

Rhode Island Council on Postsecondary Education  
Wednesday, June 4, 2025



**Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee Meeting**

Wednesday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**Rhode Island Nursing Education Center  
350 Eddy St., Providence, RI 02903  
Room 329  
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

**Council on Postsecondary Education absent:**

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

Ronald Cavallaro, General Counsel  
Jailene Colon, Part-time Administrative Assistant  
Gregory Ebner, Assistant Commissioner of Academic Student and Success  
Rebecca Ryan, Director of Compliance and Student Protection  
Jaime Wager, Program Specialist  
Jackie Xiong, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner and Council Liaison

**Rhode Island College (RIC) participants:**

Shelia Fleming, Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs  
Cindy Kozil, Vice President for Student Success

**Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) participants:**

Suzanne Carr, Dean of Health and Rehabilitative Sciences  
Elizabeth Del Sesto, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs  
Amy Kacerik, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs  
Barbara J. Nauman, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs  
Christine Turenus-Bell, Interim Dean, Business, Science, Technology and Mathematics  
Lauren Webb, Director of Academic Program Review and Accreditation

**1. Acceptance of the Agenda**

Chair Mello called for a motion that the Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee accept the agenda for the meeting of June 4, 2025.

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

VOTED: THAT The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee accept the agenda for the meeting on June 4, 2025.  
VOTE: 3 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.  
YEAS: Lawrence Purtill, Michael Mello and Jeffery Williams  
NAYS: 0  
ABSTAINS: 0

**2. Approval of the Minutes**

Chair Mello called for a motion that the Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee approve the minutes of the meeting that took place on March 19, 2025.

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

VOTED: THAT The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee approve the minutes that took place on March 19, 2025.  
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. Low Completion Report (CCRI)**

Director of Academic Program Review and Accreditation, Lauren Webb, led the discussion on CCRI's Low Completion Report. She informed the committee on the current teach-out plans and data regarding the concentrations of associate degree programs, as well as the broad efforts to improve completion. Director Webb announced that work-based learning is now required in all associate degree programs, providing students with hands-on experience through employer projects,

internships, etc. She noted improvements in student supports, and highlighted efforts to improve online learning, with faculty training to ensure course quality.

Council Member Williams asked for a definition and purpose of “suspended admission”. Director Webb and Interim Vice President Barbara Nauman defined “suspended admission” as a program is under advisory board review. Students currently enrolled are supported by enrollment advisors to explore other degree paths.

Council Member Williams inquired if CCRI had a director for online programs. Interim VP Nauman confirmed there is a director in place.

Council Member Williams requested more information about low degree completion rates. Interim VP Nauman explained that completing a certificate program is often the more practical option for students who are already in the workforce. Dean Suzanne Carr also stated that in certain Rhode Island towns, specific courses or programs are tied to employment requirements, which may impact completion.

Council Member Williams asked whether surveys were conducted to understand why students don’t complete their programs. Director Webb responded that students leave for various reasons, including work and family obligations.

Chair Mello clarified that graduation rates differ from the data in the report. These numbers are specific to individual programs and are driving the changes to better meet students’ needs and interests.

Council Member Purtill asked about efforts to encourage students during orientation. Amy Kacerik, Associate VP for Student Affairs, said CCRI offers a virtual orientation and invites students to participate in on-campus events as part of engagement efforts.

**b. Low Completion Report (RIC)**

Sheila Flemming, Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, presented an update on low-completion and low-enrollment programs at Rhode Island College (RIC), as well as steps the college had taken to address these challenges.

According to the Postsecondary Education Office’s A-7 Academic Program Review Policy, the report included productivity and efficiency analyses. Furthermore,

Interim Provost Flemming indicated that departments within RIC submitted reports addressing mission, market demand, grade trends, and data. Based on findings, the Provost's Office offered four options: suspend enrollment, develop an improvement plan, consolidate programs, or pursue further investment.

Provost Flemming also highlighted broader efforts to improve completion, including streamlined degree pathways, reduced general education requirements, and new certification programs in education. Transfer pathways were strengthened through the Joint Admissions Agreement, and new collaborative programs with CCRI were launched in AI, Behavioral Health Science, Cybersecurity, and Physics. An advising work group was also created to support transfer students early in the process.

Council Member Williams inquired where the 2024–25 low-completion data could be found and whether the term “program” referred specifically to majors. Interim Provost Flemming responded that the data was included in the appendix and confirmed that “program” in this context does mean major.

Council Member Williams noted that many programs appeared to need improvement. He then asked for clarification on the term “subplan Spanish”. Interim Provost Flemming explained that World Languages is the major and includes four concentrations, with Spanish being the most popular.

Council Member Williams then asked whether RIC planned to suspend enrollment in the other, less-enrolled language concentrations. Interim Provost Flemming confirmed that enrollment in those concentrations would be suspended. Students could still take individual courses in the areas, but they would not be able to major in them.

Vice President for Student Success Cindy Kozil reported that there had been no applicants for these concentrations over the past three years and emphasized that the issue is not only about completion but also overall demand.

Council Member Williams asked whether students who do not take Global Studies at RIC might be pursuing the program at other institutions. Interim Provost Flemming responded that the Provost's Office had conducted a comparative analysis and found that most of these programs are available at other regional institutions.

- c. Notice of Change: Creation of Certificate in Mammography (CCRI)

Suzanne Carr, Dean of Health and Rehabilitative Sciences, provided an overview of CCRI's new Certificate in Mammography. Dean Carr explained that it is an 18-credit program over two semesters, designed for students pursuing a career in Radiography. Students become eligible for the certificate after earning an associate degree in radiography. The certificate serves as a post-degree specialization, like other focus areas such as Mammography or MRI.

Council Member Williams asked if RIC offers a bachelor's degree in Radiography. Dean Carr confirmed that RIC offers a Bachelor of Science in Medical Imaging, and students may continue their education elsewhere in health sciences.

Council Member Williams inquired about entry-level wages. Dean Carr stated that entry-level pay is typically in the \$50,000 range. Graduates are job-ready, and there is strong demand in hospitals.

Council Member Purtill praised the program, calling it a strong example of meeting community needs.

**d. Notice of Change: Creation of AS (Business) – Business Administration, Hospitality and Tourism (CCRI)**

CCRI's Interim Dean of Business, Science, Technology, and Mathematics, Christine Turenius-Bell, gave a brief overview of CCRI's new concentration within the Associate of Science in Business program. Interim Dean Bell explained that the concentration is fully online, preparing students for immediate employment or transfer to a four-year institution. She noted strong economic demand in the state, with Rhode Island's hospitality industry specifically identifying this need. The concentration is transferable to Johnson & Wales University and Salve Regina University.

Chair Mello asked whether offering the program online would increase student interest. Interim Dean Bell responded yes, emphasizing that students can work while completing the program. She clarified that the format is fully asynchronous.

Council Member Williams asked what stage the program is in. Interim VP Barbara Nauman confirmed it is ready to launch, with current students in the track able to begin the new concentration immediately.

- e. Notice of Change: Creation of Combined Secondary Education History/Social Studies Concentration (RIC)
- f. Notice of Change: Creation of Certificate of Graduate Studies – Early Childhood leadership. (RIC)

Interim Provost Flemming presented Rhode Island College’s notices of program changes. Flemming reported that two changes had taken place in the previous year: the creation of the Combined Secondary Education History/Social Studies concentration and the creation of the Certificate of Graduate Studies in Early Childhood Leadership. She acknowledged that RIC was late in formally submitting these notices.

- g. Notice of Change: Program Enrollment Suspension (RIC)

Interim Provost Flemming informed the committee that the suspended enrollment notices applied to all programs listed in the Low Completion Report.

Council Member Purtill asked whether the reciprocity agreement referenced in item 3E would meet requirements in other states. Interim Provost Flemming confirmed that it would.

Chair Mello noted that because there is little incentive for students to pursue a master’s degree to teach, related programs are being closed. Vice President Kozil added that unlike Rhode Island, states like Massachusetts and Connecticut offer financial incentives by covering the cost of a master’s degree for teachers.

Interim Provost Flemming said that RIC had been considering creating a single master’s program that could serve multiple certification areas.

Chair Mello asked how RIC could find professionals capable of teaching across so many areas. Interim Provost Flemming responded that while RIC has qualified faculty, transitioning them to a new teaching format is challenging. Enrollment is also a factor, as attracting students with varied interests adds complexity.

Council Member Williams asked for a definition of a teach-out plan. Interim Provost Flemming explained that a teach-out plan outlines a revised academic path for affected students, helping them transition to other minors or adjust their schedules to stay on track for graduation.

**4. Action Items**

- a. Approval of the recommendation to the Council for its approval of amendments to Council Policy A-6 (Regulations Governing Proprietary Schools)

Dr. Greg Ebner, Assistant Commissioner of Academic and Student Affairs, presented a high-level overview of proposed amendments to Council Policy A-6 which monitors policies to protect students and maximize access to postsecondary education in Rhode Island and announced that the policy was last reviewed in 2023.

Once key areas for revision were identified, legal counsel first reviewed the proposed limits. New language and definitions were then added, to address distance learning at proprietary schools. Dr. Ebner noted that efforts were also made to streamline the application process, such as ensuring appropriate bonding during fiscal review. He mentioned that reimbursement rates, which were a concern for one school, were adjusted to 20, 30, 40, and 50 percent to simplify calculations. Additional updates were made regarding catalog requirements for schools.

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

VOTED:        THAT        The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee approve a recommendation to the Council for its approval of amendments to Council Policy A-6 (Regulations Governing Proprietary Schools)

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

- b. Approval of the recommendation to the Council for its approval of the operation of a proprietary school (Joy CNA).

Rebecca Ryan, Director of Compliance and Student Protections, led the presentation on the operation of the proprietary school, Joy CNA. She explained

that Joy CNA, located on Allens Avenue in Providence, submitted all required documentation and completed its compliance process.

General Counsel Ronald Cavallaro asked if this was Joy CNA's initial approval.

Director Ryan confirmed, explaining that the process begins with a pre-application to review finances, followed by initial approval to operate. After that, the school undergoes an annual review.

Council Member Purtill asked whether the annual review is conducted through paperwork or in person. Director Ryan responded that reviews are completed through submitted reports. However, if there are complaints or concerns, a surprise site visit may follow.

Chair Mello asked how many proprietary schools are currently operating in the state. Director Ryan stated there are approximately 9 to 10. Chair Mello followed by requesting a list of all proprietary schools, including their specialties and addresses, for the next meeting.

On a motion duly made by Michael Mello and seconded by Jeffery Williams, it was:

VOTED:	THAT	The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee approve a recommendation to the Council for its approval of the operation of a proprietary school (Joy CNA).
	VOTE :	3 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
	YEAS:	Jeffery Williams, Lawrence Purtill and Michael Mello
	NAYS:	0
	ABSTAINS:	0

- c. Approval of the recommendation to the Council for Non-SARA Approval for California Institute of Integral Studies

Commented [JC1]: wording

Director Ryan introduced the next item, Non-SARA Approval for the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). She explained that Non-SARA Approval is a pathway allowing accredited, non-profit institutions to offer distance education across state lines without needing individual state permissions. Participating schools can enroll out-of-state students more easily.

CIIS, a private, non-profit institution, meets the base eligibility to apply. Initial approval must go through the Council on Postsecondary Education, followed by annual renewals.

Chair Mello inquired about Rhode Island residents currently enrolled at CIIS. Director Ryan responded that there are RI residents currently enrolled and announced that the school pays between \$5,000 and \$10,000 to enroll Rhode Island students.

Council Member Williams asked, what is the school's area of specialization? Director Ryan answered, mental health counseling.

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

VOTED: THAT The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee approve a recommendation to the Council for its approval for Non-SARA Approval for California Institute of Integral Studies.

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 July 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 June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025

VOTE: 3 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

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YEAS: Lawrence Purtill, Jeffery Williams, and Michael Mello  
NAYS: 0  
ABSTAINS: 0

**The meeting adjourned at 5:54 PM.**