discussion on updates to the Promise Scholarship, focusing on the incoming Fall 2024 cohort and the returning Fall 2023 cohort of RI Promise students. Dean Morrissey began by acknowledging that the late release of FAFSA has impacted student submissions. Initially, they were 40% behind on FAFSA applications, but that figure has now decreased to 7%.

Associate Vice President Kacerik reported there has been an 8% decrease in students who have enrolled for the Fall semester compared to the Fall 2023 cohort. In the Fall 2023 returning cohort, a 62% fall-to-fall retention rate was recorded, which is higher than the New England 2-year public community college retention rate of 59%.

Associate VP Kacerik highlighted their apprenticeship programs that have expanded eligibility for the Promise Scholarship. The Associate VP also mentioned that they are working to expand Promise eligibility to allow students to defer enrollment for up to one semester. Assistant Commissioner of Academic and Student Success, Gregory Ebner followed by stating that he would work to revise the policy.

Dean Morrissey raised a financial concern regarding the Promise Scholarship. Since RI Promise is a last-dollar scholarship, competitive students who receive outside scholarships are impacted. If the scholarship is awarded to a student attending CCRI, that scholarship is not considered financial aid; rather, CCRI applies the outside scholarship directly to the student's tuition. This limits the cost of the Promise scholarship (the outside scholarship pays first), but the student sees no reduction in his or her overall cost of tuition.

Council Member Williams asked how RIC can ensure that students receive all the aid provided. Chair Mello responded by stating that this is a legislative issue. Dean Morrissey further explained that if schools are aware that a student has been accepted to CCRI and the Promise Scholarship, they will not grant the student any additional scholarships.

4. Action Items

- a.** Approval of the recommendation to the Council for its approval of the operations of Empower Training Academy, a proprietary school, within the State of Rhode Island

Dr. Ebner introduced the Empower Training Academy, stating that the proprietary school's goal is to expand and offer training to the public. Dr. Ebner highlighted that Director of Compliance and Student Protections Rebecca Ryan and Program Specialist Jaime Wager, from the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, have reviewed the school and confirmed that it met all compliance requirements.

Council Member Williams inquired about the current student enrollment. Empower Training Academy's Chief Operating Officer, Caleb Roseme reported that twelve students were currently taking a 25-day course, with five days spent in the facility.

Council Member Williams followed up by asking Mr. Roseme to share his background to which Mr. Roseme did. Mr. Roseme informed the committee that the owner and CEO of Empower Training Academy was his wife, Samantha Descombes, a registered nurse (RN), who unfortunately was unable to attend the meeting. Ms. Decombes started a home care agency in Connecticut seven years ago. They eventually decided to expand into training and launched a program, partnering with Connecticut state colleges, adult education programs, and U.S. immigrants. They later expanded their home care agency to an office in Warwick, RI, which spans about 300 square feet and is considered a large pipeline program for individuals entering the workforce.

Chair Mello asked Mr. Roseme how many employees they currently have. Mr. Roseme responded that they have 65 employees in total, operating both agencies in Rhode Island and Connecticut, as both are growing.

Council Member Purtill asked Mr. Roseme how many homes they are operating in and how many of those are full-time versus on a need-basis. Mr. Roseme stated that they are working in a total of 35 homes, with clients receiving support for 36 hours a week. The caregiver-to-client ratio was reported to be 1.5 to 1.

Council Member Williams concluded the discussion by asking Mr. Roseme how clients are paying. Mr. Roseme responded that, in Rhode Island, they receive Medicaid and out-of-pocket payments.

On a motion duly made by Lawrence Purtill and seconded by Michael Mello, it was:

VOTED:	THAT	The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee approve a recommendation to the Council for its approval of the operations of Empower Training Academy, a proprietary school, within the State of Rhode Island.
	VOTE :	3 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in The negative.
	YEAS:	Lawrence Purtill, Jeffery Williams and Michael Mello
	NAYS:	0
	ABSTAINS:	0

5. Next Meeting

Chair Mello announced that the next Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee meeting will be on April 2, 2025, at 4:30 PM.

6. Adjourn

Chair Mello called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

On a motion duly made by Lawrence Purtill and seconded by Michael Mello, it was:

VOTED:	THAT	The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee of the Council on Postsecondary Education adjourn the meeting of February 12 th , 2025
	VOTE:	3 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
	YEAS:	Lawrence Purtill, Jeffery Williams and Michael Mello

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NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting adjourned at 5:27 PM.