Departmental Web Sites:
Best Practices for Improving Student Recruitment —
A report of the Admissions Advisory Committee

Spring 2010

— *"Second only to expending resources on improving the quality of undergraduate teaching is funding adequately the department Website." (Estaville, Brown, and Caldwell, 2006)*

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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INTRODUCTION

During the 2009/10 academic year, the Admissions Advisory Committee took on the project of investigating best practices for Web sites at the departmental level.

Importance of Web to prospective students

College and university Web sites are a key source of information for today's prospective students in familiarizing themselves with schools, deciding where to apply, and making a final decision on which institution to attend.

In 2006, a report titled "E-Expectations," sponsored by the consulting firm Noel-Levitz, the recruiting firm James Tower, and the National Research Center for College and University Admissions, found that "56% of prospective college student respondents preferred Web to print, and 43 percent of college-bound students had created a profile on a college or university Web site." (Roach, 2006). Another report, "College Search and the Millennial Generation," produced in 2007 by Eduventures Inc., discovered that "most students surveyed (84 percent) said they used colleges' Web sites most heavily in their research, followed by personal recommendations (75 percent), campus visits (64 percent), and college viewbooks (64 percent)." (Ashburn, 2007)

The use of the Web by prospective applicants applies not only to undergraduates, but to graduate students as well. In 2002, Hoeflich reported that 70 percent of graduate students surveyed rated the Web as important or very important in their program selection process, and that "this source of information was rated higher than all others, including contact with faculty members (57 percent), department literature (48 percent), and graduate school fairs (6 percent)." (Poock & Lefond, 2003). Since the time these reports were released, the significance of the Web as a source of information for prospective students has most certainly increased.

Focus on recruitment is essential for health of university

We chose this project because not only is the University of Rhode Island's Web presence essential for recruitment, but recruitment is essential for the health of the university and its programs. State funding for URI has been reduced steadily over the past decade. In fact, as of this year, the amount of scholarship funding alone given out by URI is greater than the state's appropriation to the University. Tuition dollars (especially from out-of-state students) make up the majority of the University's unrestricted budget. Attracting and yielding these out-of-state students is a priority.

Departmental Web sites are key in recruitment efforts

We chose to focus on departmental Web sites in particular because they have become the main instrument for providing information to prospective undergraduates and their parents, perhaps even more than the institution's site as a whole. When researching colleges, "many prospective students arrive [first] at a departmental Web site by executing a discipline field search" (Mentz & Whiteside, 2003), and a national Web-based survey of 7,867 high-school juniors and seniors found that "in evaluating colleges, students were most interested in internship programs and the institutions' reputations in their intended major" (Ashburn, 2007).

Thus, the implementation of an effective departmental Web site can significantly improve yield. For example, URI's Department of Ocean Engineering has seen a 50% increase in the size of its freshman class since the department overhauled their site in 2008 (35 students in 2008/09 compared with 55 students in 2009/10), and as of March 11, 2010, the number of freshman applications to the Department's degree program have increased by 35% from the prior year.

Estaville, Brown, and Caldwell (2006) articulate well the importance of departmental sites. They write, "A Web site is an electronic portal to the world—a virtual department personality—that conveys through visual, audio, and textual means a compelling account of a department's commitment to its undergraduate mission, the excellence of its programs, the excitement of its teaching and learning environments, and the quality of support it provides for its students."

BEST PRACTICES FOR DEPARTMENTAL WEB SITES

Below we list components of departmental Web sites that have been shown to enhance recruitment efforts by connecting with prospective students (and their parents) and addressing common questions and concerns. We provide examples of sites at the University of Rhode Island that exhibit best practices in these areas.

In providing examples from URI, our goal is to demonstrate that it is possible to create quality departmental Web sites with minimal additional resources. In our examples, we emphasize content over design, acknowledging that many departmental sites have not yet been updated to conform to the branded template and that the design and organization of some of our example sites need improvement.

To increase recruitment of prospective students, departmental Web sites should:

Incorporate student voices.

- *Include profiles of current students in their own words (photos, text, video, blogs), including:*
    - *Why they chose this major.*
    - *What they like about their classes and professors, about the program.*
    - *What a typical day or week is like.*

Examples:
1. Department of Computer Science and Statistics <http://www.cs.uri.edu/>
    - Top level page contains "Department Spotlight" student profile, with links to more profiles.

2. Department of Psychology <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/psy/>
   ◦ Top level page contains "Department Spotlight" student profile.

3. College of the Environment and Life Sciences, "Meet Some of Our Students" <http://cels.uri.edu/home/studentaffairs/SA_MeetStudents.aspx>
   ◦ Engaging profiles of students, including name, email (so they can be contacted by prospective students), major, hometown, and answers to questions such as "Favorite class at URI?," "Hands-on experience you've had at URI?," and "Who at URI has helped you to be successful?"
   ◦ Could be improved by adding student photos and moving to a more prominent place on the CELS site, or to the sites of individual departments within CELS.

4. International Engineering Program, "Student Profiles" <http://www.uri.edu/iep/IEPStudentProfiles.html>
   ◦ Student profiles with photos and text in their own words.
   ◦ Could be improved by moving to a more prominent place on the IEP site.

5. College of Pharmacy, "Resources for Prospective Pharm.D. Students" <http://www.uri.edu/pharmacy/about/prospectivepharmd.shtml>
   ◦ Videos of current students explaining why they chose URI.
   ◦ Could be improved by integrating images and video clips of campus life and clinical settings as students speak, lessening "talking head" effect.

6. Office of International Education video and photo gallery <http://www.uri.edu/international/gallery>

- Extremely engaging videos and photos, shot by students themselves, of their study-abroad experiences. See, for example, "Making Bait With Local School Children" <http://www.uri.edu/international/bait.html>
- Could be linked to or reproduced on Web sites of related departments.

7. Office of Internships and Experiential Education <http://www.uri.edu/internships/>
    - Homepage highlights videos of students discussing their internship experiences.
    - Best examples combine student's voice with active video of their experience, for example Harold Guise, who interned with the South County Police Harbor Master <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-OMiIpYsqg>
    - Could be linked to or reproduced on Web sites of related departments.

Highlight the strengths of your program.

- *Answer the question: Why major in this field at URI?*
- *Echo language, themes, and branding used on institutional site.*
- *Highlight points of pride of department.*
- *Showcase cutting-edge facilities available to students.*

Examples:

1. Department of Human Development and Family Studies, "Why HDF at URI?" <http://www.uri.edu/hss/hdf/about.html>
    - Linked prominently from the departmental home page, clearly and concisely outlines program strengths and structure.

2. Department of History, "Why History at URI?" <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/his/why_his.html>
    - Linked prominently from the departmental home page, clearly and concisely outlines program strengths and options such as second majors, minors, teaching certification, study abroad and internships.
    - Could be improved by linking to additional information on items listed.

3. Department of Communicative Disorders, "Why Communicative Disorders at URI?" <http://www.uri.edu/hss/cmd/why_cmd.html>
   ◦ Includes data on employment rates of graduates, students passing PRAXIS exam on the first try, and time to graduation.

4. Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering <http://www.uri.edu/cve/>
   ◦ Home page highlights departmental research strengths, points of pride of the department, and the relevance of civil and environmental engineering in providing solutions to real-world problems.

Profile the strengths of your faculty.

- *Include photos, research interests, publications, contact information. (Gear the information presented toward an external audience; links to faculty C.V.'s can provide more detailed lists of publications, etc. for those who are interested.)*

Examples:

1. Department of Human Development and Family Studies, "Faculty and Staff" <http://www.uri.edu/hss/hdf/faculty/index.htm>

- ◦ Main faculty and staff page includes photos and contact information. Photos of staff members are included. Page feels welcoming.
- ◦ Individual faculty pages are accessible and engaging.

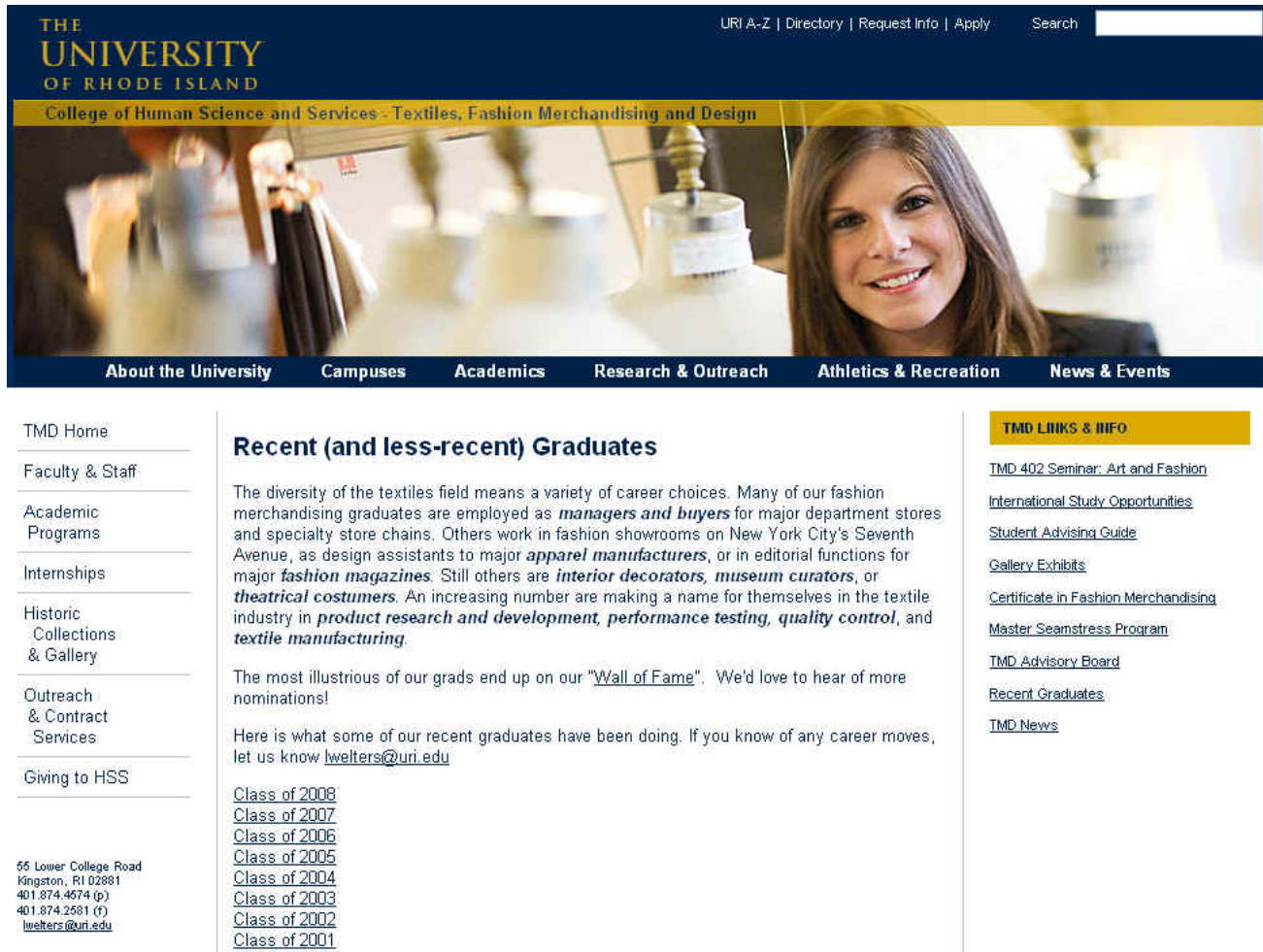
2. College of Nursing, "Faculty and Staff" <http://www.uri.edu/nursing/facultyandstaff.html>
    - ◦ Accessible and engaging narrative on individual faculty pages.
    - ◦ Could be improved by compacting faculty listing and adding photos.

3. Department of Mathematics, "Math Faculty and Staff" <http://www.math.uri.edu/People/faculty/index.html>
    - ◦ Attractive photo layout employing current photos.
    - ◦ Could be improved by updating design of individual faculty pages and including accessible narrative and/or faculty interests in their own words.

4. College of Business Administration <http://www.cba.uri.edu/>
    - ◦ Main college page includes a "Faculty Spotlight," e.g. <http://www.cba.uri.edu/spotlight/faculty/2010/February/>

Provide concrete examples of relevant and rewarding careers available to students with a degree in your field.

- *For example, include an online business card directory of departmental alumni, accompanied with photos and short biographical sketches.*
- *Statistics on employment and salaries of graduates, if available.*
- *Alumni statements and testimonials.*

Examples:

1. Department of Textiles, Fashion Merchandising, and Design, "Recent Graduates" <http://www.uri.edu/hss/tmd/grads.html>
   - Provides examples of careers available to TMD degree-holders. Lists jobs held by selected graduates by graduation year. "Wall of Fame" offers alumni profiles with photos.

2. Department of Human Development and Family Studies, "HDF Careers" <http://www.uri.edu/hss/hdf/careers.html>
   - Lists types of careers available to HDF graduates, as well as a list of selected first jobs held by recent graduates. A "Detailed Guide to HDF Jobs and Careers" <http://www.uri.edu/hss/hdf/career_guide.html> provides an extensive list of potential job titles and employers for those with HDF degrees.
   - Could be improved by profiles of selected alumni.

3. College of Business Administration <http://www.cba.uri.edu/>

- Main college page includes an "Alumni Spotlight," e.g. <http://www.cba.uri.edu/spotlight/alumni/2010/February/>.

4. Women's Studies Program, "Careers" <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/careers.html> and "Alumnae and Friends" <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/alum.html>
   - Linked prominently from the departmental home page, careers page lists skills acquired by Women's Studies majors or minors and related careers.
   - Alumnae page profiles recent graduates in their own words. Includes photos.

Clearly communicate degree requirements and courses offered.

- *Lists of courses required help students understand exactly what is needed for the major.*

Examples:
1. Department of Computer Science and Statistics, "Computer Science Undergraduate Programs" <http://www.cs.uri.edu/academics/undergraduate-studies/>
   - For each undergraduate degree offered, provides list of course requirements, sample program of study, and download-able curriculum worksheet.

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Department of Computer Science and Statistics

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Webmail
Technical Reference (FAQ)
Room & Equip Calendars
Useful Forms
Activities
Comp Sci Summer Camp
News
Jobs in Computer Science
The Department Spotlight

Computer Science B.S. Curriculum

Students following the B.S. curriculum will be particularly well prepared for graduate study in computer science.

Course Requirements

56 CREDITS FROM THE FOLLOWING REQUIRED CORE COURSES:

- CSC 110 - Computing Concepts (4cr)
- CSC 211 - Introductory Programming and Design (4cr)
- CSC 212 - Data Structures and Abstractions (4cr)
- CSC 301 - Fundamentals of Programming Languages (4cr)
- CSC 305 - Software Engineering (4cr)
- CSC 340 - Mathematical Foundations of Computer Science (4cr)
- CSC 411 - Computer Organization (4cr)
- CSC 412 - Operating Systems and Networks (4cr)
- CSC 440 - Algorithms and Data Structures (4cr)
- CSC 499 - Project in Computer Science (8cr)
- Including at least one of the following:
  - CSC 350 - Fundamentals of Mathematical Computation (4cr)
  - CSC 445 - Models of Computation (4cr)

Sample B.S. Program of Study

A typical plan for graduating in four years follows:

SEMESTER 00: 15 CREDITS

- CSC 110 - Computing Concepts (4cr)
- MTH 141 - Introductory Calculus with Analytic Geometry (4cr)
- URI 101 - Traditions and Transformations: A Freshman Seminar (1cr)
- WRT 101 - Composition (3cr) [No Longer Offered]
- Basic Liberal Studies requirement or Elective (3cr)

SEMESTER 01: 17 CREDITS

- COM 100 - Communication Fundamentals (3cr)
- CSC 211 - Introductory Programming and Design (4cr)
- MTH 142 - Intermediate Calculus with Analytic Geometry (4cr)
- Basic Liberal Studies requirement (3cr)
- Elective (3cr)

SEMESTER 02: 17 CREDITS

2. Department of Electrical, Computer, and Biomedical Engineering, "Checksheets" <http://www.ele.uri.edu/advising/checksheets/index.html>
    ◦ For each degree program within the department, provides download-able check-sheets listing degree requirements. Avoids confusion caused by curriculum changes by providing a separate sheet for each class year.
    ◦ Could be improved by updating site design.

3. Department of Journalism, "Journalism's Major Worksheet" <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/jor/newpink.htm>
    ◦ Chart simplifies curriculum choices required of majors. Available also in download-able form.

Include opportunities for internships, service learning, and study abroad.

Examples:
1. Department of Textiles, Fashion Merchandising, and Design, "TMD Internships" <http://www.uri.edu/hss/tmd/interns.html>
    ◦ Linked prominently from the departmental home page, explains steps to take to pursue an internship and lists recent internships held by students.

2. Department of Communicative Disorders, "Undergraduate Internships" <http://www.uri.edu/hss/cmd/internships.html>
    ◦ Outlines steps to take to pursue an internship, lists locations where students have recently held internships, and links to the Office of Internships and Experiential Education.

3. Department of Journalism, "Internships" <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/jor/jorinterns.htm>
    ◦ Linked prominently from the second-level departmental pages, lists specific internships held by students in recent semesters.
    ◦ Could be improved by providing more information on process of finding internship opportunities and incorporating links to student self-evaluations and contact information as mentioned.

Include information on support services and programs available to students.

- *Provide information on departmental or university advising and mentoring programs as well as complementary support networks.*
- *Showcase living and learning communities.*

Examples:

1. College of Nursing, "First Year Living and Learning Community" <http://www.uri.edu/nursing/livinglearninginfo.html>
    ◦ Linked prominently from the college home page, outlines benefits of the College of Nursing Living and Learning Community in Peck Hall. Includes behind-the-scenes, student-created video.

2. International Engineering Program, "IEP Houses"<http://www.uri.edu/iep/houses.html>
    ◦ Linked prominently from the program home page, describes IEP living options and amenities. Includes photos.

3. College of Continuing Education, "Student Resources" <http://www.uri.edu/prov/studentresources/overview.html>
    ◦ Linked prominently from the college home page, includes links to the Academic Advising Office, Academic Skills Center, Office of Student Services, Child Development Center, computer labs, and library.

Use good-quality photos and videos to capture the attention of site visitors.

- *Show people in action: students, faculty, staff, classes and labs in session, field trips, speakers, student social events, etc.*

Examples:

1. Women's Studies Program <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/>
    ◦ Dynamic, up-to-date photos of students and faculty are used generously throughout the pages of the site.

Include current news and events listings.

- *An up-to-date listing of department-related lectures, awards, faculty publications and activities, student events, and deadlines conveys a sense of excitement, that there is lots going on.*

Examples:

1. Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering <http://www.uri.edu/cve/>
   - ◦ "News and Events" column on home page prominently lists student, alumni, and faculty news. Includes eye-catching photos and links to additional information.

2. School of Education <http://www.uri.edu/hss/education/>
   - ◦ "Upcoming Events" and "In the News" sections on home page list items of interest. Separating events and news can make information more accessible.

3. Department of History <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/his/>

- "News and Events" box on home page prominently lists upcoming faculty lectures and other departmental news.

4. Department of Textiles, Fashion Merchandising, and Design <http://www.uri.edu/hss/tmd/>
   - "News and Announcements" section on home page lists items of interest. "More" links to an archive of recent departmental news with photos and links to additional information.

Link to discipline-related student clubs, organizations, and activities.

1. Department of Human Development and Family Studies, "HDF Club" <http://www.uri.edu/hss/hdf/hdf_club.html>
   - Linked from department home page, provides information and upcoming events for the current semester. Of the examples listed here, this page was the only one with current information.
   - Could be improved by photos of student events.

2. College of Nursing, "Organizations" <http://www.uri.edu/nursing/organizations_committees/organizations.html>
   - List and descriptions of organizations for nursing students, with links to more information.

3. Department of Electrical, Computer, and Biomedical Engineering, "Organizations" <http://www.ele.uri.edu/organizations/>
   - Lists technical societies, honors societies, and diversity in engineering societies available to students. Links to organization pages provide additional information.
   - Could be improved by updating site design and removing links to pages of organizations that have not been updated in a long time.

Incorporate interactive technologies into your site.
- *Make use of technologies that facilitate two-way communication and build community, for example social networking sites, instant messaging, discussion boards.*
- *Use technologies that create communication options, for example video and podcasts geared toward prospective students, text geared toward parents.*
- *Offer e-mail communication with program coordinators, faculty and staff persons, and student organizations.*
- *Allow online registration to receive departmental newsletters and event announcements.*

Examples:
1. International Engineering Program <http://www.uri.edu/iep/>
   - IEP offers a student blog hosted on Wordpress as well as a Flickr site, both of which could be improved by implementing procedures for keeping content up-to-date.
   - IEP's home page also links to their facebook page, which contains current postings and photos. A facebook *group* (as opposed to a page) would allow for more interactivity by allowing students and others to post content.

2. Department of Ocean Engineering <http://www.oce.uri.edu/>
   ◦ Linked from the home page is an ocean engineering-related blog, maintained by the department, and a department Twitter feed.

3. College of Pharmacy <http://www.uri.edu/pharmacy/>
   ◦ Home page offers video news items, and links to a video showcase for the college.
   ◦ Home page also links to an interactive Google Calendar listing college events. Could be improved by populating calendar with more events.

4. Department of Electrical, Computer, and Biomedical Engineering, "Undergraduate Programs in the Department" <http://www.ele.uri.edu/ugprog/>
   ◦ Offers an email listserv to provide information relevant to the undergraduate programs in the department. Students (and others) can subscribe.

5. College of Continuing Education, videos <http://www.uri.edu/prov/videos/videos.html>

◦ Professionally-produced videos highlighting students at CCE and the college's programs.

Organize your site to accommodate multiple audiences.

- *Even as you focus on student recruitment, keep in mind that departmental Web sites serve a number of audiences, including prospective students, parents, current undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, faculty, administrators, colleagues from other universities, and accreditation authorities. Information should be available to meet the needs of all of these audiences.*
- *Use navigational links to organize information by target population (e.g. "for prospective students," "for current students," "for alumni") as well as by functional topic (e.g. "forms," "jobs," "facilities").*

Examples:

1. College of Pharmacy <http://www.uri.edu/pharmacy/>
   ◦ Navigation bar asks "Who Are You?" and when clicked provides page customized to audience.

2. Department of Electrical, Computer, and Biomedical Engineering <http://www.ele.uri.edu/>
   - Offers different paths through the site for prospective students, current students, graduate students, and campus visitors.

OVERALL BEST-PRACTICES AMONG DEPARTMENTAL WEB SITES AT URI

After viewing the Web sites of academic departments at URI and elsewhere, this committee concluded that the departmental site at the University of Rhode Island that best exemplifies, overall, the criteria outlined above is the site of the [Department of Human Development and Family Studies](#).

The HDF site incorporates most of the best practices discussed here. It highlights program and faculty strengths, contains career information, clearly outlines program requirements, provides information on internships, field experiences, and undergraduate research opportunities, showcases current news and announcements, and offers links to student clubs and professional organizations.

We found the HDF site to be simple, well-organized, and accessible. It conforms to the University brand and thus interacts coherently with other college and university pages, helping to present a unified image for the university. Most of all, we felt that the HDF site is *achievable*. It clearly demonstrates that it is possible to create a departmental Web site with excellent content and design with resources currently available.

With the addition of student voices (e.g. student and alumni profiles), more photo and video content, the incorporation of interactive technologies (e.g. a facebook page or group, an online calendar), links to student support services, and possibly additional links for groups such as alumni, it could be an even stronger example of the best practices we've outlined here.

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College of Human Science and Services - Human Development and Family Studies

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HDF Home

Why HDF at URI?

Undergraduate Programs

Graduate Programs

Affiliated Programs

Faculty & Staff

Outreach

Giving to HSS

2 Lower College Road
Kingston, RI 02881
401.874.2150 (p)

Welcome to the
Department of Human Development and Family Studies

The Department of Human Development and Family Studies (HDF) offers a wide range of innovative learning opportunities designed to immerse students in all types of educational, community and therapeutic settings. Through hands-on experiences working with individuals, families, and groups of all ages, students can gain an in-depth understanding of human development at all levels. HDF graduates possess the professional skills and experience that make them uniquely qualified to succeed in a range of career paths that enhance human potential across the lifespan.

HDF offers a range of opportunities to engage in hands on learning in the local community with people of all ages. Some examples include:

- Observe children at the Child Development Centers
- Counsel individuals, couples and families at the Couple and Family Clinic
- Interact with lifelong learners and foster relationships across generations through the Gerontology Program
- Participate in internships in a variety of community settings including schools, nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies
- Study with professors who are engaged in long term relationships with the local community

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Join the HDF Club! HDF Club supports the professional development of HDF majors, and provides networking opportunities between students and faculty. Learn more...

Promising career outlook for Couple and Family Therapy
As one of the 50 best careers of 2010, CFT should have strong growth over the next decade Article in US News

More evidence for client feedback in Family Therapy. Research by Dr. Jackie Sparks and her colleagues finds more proof that client feedback improves therapy.

FOR CURRENT STUDENTS

- HDF Club
- Advising Guide
- Field Experience
- CDC Involvement Opportunities
- Jobs & Careers
- Professional Associations

FURTHER READING

Importance of Web to student recruitment

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