

PRELIMINARY DRAFT – WORKING PAPERS SUBJECT TO REVISION⁽¹⁾

Rhode Island College (RIC)

Weekly Status Update with A&M

February 22, 2021

ALVAREZ & MARSAL
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(1) Exemption (K): Preliminary drafts, notes, impressions, memoranda, working papers and work products, including public university work product; provided, however, any documents submitted at a public meeting of a public body shall be deemed public. R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-2-2(4)(K) (2012).

Executive Summary

Project Overview

On December 16, 2020, the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (“OPC”), on behalf of the Council hired Alvarez & Marsal (“A&M”) to provide analysis and recommendations related to programmatic, operational, and financial improvements at Rhode Island College (“RIC”). Pre-COVID many colleges have experienced ongoing enrollment declines⁽¹⁾. The need for the analysis stems from the ongoing operational and financial challenges at the college that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

More specifically, A&M provided strategic support for leadership across the following areas of scope:

- **Enrollment Strategy:** Work with the Director of Enrollment Management and RIC’s budget office to evaluate the historical trends of key variables.
- **Program Review:** Provide project management and data analysis support to the Provost to evaluate net financial performance, academic outcome performance by each program level.
- **Operational Review:** Recommend cost savings, efficient options that consider that impact on student life. The reviews shall include, but not limited to, use of residence halls, athletics review, capital strategy, housekeeping, information services, and administrative functions.
- **Federal Grant Optimization:** Work with budget office of RIC to identify options for additional federal funding or increased allocations of existing federal funding streams.
- **COVID-19 Response:** Work with state leadership and RIC to be adaptive and evolving in the COVID-19 pandemic.

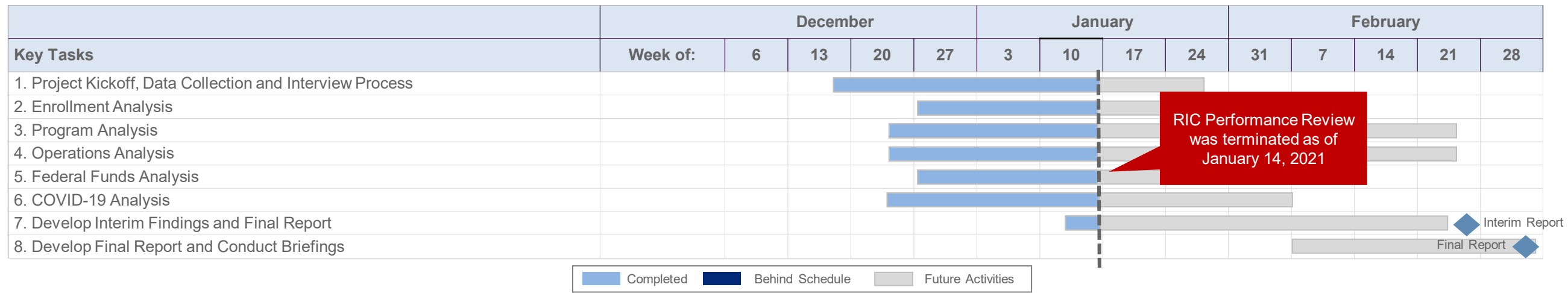
(1) Overall enrollment declines across 33 peer institutions was negative 7% between 2014 and 2018. RIC’s enrollment decline over this time period was negative 10%.

Weekly Status Update

Timelines subject to availability of staff/data and any pandemic related issues

Rhode Island College Performance Review Overall Project Status: ● Project Manager: Erin Covington Date 01/15/2021

Detailed Project Progress



Previous Week's Accomplishments and Upcoming Tasks

- Previous Week's Accomplishments:**
- Scheduled and/or completed additional interviews
 - Developed Tableau dashboard with peer benchmark, staff composition, course information, enrollment, department, fill rate, and graduation data
 - Conducted data analysis utilizing the Tableau dashboard and MS Excel, using RIC-provided inputs
 - Developed preliminary observations
- Key Upcoming Tasks:**
- Not Applicable: The RIC Performance Review was terminated as of 1/14/2021

New/Updated Project Risks/Issues

ID	Description	Mitigation	Status	Owner
1	Work plan and data collection are being conducted amidst holidays	A&M will work with RIC to specify highest priority items and responsibilities	●	J. Rust / A. Cowper
2				
3				

Risk Level ● Low ● Moderate ● High ✓ Mitigated/Avoided

Progress / Key Accomplishments

The contract period for this engagement was originally 11 weeks with a final report due on March 1, 2021. However, the contract period was terminated after four weeks, ending January 14, 2021, to allow for gubernatorial transition.

During the shortened engagement, A&M conducted over 50 interviews across the institution, the Council, and amongst external stakeholders; and our team gathered significant amounts of institutional, peer comparison, and demographic data within the state in order to develop a comprehensive plan for viability.

- **Interviews with key stakeholders:** RIC leadership including the president, the executive leadership team and several of their direct reports (interviews with accounting, marketing, dining, IT, facilities, and planned interviews with each of the Deans) and other external stakeholders including OPC members, OMB, Department of Labor and Commerce.
- **Highlights of data collected:** historical enrollment and retention data, human resources data such as organization charts, academic programming and financial data such as budget and actuals.
- **Comprehensive Plan:** A&M started to construct an analysis focused on institutional viability including a review of academic programming, student recruitment, retention and graduation, non-academic operations, and student services improvements.

Given the shortened contract period, this report is limited to observations made from the interviews conducted and data review during the four weeks. In addition, A&M has highlighted next steps for RIC leadership to transition these observations into recommendations to improve student outcomes and address financial and operational challenges.

Key Observations

During the four weeks, key themes emerged around the institutions challenges that must be addressed to improve student outcomes and improve the financial viability of RIC. Key themes within each scope area are highlighted below and elaborated further in the report.

- **Enrollment** has been steadily declining, from 7,446 students in Fall 2015 to 5,998 students in Fall 2020. During this time, the student body has become more diverse with the Hispanic student body increasing to 25% of the total undergraduate enrollment in the Fall of 2020.
- The Northeast neighbor's strategy should be analyzed for viability, as the program has resulted in reduced out of state fees, but has not had an offsetting impact on enrollment or dorm capacities.
- RIC has worked with local industry leaders to develop programs to help students achieve certifications enabling advancement and social mobility, however, more work is needed to help achieve the **70 by 25 goal** for the state.
- The **Undergraduate Programs** appear to be covered by the net tuition, but the **Graduate Programs** appear to cost more than the average cost per credit hour.
- The College is using a 20-year-old implementation of Peoplesoft that has led to **Operational** inefficiencies. There is a need for more dynamic reporting for both financial and operating metrics.
- **Federal grant optimization** will require a more strategic and proactive approach to Federal grants pursuit.
- **COVID-19** created a challenging environment due to continued reductions in enrollment, the reduced dorm capacity to 30%, and significant declines in dining operations of 58% all of which accelerate the structural and operational deficits and require immediate action.

Potential Areas for Opportunities

Based on these core key themes, there are key areas that should be further evaluated to assess the potential to improve student outcomes and the financial viability of the institution.

- Develop new strategies to proactively recruit new students within Rhode Island including both first time students, transfers from other colleges, and nearby neighboring states. Specifically, creating a conduit from CCRI into RIC by enabling enhanced transfer of credits, targeting students with outreach, and working closely with CCRI to promote the ability to transfer from CCRI to RIC with greater ease.
- Increase student retention / completion rates, by centralizing some aspects of Student Advising and by identifying the most common reasons that student choose to withdraw from RIC, while working to mitigate those issues.
- Revamp the marketing strategy and tactical implementation of that strategy to focus on RIC's key value proposition to help first generation Rhode Islanders graduate from college.
- Continue RIC Program Review, focusing on the sustainability of smaller programs in particular (both graduate and undergraduate)
- Evaluate opportunities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of continuing academic programs -- including areas such as student faculty loads, course scheduling practices, organization of programs within schools, and alignment of programs to the Rhode Island labor market.
- Evaluate opportunities to run non-academic / operational areas more efficiently including benchmarking operations against peer institutions and evaluating the impact and profitability of other student programs such as residential life, sports programs and others.
- Maximize federal grants focused on increasing student access to Federal student aid and maximizing Federal grants focused on low-income and Hispanic populations.
- Develop strategies to reopen school safely and effectively post-COVID-19 including a comprehensive COVID-19 testing strategy and other CDC guidelines.

Next Steps for OPC and RIC Leadership

RIC leadership can leverage much of the analysis conducted to date to inform and prioritize recommendations to strengthen the institution for FY21-22 and beyond. Key next steps are as follows:

- The Council and RIC leadership must leverage these observations immediately to develop recommendations that can be implemented for the 2021-2022 school year, helping to improve student success and the institutions viability.
- Develop / refine recommendations to specifically address ways to improve student outcomes and strengthen the viability of the institution.
- Quantify the impact of these recommendations.
- Prioritize which initiatives to implement first (set priorities based on student/ financial impact and ease of execution).
- Execute initiatives. Explore creating a project management office or hiring a chief transformation officer to drive implementation of the initiatives, create detailed work plans, monitor progress and adjust plan based on lessons learned.

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