



Graduate Committee  
Annual Report  
2021-2022

The membership of the Graduate Committee for the 2021-2022 session was as follows:

Member	Department	Constituency
Leonardo Pinheiro <i>Chair</i>	Mathematical Sciences	FAS
Anita Duneer	English	FAS
Deborah Britt	Biology	FAS
Monica Darcy <i>Executive Committee</i>	Counseling, Educational Leadership & School Psychology	FSEHD
Ying Hui-Michael	Special Education	FSEHD
Gerri August	Educational Studies	FSEHD
Constance Milbourne	Management and Marketing	SOB
Justin Dilibero <i>Executive Committee</i>	Nursing	SON
Jenn Meade	Social Work	SSW
Katricia Padula	Graduate Student	Appointed by VPAA
Leslie Schuster <i>Executive Committee</i>	Dean of Graduate Studies	<i>ex officio</i> ; non-voting

The committee met monthly via Zoom as required by Article XVIII of the Rhode Island Council By-Laws.

Meeting dates, agendas, and minutes can be found at

<https://www.ric.edu/department-directory/graduate-curriculum-committee/graduate-curriculum-committee-minutes-and-agendas>

The committee reviewed and approved 38 proposals, ranging from small revision to courses to entire program revisions.

All proposals can be found at

[https://w3.ric.edu/graduate\\_committee/Pages/graduate-committee-documents.aspx](https://w3.ric.edu/graduate_committee/Pages/graduate-committee-documents.aspx)

The committee also prepared, distributed, and analyzed the results of a survey about graduate studies at Rhode Island College. Please see the appended document.

Respectfully submitted,

Leonardo Pinheiro  
Chair of Graduate Committee

## Report on the 2021 Graduate Studies Advocacy Survey Graduate Committee

### Introduction

According to the By-Laws of the Council of Rhode Island College, the duties and responsibilities of the Graduate Committee include:

"7. Seek to maintain high standards of quality of program, including recruitment, admissions, and assessment of graduate programs, in coordination with the Dean of Graduate Studies.

(...)

9. Advise the Deans of the Schools and the Vice President for Academic Affairs on other matters of mutual concern."

To better fulfill these responsibilities, the Graduate Committee conducted a Qualtrics survey in the fall semester of 2021. The main goal of the survey was to identify priorities for graduate programs from the perspective of the Rhode Island College faculty. We have also obtained data spanning from 2017 to 2021 about the enrollment and demographics of RIC graduate programs.

### The survey

The survey was distributed via e-mail to all full-time faculty. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of graduate studies to the college along with six issues - described as initiatives - on a 5-point Likert scale. We also allowed respondents to offer written comments and choose their top 2 priorities among the 6 issues.

The six issues were:

#### *Presence and leadership of the Office of Graduate Studies*

Creation of a permanent Graduate Dean's office with the necessary infrastructure needed for the development, refinement, and support of graduate programs at RIC.

#### *Graduate Studies coordination with other offices*

Creation of mechanisms to allow clear and efficient communication and use of student-centered resources already existing on campus. This includes developing efficient processes to allow graduate students and faculty to have access to the infrastructure that is currently focused on

undergraduate students such as the Division of Student Success, Financial Aid Office, the Office of the Dean of Students, and Disability Services.

#### *Budget Stability for Graduate Studies*

Creation of a stable budget to allow for a predictable and stable functioning of graduate studies at RIC. This would include the maintenance of graduate assistantships as well as funds for professional development for graduate students such as conference travel and research. Ensure that fees paid to Student Government by graduate students are used for graduate student support.

#### *Marketing and recruiting for Graduate Studies*

Developing a clear and data-driven marketing and recruiting strategy focused on graduate studies.

#### *Support for the review of graduate programs*

The administration has indicated that a comprehensive round of program reviews is in our near future. Graduate program directors and faculty should be given clear guidelines regarding the process of reviewing programs. This includes the open and transparent dissemination of the timeline for review, the metrics to be used in the review process, and the intended use of the results by the administration. Graduate program directors must be given the necessary administrative and technical support to conduct the review process.

#### *Graduate Studies and the Strategic Plan*

Graduate programs play an essential role in the academic offerings at the college and contribute to the financial stability of the institution. We must guarantee that graduate studies have a clear and central role in the college's strategic plan.

### **Results, Analysis, and Commentary**

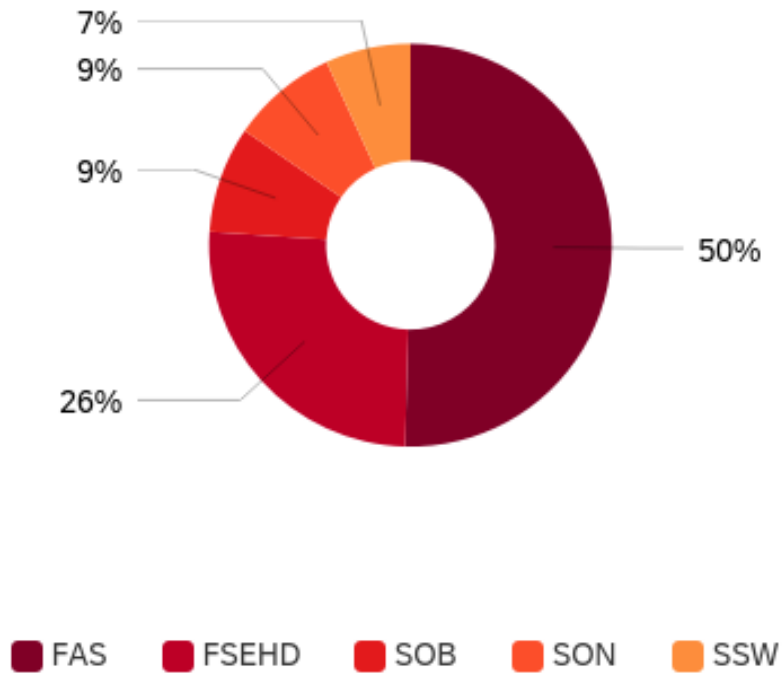
There were 123 responses amounting to approximate 41% of all full-time faculty. Respondents were asked to identify themselves as teaching graduate classes, teaching undergraduate classes or as program directors. (See Table 1). The figures do not add up to 123 as many faculty fit in more than one of the categories. Twenty-seven faculty identified themselves as program directors which accounts for approximately 59% of graduate degree programs.

Table 1. Identification of Respondents by Role at RIC

Answer	Count
Graduate Program Director	27
I teach graduate classes	73
I teach undergraduate classes	82

The distribution of respondents across schools is consistent with their respective sizes. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of Respondents Across Rhode Island College Schools



The results for each of the 6 issues/initiatives are listed below. (See Table 2). Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

**Table 2. Rhode Island Graduate Committee Survey Results per Initiative**

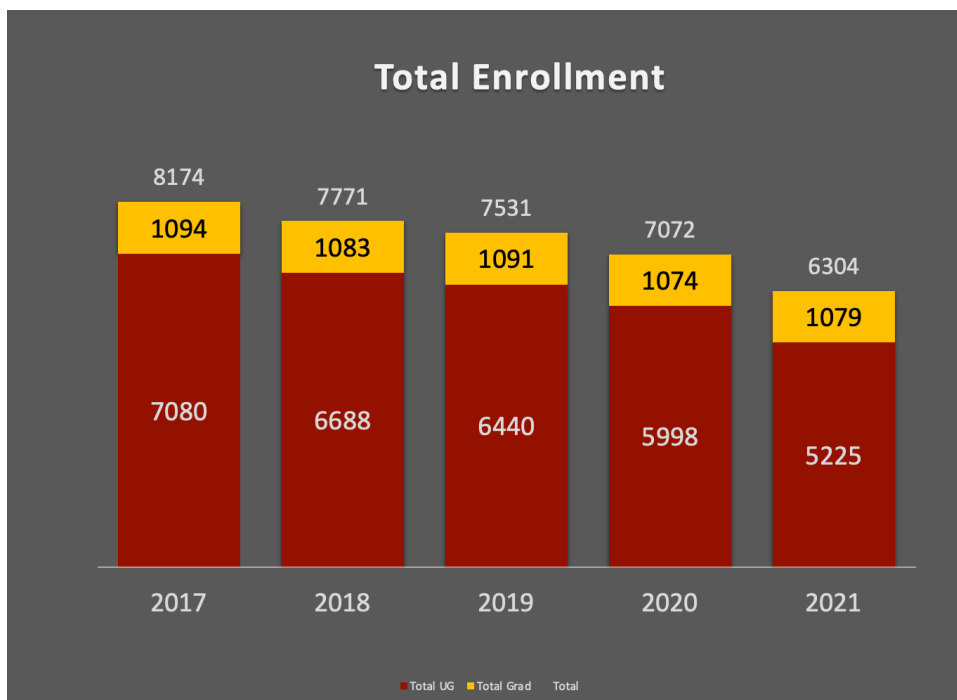
Issue/ Initiative	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Low Importance	Not at all important
Presence and leadership of the Office of Graduate Studies	57%	31%	5%	4%	3%
Graduate Studies coordination with other offices	63%	30%	4%	2%	1%
Marketing and recruiting for Graduate Studies	75%	20%	4%	1%	0%
Budget Stability for Graduate Studies	74%	23%	3%	1%	0%
Graduate Studies and the Strategic Plan	63%	31%	5%	1%	0%
Support for the review of graduate programs	52%	41%	7%	0%	0%

Members of the graduate committee and other faculty involved with graduate studies perceive graduate programs as an essential link in the college's structure. This same sentiment was echoed in the NECHE accreditation report, the accreditation team noted:

"RIC aspires to maintain and increase its reputation as a strong undergraduate institution. It may also want to consider whether a greater emphasis on graduate education and research will be needed moving forward(...)"

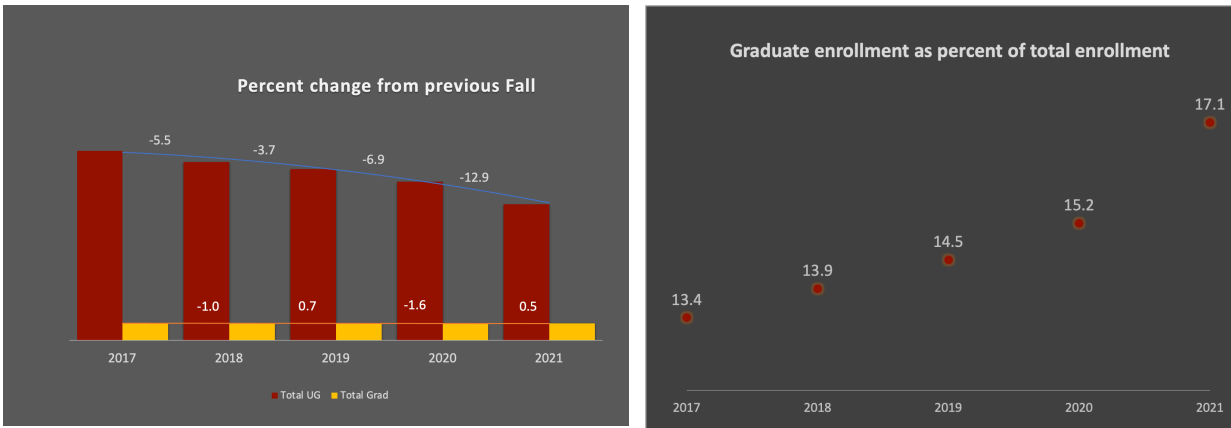
Enrollment data also support the claim that graduate programs are indeed an essential part of the enrollment picture at Rhode Island College. While total enrollment has decreased steadily over the last few years, graduate enrollment has maintained its numbers. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Number of Enrolled Students at Rhode Island College from 2017- 2021



The trend becomes even more evident as we look at percent changes in enrollment and graduate enrollment as a percent of total enrolment. (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Trends of Undergraduate and Graduate Enrollment at Rhode Island College 2017-2021

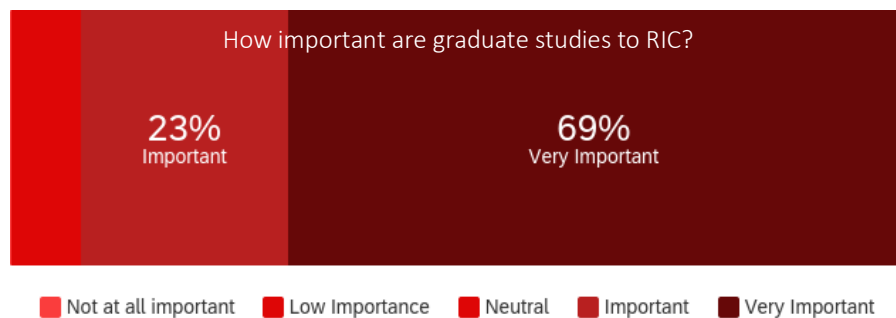


It is also important to notice that graduate programs are attracting a more diverse student population. The percentage of Hispanic and black graduate students grew from 7.6% and 3.9 % in 2016 to 11 .6% and 7.3%, respectively, in 2019. Youth Development, for example, reports that approximately 60% of enrolled students identify themselves as people of color.

Moreover, the quality of our graduate programs is undeniable with nationally accredited offerings in Nursing, Social Work and Mental Health Counseling.

When asked about the importance of graduate studies, 82% of respondents rated it important or very important. (See Figure 4).

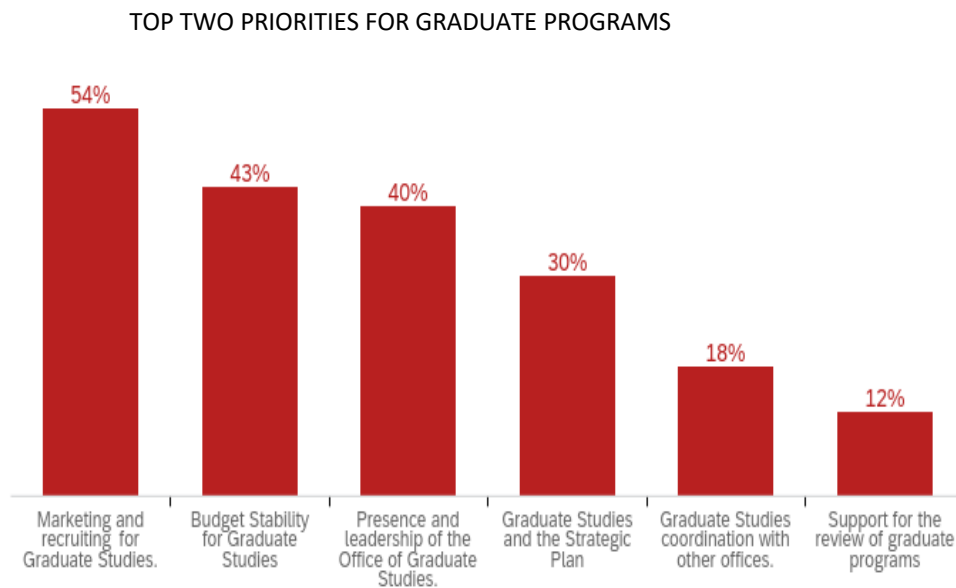
Figure 4. Percentage of Respondents Indicating the Importance of Graduate Studies as Important or Very Important





When asked about their top two priorities for graduate studies, respondents ranked Marketing and Recruiting, Budget Stability and Presence and Leadership of the Office of Graduate Studies appeared as their top priorities. (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. Graduate Program Priorities



The issue of Marketing and Recruiting was identified as a top two priority by 54% of survey respondents. Over the last few years, the administration has expanded RIC's presence in social media and other advertisement showing some improvements in marketing and communications. While these are good initiatives, they do not include a clear plan for advertising and recruiting for graduate programs. This fact was also note by the NECHE accreditation team, they wrote:

"There is a disconnect between the admissions experience for undergraduate and graduate students. The process for recruitment of graduate students appears to be decentralized and may not be maximizing enrollment in these programs although the implementation of CollegeNet to centralize the application process may help. It is not evident what the marketing plan is for graduate programs."

Forty-three percent of faculty responding to the survey selected Budget Stability as one of their top two priorities. One of the greatest challenges for a sustainable model for graduate programming is the issue of funding. Rhode Island College has experienced a lack of stability in

the budgeting process for graduate programs. Access to graduate assistantships, scholarships, funds for professional development, and general funding for graduate programs are often not accessible and are lacking well-established processes to streamline access to funds. The request and allocation of funds are usually accomplished via a continuous back-and-forth between the dean of graduate studies and the administration.

Approximately 40% of respondents selected the issue of Leadership as a one of their top two priorities. All the issues previously discussed are possibly exacerbated by the fact that the office of graduate studies has operated, for more than a decade, under the leadership of an interim dean assisted by one administrative assistant. The coordination of graduate assistantships, the graduate studies open house, and many other aspects of serving a population of approximately 1,000 students has been managed by an understaffed office lacking the resources needed to function properly.

## **Conclusion**

Our conclusion is that there is an alignment of anecdotal sentiments around campus, enrollment data, survey data, and the findings of the NECHE accreditation team concerning graduate studies at RIC.

Graduate programs must play an important role in the institution's short and long-term future and have a central place in the next strategic plan. A continued landscape of diminished support and lack of focus on graduate programs could have a severe negative impact on our institution's financial stability, regional and national standings, and hinder the graduate student experience at RIC.

It is our hope that the data we have presented in this document can be used to help guide conversations about the future of graduate studies at Rhode Island College.