

**A Common Agenda for  
Public Higher Education in  
Rhode Island**

**Article 20:**

**Establishing the Roles & Responsibilities of the  
Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner**

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## **Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC)**

### **Mission**

The mission of the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner is to support the work of the Board of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education in providing an excellent, accessible and affordable system of higher education designed to improve the overall educational attainment of the citizens of Rhode Island, support economic development, and enrich the civic, social and cultural life of all living in the state of Rhode Island.

### **Scope**

The Office will serve as the definitive resource for information on and the interpretation of Council policy for public higher education and the postsecondary institutions in Rhode Island that are under the authority of the Council on Postsecondary Education. The Office will work collegially and look for shared opportunities to advance the objectives of postsecondary education with the public and independent institutions.

In fulfilling this role, the Commissioner for Postsecondary Education will work with the presidents of the state higher education institutions to determine the benefits or disadvantages of proposed new programs, departments, division, courses of study with the scope and role adopted by the Council on Postsecondary Education and in developing tables of organization. The presidents also will prepare and submit budgets to the Council on Postsecondary Education and the Board of Education for approval, and will be responsible for the general management of property.

To accomplish these and additional responsibilities called for in Article 20, the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner will rely on the collegial relations and civil discussions among the members of the postsecondary community and with important stakeholders from business, government, and K-12 education.

### **Roles & Responsibilities**

Pursuant to Article 20 of the FY15 appropriation act (RIGL 16-59-1; RIGL 16-59-2; RIGL 16-59-6 as amended) relating to the Board of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education the following are duties as outlined below. (Note that these align with the work of Complete College America and the Lumina Strategy Lab.)

**DATA ANALYSIS: Systematically gather, process, and analyze information on all aspects of postsecondary education in Rhode Island, including identifying current and future needs [16-59-6(1)]**

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Develop internal capacity for collection and analysis of system data to drive policy development and monitor institutional effectiveness, and to report to internal and external stakeholders	Establish a robust RIOPC website that provides interactive data that is useful and user-friendly	Finance & Management Policy & Analysis,
	Identify key metrics for internal and external reporting purposes (e.g., transfers among state institutions, degree completions, excess credits, cost factors, etc.)	Policy & Analysis, Communications
	Coordinate submission of annual data sets including IPEDS and A2S; participate in annual IPEDS training, and maintain access to state IPEDS database	Policy & Analysis
	Use longitudinal data for tracking student success, in particular for nontraditional students	Policy & Analysis
	Develop funding stream to support data collection and analysis at the system level	Communications/ Government Relations
	Develop RIOPC unit for data analysis	Commissioner
	Collaborate with public and independent postsecondary institutions, business communities, and economic and workforce development stakeholders to develop and release periodic report on “The Economic Impact of Higher Education in RI”	Finance & Management
Determine economic impact of higher education in RI and further enhance its role	Identify existing collaborative research activities within postsecondary institutions contributing to economic development goals as well as new opportunities to expand these relationships	Policy & Analysis

**STRATEGIC PLANNING:** Develop a strategic plan encompassing the broad goals and objectives for the state’s higher education system aligned with those of the Board of Education and the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, and with the activities of the independent higher education sector, where feasible, including a 5-year strategic funding plan [16-59-6(2), [16-59-6(6)]

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Develop a five-year strategic plan to guide postsecondary education in Rhode Island over the next five years	Identify major responsibilities of the Office, the Council, and the Board	Commissioner
	Establish process for discussion and review of strategic plan document	Commissioner
	Prepare robust research base for comparing various academic and financial policies to assist the Commissioner and the Board with multi-year strategic plan	Finance & Management, Policy & Analysis
	Ensure sufficient staffing and data capacity to build and maintain cutting-edge review of evolving national and state policy	Commissioner
	Determine potential collaborations among the three institutions to reduce costs and/or improve student services and outcomes (e.g., personnel or facilities management, etc.)	Finance & Management, Policy & Analysis
	Identify and report system metrics pertaining to goals and mission of the Board and the Council	Policy & Analysis, Finance & Management
	Establish process for discussion/review of strategic plan document	Commissioner
	Review the operating budgets of the three public institutions focusing on efficient utilization and coordination of assets	Finance & Management
Coordinate development of a five-year strategic funding plan aligned to goals and objectives of Board	Research and analyze innovative funding mechanisms challenging the system to increase degree output and quality	Finance & Management
	Identify less productive usages of funding and recommend redistribution as appropriate	Finance & Management, Policy & Analysis
	Advise the Council on five-year capital improvement plans submitted by each college president for renovation and expansion of institutions’ physical plants and accommodations with the goal of eliminating redundancies or inefficiencies	Finance & Management

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT:** Formulate broad policy to implement the goals and objectives established and adopted by the Board of Education and Council on Postsecondary Education promoting coordination between public and independent higher education, PreK-12 education, and other stakeholders [16-59-6(3)], [16-59-6(4)]

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Maintain OPC as the primary source for the development and interpretation of Board policy for postsecondary education	Provide staff support to the Council and the Board in developing new policy and revising current policy	Commissioner
	Research international, national and regional initiatives to provide the Council with relevant information including effectiveness, efficiency, and outcomes (e.g., Complete College America, performance funding structures, student financing options, etc.)	Commissioner, Policy & Analysis, Finance & Management
	Identify & develop new academic and fiscal policies that promote better student access and completion rates, especially for nontraditional student populations; implement policy upon approval of the Board and the Council.	Policy & Analysis
	Invite independent institutions to participate more fully in RIOPC initiatives convening them to discuss and identify potential joint ventures	RIOPC
Promote coordination among public and independent higher education in RI	Develop coordinated programs & policies that improve career & college readiness, reduce need for remedial education, implement common core & other standards, ensure a quality system of adult education and certification programs	Policy & Analysis
Promote coordination in courses of study & programs to promote collaboration PK-20	Develop policies that ensure state education is aligned with opportunities in workforce development & economic development and that students are prepared for future workforce	Commissioner, Policy & Analysis, Finance & Management
	Support access to postsecondary certificates or degrees promoting a seamless transition from K-12 to/through college (e.g., college and career ready standards, dual enrollment policies, etc.)	Policy & Analysis

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>OPC Unit(s)</b>
Advance partnerships with K-12 education	Conduct longitudinal data studies determining strengths and weaknesses throughout the PK-20 system	Policy & Analysis
	Work with the state’s educator preparation programs and RIDE to ensure the needs of teachers, schools, and districts are met	Policy & Analysis
	Schedule quarterly meetings between senior administration from higher education and agencies such as the Governor’s Workforce Board, Adult Education in RIDE, and industry associations	Policy & Analysis
Improve alignment between state’s workforce needs and certificate/degree programs offered by RI colleges and universities	Encourage the appointment of current practitioners and workforce development representatives in advisory boards for undergraduate and graduate programs	Policy & Analysis
	Enable students to efficiently complete postsecondary credentials	Policy & Analysis
	Consider adult degree attainment in development of degrees and certificates and institutional policies.	Policy & Analysis
	Collaborate with public and independent higher education institutions as well as state agencies and others to explore common areas of interest	Policy & Analysis, Finance & Management
Initiate and coordinate special research projects	Provide public postsecondary system perspective in conducting such research (e.g., dual enrollment, competency-based education)	Policy & Analysis, Finance & Management

**FISCAL:** Assist in budget preparation for public higher education, prepare standard accounting procedures for all public colleges and universities, and, on direction of the Council, be responsible for appropriation allocations and the acquisition, holding, and disposition of property [16-59-6(4)], [16-59-6(12)]

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Assist in budget preparation for public higher education	Prepare the annual budget for the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner	Commissioner, Finance & Management
	Analyze each of the institutions' annual operation budgets with special focus on new programs, cost containments, etc.	Finance & Management
	Review operational budgets for institutions; advise the Council on compliance issues as well as responsiveness to the Board's and the Council's mission and goals including access, completion, affordability and alignment with workforce demands	Commissioner, Finance & Management
	Perform mid-year reviews and submissions to the State Budget Office of anticipated fiscal status at mid-year	Finance & Management
Evaluate risk exposures and effectiveness of controls relating to integrity of financial information, safeguarding of assets, and overall compliance	Maintain auditing function to provide value-added audit and advisory service to the system's three institutions; coordinate and support annual external audits of the three institutions of public higher education	Finance & Management
	Oversee annual financial statement audits as well as the A-133 audit to assure compliance with standards set by auditor general	Finance & Management
	Coordinate the system actuarial studies as required	Finance & Management
	Manage the fiscal officers' work group to address the system's approach to such issues as reporting of special items – RICAP, OPEB, GASB	Finance & Management
	Present draft financial statement audit results for review and approval	Finance & Management
On direction from the Council, insure accountability for appropriation allocations and the acquisition, holding and disposition of property	Provide guidance and assurances to the Council regarding all real and personal property now owned by and/or under control of the Board for use of public postsecondary institutions and in accordance with all laws/regulations of state	Finance & Management
	Acquire, hold and dispose of property as deemed necessary for the execution of the Council's corporate purposes	Finance & Management
	Prepare resolutions for Board review of capital projects as well as bond	Finance & Management

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>OPC Unit(s)</b>
	and debt service funding plans in coordination with issuing institutions and bond counsel	
	Provide support to institutions identifying funding options and other compliance processes once Board approval is received	Finance & Management
	Produce the most marketable issuance possible working with bond counsel, financial advisors, investment banks, RIHEBC, and rating services	Finance & Management
	Report on account activity for all bond issuances to reconcile each account and assure compliance with bond covenants	Finance & Management

**REGULATORY & ADMINISTRATIVE: Administer policies, rules, and regulations of the Council on Postsecondary Education including those duties relating to independent higher education institutions in Rhode Island under the terms of Chapter 40 and any other relevant laws [16-59-6(10), [16-59-6(11)**

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Insure compliance with Board regulations and RIOPC procedures by providing technical support to institutions on the interpretation and implementation of policy and regulations	Provide trainings as needed to insure an understanding and uniform response to Board policy	Commissioner
	Monitor and enforce compliance with RI law and act to enforce compliance or to end non-compliance as indicated	Commissioner
	Revise <i>Regulations Governing Institutions of Higher Education Operating in Rhode Island</i>	Commissioner
Ensure students receive protections afforded by law and due process is accorded in the resolution of conflicts	Respond to student complaints and monitor the resolution of issues	Policy & Analysis
	Evaluate requests for authority of out-of-state institutions to offer on-line instruction to RI residents	Commissioner, Policy & Analysis
	Revise <i>Regulations on Distance Learning</i>	Commissioner
Promote access to postsecondary education for RI veterans and/or their beneficiaries and other underserved adults	Plan and conduct system-wide promotional campaign encouraging enrollment of adults, veterans and other underserved populations	Policy & Analysis
	Review services and enrollment and completion metrics for these populations	Policy & Analysis
	Determine school and program eligibility for approval of veterans' education benefits and monitor and support all those eligible	Policy & Analysis
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Review and approve academic programs and curricula of proprietary schools ensuring academic integrity and fair business practices	Policy & Analysis
	Evaluate program offerings against industry standards and market analyses	Policy & Analysis
	Determine financial stability and legal compliance with all pertinent laws and regulations	Finance & Management, Policy & Analysis
	Perform annual oversight visits and evaluations of all aspects of a proprietary school's operations (academic, legal, financial and structural)	Finance & Management, Policy & Analysis
	Revise the <i>Regulations Governing Proprietary Schools in Rhode Island</i>	Commissioner
Support the council with its mission as the employer of record for higher	Negotiate and monitor 14 collective bargaining units' contracts as well as state-based collective bargaining contracts	Commissioner

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>OPC Unit(s)</b>
education and the OPC (The Council retains all authority formerly vested in the Board regarding the employment of faculty and staff at the public institutions.)	Assure diversity in hiring and promotion programs.	Commissioner
Participate in the workgroup on insurance coverage for state employees as well as the system of public higher education	Study levels of coverage needed by the system as it does not have the sovereign immunity of the state	Finance & Management
	Annually review the risk management portfolio and renewal of all policies included	Finance & Management
Provide Council with proper and timely compilation of all compliance reporting for public higher education required by federal, state, and other authorities	Establish and maintain a database of standard reports containing an array of statistics and benchmarks for the system of public higher education	Commissioner, Policy & Analysis, Finance & Management
Coordinate the Business Continuity Plan for the system and verify each institution has its own BC policy in place	Lead work group in review of prior Business Continuity Plan (BCP) for the OPC in order to update and complete	Finance & Management
	Work with the institutions to ensure that their BCPs are in order and up-to-date	Commissioner
Support oversight of institutions as part of a system of public higher education	Provide the Council with updated system mission, role & scope statements	Commissioner
	Coordinate higher education functions to maximize efficiency and economy	Commissioner

**ADVOCACY & IMPLEMENTATION:** Make recommendations to the Council on Postsecondary Education regarding the mission of each public institution and their programmatic operations and carry out the Council’s policies and priorities [16-59-6(7)], [16-59-6(8)], [16-59-6(9)], [16-59-6(13)]

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Organize and sustain a robust OPC to fulfill duties and responsibilities established in law and by Board and Council	Identify skills necessary for RIOPC to successfully fulfill its responsibilities	Commissioner
	Acquire sufficient FTEs and hire staff to carry out its mission	Commissioner
Pursue and administer public and private financing to advance the mission of the Council and the Office	Identify and submit grant proposals applicable to the system level and responsive to mission	Policy & Analysis
	Comply with all requirements and specifications of the granting agency	Policy & Analysis
	Serve as liaison for special federal, regional or private grants to assure compliance with fiscal requirements (ARRA)	Finance & Management
	Account for all fiscal activity of OPC including variance analysis	Commissioner
Proactively represent public postsecondary in RI and nationally	Actively participate in relevant state and federal initiatives (e.g., Governor’s Workforce Board, Complete College America, PARCC, etc.)	RIOPC
	Ensure all oral and written communications are presented in a unified and professional manner	RIOPC
	Serve as primary resource for local, state and national queries	Commissioner
Enhance postsecondary education on behalf of RI students	Establish a statewide completion agenda	Commissioner
	Advance proposals to the Board and the Council submitted by the presidents	Commissioner
	Develop coherent plans for elimination of unnecessary duplication and address future needs of state in most efficient & economical manner	Policy & Analysis
	Revise <i>Regulations Governing Academic Changes in RI Public Institutions</i>	Policy & Analysis
	Convene academic administrators and others to reform remedial programs	Policy & Analysis
	Provide a seamless transition for students transferring among public	

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>OPC Unit(s)</b>
	higher education institutions revising current transfer policies and procedures and reporting annually	Policy & Analysis
	Ensure regular assessment of learning outcomes is conducted and consider institutional plans for the same	Policy & Analysis
Encourage the development and improvement of virtual learning options	Review current course offerings and degrees available through distance learning	Policy & Analysis