



Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee Meeting

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

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

Chair 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 Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC) staff present:

Jailene Colón, Coordinator
Greg Ebner, Assistant Commissioner, Academic Affairs and Student Success
Omar Reyes, Director of Adult Policies and Programs

Rhode Island College (RIC) participants:

Manyul Im, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Cindy Kozil, Vice President for Student Success

Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) participants:

Ashley Casiano, Director of Athletics, Recreation and Wellness
Elizabeth Del Sesto, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs
Amy Kacerik, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs

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 February 4, 2026.

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

VOTED: THAT The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee
accept the agenda for the meeting on February 4, 2026.

VOTE: 3 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
YEAS: Michael Mello, Lawrence Purtill, 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 January 7, 2026.

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 the minutes that took place on January 7, 2026.
VOTE: 3 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
YEAS: Michael Mello, Lawrence Purtill, Jeffery Williams
NAYS: 0
ABSTAINS: 0

3. **Discussion Items**

a. Report on Athletic Program (CCRI)

Ashley Casiano, Director of Athletics, Recreation and Wellness at the Community College of Rhode Island, presented an overview of CCRI's athletics program. Director Casiano reported that the program includes seven varsity sports and has grown from 107 student-athletes in Fall 2023 to 127 in 2025. She noted strong performance among several teams, with basketball ranked in the top five regionally for the past three years and softball ranked in the top seven, with both teams preparing for national competition.

Director Casiano highlighted academic achievement among student-athletes, reporting that 21 received Regent Honors in 2025 and 43 earned a semester GPA of 3.0 or higher. She discussed recent facility improvements, including enhanced campus signage and gym upgrades, and shared plans for a student-athlete enhancement center to support study halls and tutoring access.

Director Casiano also noted efforts to improve communication regarding athletic eligibility requirements to ensure prospective student athletes clearly understand participation standards.

Council Member Williams asked where athletic programs are primarily located. Director Casiano responded that most sports operate at the Lincoln and Warwick campuses. Chair Mello asked whether CCRI plans to add additional sports. Director Casiano stated that her current focus is on stabilizing existing varsity programs and strengthening retention before considering expansion.

b. Notices of Change (CCRI):

i. Program Closures

- 1) Administrative Office Technology, Administrative Management–Certificate
- 2) Administrative Office Technology, Administrative Support Specialist – Certificate

Elizabeth Del Sesto, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs at the Community College of Rhode Island, presented two proposed certificate program closures within Administrative Office Technology. Assistant Dean Del Sesto explained that both standalone certificates have experienced consistently low enrollment, with fewer than five active students and minimal recent graduates. She noted that the programs no longer align with current industry needs and have been replaced by more modern offerings.

Assistant Dean Del Sesto stated that currently enrolled students who are near completion will be permitted to finish their programs, while others will be advised into related business and professional studies pathways.

Chair Mello commented that program closures should be viewed as an evolution of academic offerings to ensure alignment with workforce demands.

ii. New Joint Admission Agreements (CCRI)

- 1) Biology Transfer, Biotechnology B.S. – Associate in Arts (RIC)
- 2) Computer Science Transfer, Artificial Intelligence B.A. – Associate in Arts (RIC)
- 3) Computer Science Transfer, Cyber Security B.S. – Associate in Arts (RIC)
- 4) Performing Arts Transfer, Music B.A. – Associate in Arts (RIC)

Assistant Dean Del Sesto continued the discussion by introducing four new Joint Admissions Agreements (JAAs) with Rhode Island College. She explained that while CCRI has previously offered coursework and certificates in biology and cybersecurity, these agreements formalize associate degree pathways and support stackable credentials, allowing students to transition more

seamlessly into related bachelor's programs. She noted that the agreements in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, biotechnology, and music align with expanding academic offerings at Rhode Island College and provide structured transfer opportunities for students.

Council Member Purtill asked about enrollment in the performing arts and music pathway. Assistant Dean Del Sesto indicated that participation exceeds five students and continues to grow.

Council Member Williams asked about the advising process for JAA students. Amy Kacerik, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, at CCRI, explained that students receive coordinated advising from both CCRI and RIC to ensure a smooth transfer experience.

c. Update on Rhode Island Reconnect (OPC):

Omar Reyes, Director of Adult Policies and Programs at the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, provided an update on Rhode Island Reconnect. Director Reyes reported that the initiative began in 2020 with \$500,000 in funding from the Lumina Foundation and has since expanded to \$22 million, with additional funding anticipated.

He explained that the program focuses on removing barriers for adult learners by providing direct support, including emergency assistance, technology resources, and personalized navigation services.

Director Reyes noted that over the past five years, Rhode Island Reconnect has supported more than 5,000 Rhode Islanders, distributed approximately 2,000 laptops, and addressed more than 20,000 individual barriers. He highlighted the program's navigator model, which pairs students with dedicated staff who provide ongoing, relationship-based coaching and support. He reported a semester-to-semester retention rate of 70 percent and 162 program graduates to date.

Council Member Williams asked whether the Office has a grant writer or researcher to support the initiative. Assistant Commissioner Ebner confirmed that a new staff member will be starting soon.

Assistant Commissioner Ebner added that over the next six months, he plans to bring additional members of the Academics and Student Affairs (ASA) department before the committee to provide broader context on the work of the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner.

4. Action Items: None

5. Next Meeting

Chair Mello announced that the next Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee meeting will be on March 11, 2026, 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 Jeffery Williams, it was:

VOTED:	THAT	The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee of the Council on Postsecondary Education adjourn the meeting of February 4, 2026
	VOTE:	3 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.
	YEAS:	Michael Mello, Lawrence Purtill and Jeffery Williams
	NAYS:	0
	ABSTAINS:	0

The meeting adjourned at 5:20 PM.