



Rhode Island School of Design
Institutional Self-Study | February 2026
Prepared for New England Commission of Higher Education



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Introduction

The self-study process reflected in this report began two years after the appointment of RISD's 18th president, Crystal Williams. The timing was especially fortuitous, in that President Williams had already initiated several key initiatives examining RISD's commitments and values. It also coincided with the initial planning for the college's next strategic plan (to begin Fall 2027); the information gathered here will provide a meaningful foundation for that effort.

In spring of 2024, President Williams appointed Toubia Ghadessi, Provost, and Jennifer Roberts, Executive Director of Accreditation and Institutional Effectiveness as co-chairs, with the responsibility to lead the college through the self-study process. The two co-chairs, in consultation with President Williams, considered possible chairs/co-chairs of working groups for the standards, who would also be on the steering committee, which was termed "the NECHE Engagement Team."

In August 2024, ahead of the fall semester, the work group co-/chairs and work group members were invited to participate. A total of eight work groups (with one group addressing Standards 1 and 3) were composed of faculty and staff from across all divisions, for a total of 75 RISD community members taking part in the self-study process. In addition to those leading and being part of the work groups, countless other community members supported the process, providing invaluable information, input, and documents that allowed RISD to demonstrate its compliance with all of the NECHE standards.

The co-chairs of the NECHE Engagement Team developed and shared guidelines and timelines based on the self-study workbook, information shared at self-study workshops, and other NECHE materials. Two NECHE vice presidents led a kick-off meeting for the group on September 18, 2024. Although Data First forms were no longer going to be part of the self-study, the Data Dashboard had not yet been made public. To ensure the work groups had the necessary data, the Institutional Effectiveness Office provided them the Data First Forms beginning in September 2024. A shared drive was created, which provided a centralized place for the sharing of information and for collaboration. The NECHE Engagement Team held monthly meetings, during which they discussed the standards and shared questions and issues. Between those monthly meetings, the co-/chairs of the work groups met and communicated regularly with their respective work group members. Updates were shared with the RISD community at various town halls and meetings.

The deans were invited to review an early compilation of information in April 2025. An initial draft of the report was completed in summer 2025. In September 2025, the deans and cabinet members were invited to review a full draft of the self-study report and provide feedback, with the self-study the focus of a cabinet retreat.

On October 28-29, 2025, the Visiting Team Chair Dr. Joanne Berger-Sweeney, President Emerita of Trinity College, conducted the preliminary visit. During the visit, Dr. Berger-Sweeney met with President Williams, the NECHE Engagement Team, the academic deans, and college leaders whose work encompasses the various areas of emphasis from the 2021 interim report.

Throughout the months from September 2025 through February 2026, a subgroup of the NECHE Engagement Team worked through an iterative drafting process. The co-chairs of the

self-study shared the draft with NECHE Vice President Carol Anderson in November 2025; her feedback provided indispensable guidance that helped us ensure our self-study not only demonstrated compliance, but also told RISD's story. Information was updated as appropriate, with faculty and staff from across the college again providing support. The self-study was finalized and submitted through the NECHE portal in mid-February. As part of the self-study process and in adherence to the NECHE guidelines, RISD posted the report for public comment, providing public notice on its website and via the alumni newsletter.

Overall, building on critique as a central component of a RISD education, this self-study has been an opportunity for RISD to engage in reflection about its own values. Such self-critique has provided the RISD community with an occasion to bring together diverse perspectives and reactions, shared knowledge of the college, and constructive criticism to consider how the college can continue to improve.

NECHE Engagement Team (Steering Committee)

Touba Ghadessi, Co-Chair
Jennifer Roberts, Co-Chair
Rob Albanese, Standard 9 Co-Chair
Renee Byas, Standards 1 and 3 Chair
Dan Cavicchi, Standard 4 Co-Chair
Xiangli Ding, Standard 8 Chair
Paula Gaetano Adi, Standard 4 Co-Chair
Jennifer Liese, Writer
Brittany Lok, Standard 9 Co-Chair
Rick Mickool, Standard 7 Chair
Margot Nishimura, Standard 6 Chair
Sara Rothenberger, Standard 5 Chair
Jack Silva, Standard 2 Chair (retired)

Work Group Members

Standards 1 and 3

Renee Byas, General Counsel, Chair
Sofiya Cabalquinto, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer
Bethany Costello, Executive Director, Center for Community Partnerships
Antonia Craig, Special Assistant to the President & Secretary to the Board of Trustees
Cheryl Heroux, Executive Legal Assistant/Paralegal
Sarah Knarr, Director, Center for Student Involvement
Rebecca Lazouras, Executive Assistant & Policy Coordinator
Kajette Solomon, Museum SEI Specialist
Tracy Voccio, Student Account Manager, Continuing Education

Standard 2

Jack Silva, Vice President, Campus Services, Chair (retired)
Amanda Clark MacMullan, Vice President, Institutional Advancement
Dylan Costa, Audio Visual Tech Coordinator/Programmer
Jennifer Howley, Director, Risk, Emergency Management, & RISD Property Holdings
Jay Lowrey, Associate Director, Institutional Effectiveness
Leora Maltz-Lecaz, Professor

Tom Mattos, Assistant Vice President of Finance/Controller
John Murphy, Senior Director, CE Strategic Operations & Adult Programs

Standard 4

Dan Cavicchi, Professor, History, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences, Co-chair
Paula Gaetano Adi, Professor, Foundation Studies, Co-chair
Susan Andersen, Associate Director, Career Center
Amalia Galdona-Broche, Assistant Professor, Textiles
Brittany Goodwin, Student Success Project Manager
Westley Holiday, Senior Project Manager
Amy Horschak, Director, Graduate Studies
Carol Lasch, Associate Professor, Foundation Studies
Christine Peterson, Registrar
Ramon Tejada, Associate Professor, Graphic Design
Traci Vaspol, Senior Academic Department Administrator, Computation, Technology and Culture Department

Standard 5

Sara Rothenberger, Associate Dean of Students, Chair
Ginnie Dunleavy, Executive Director, Auxiliary Services
Jess Harris, Student Support & CARE Network Program Manager
Sean Nesselrode Moncada, Associate Professor, Theory and History of Art and Design
Dallas Pride, Executive Director, Alumni + Family Relations
Ray Quirolgico, Vice President, Student Life and Engagement
Richard Song, Director, Intercultural Student Engagement
Maria Stadanlick, Director, Student Accounts

Standard 6

Margot Nishimura, Assistant Provost for Academic Engagement, Chair
Alero Akporiaye, Associate Professor, History, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences
Meredith Barrett, Associate Director, Writing & Related Literacies
Justine Bubar, Faculty Recruitment & Development Coordinator
Joshua Chodorow, Administrative Assistant, Provost's Office
Jen Horwitz, First Year Liberal Arts Academic Advisor
Norm Paris, Professor, Foundation Studies

Standard 7

Rick Mickool, Chief Information Officer, Chair
Joe Bernier, Senior Director, Information Technology Services
Tara Blaney, Treasury Director
Sarah Caggiano, Assistant Vice President of Institutional Advancement Business Operations & Annual Giving
Janine Connelly, Director, Academic Budgets, Planning, and Analysis/Strategy
Jill English, Executive Director, Compensation and Benefits
Anthony Gallonio, Assistant Vice President, Enrollment Services
Aliza Leventhal, Director, Fleet Library
Jerlyn Vidal, Director, CE Finance & Business Administration

Standard 8

Xiangli Ding, Associate Professor, History, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences, Chair
Veronica Dupuis, Administrative Coordinator, Student Life

Elyana Kadish, Health Educator
Jay Lowrey, Associate Director, Institutional Effectiveness
Dimitris Papadopoulos, Senior Instructional Designer, Teaching & Learning Lab
Brian Ulrich, Professor, Photography

Standard 9

Rob Albanese, Associate Director, Digital Content Production and Operations, Co-chair
Brittany Lok, Associate General Counsel, Co-chair
Claudeline Chery, Associate Director, Center for Community Partnerships
Justeane Odams, Senior Enrollment Reporting & Research Analyst
Phil Oliveira, Director, Student Conduct and Community Standards
Liz Rainone, Director, Employment & Employee Development

Institutional Overview

Rhode Island School of Design is consistently ranked among the best art and design colleges in the world. Given its small size (2,616 students in Fall 2025), it offers a surprisingly wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs in areas of architecture, arts education, design, fine arts, and liberal arts. It also attracts students from around the globe; roughly a third of the student body is international, representing approximately 60 countries. The student-to-faculty ratio is low, at 8:1; students are mentored by full- and part-time faculty, who are practicing artists, designers, and scholars, as well as by professional museum staff and visiting critics. Student learning and faculty teaching are enhanced by the extensive collections of the RISD Museum (the second-largest art museum in New England, next to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston), the Edna W. Lawrence Nature Lab, and Fleet Library. RISD students and faculty are part of the wider learning community facilitated by cross-registration and a highly selective dual degree program with Brown University; additionally, students are afforded opportunities to participate in courses and sponsored studios that link their studies and practices with engaged work in Providence, the region, and sites outside the United States.

Art and design schools are known for supporting a degree of unconventionality, but as one of the first schools of art and design in the US, RISD has been influential in setting a standard for expansive thinking, in which questioning prevailing assumptions is essential to the creative process. RISD was established in 1877 by a group of visionary women with a missionary zeal to position art as an agent of social change, in a time of increasing industrialization and upheaval, when wealthy men of industry largely controlled social institutions and their values. The founding purpose of RISD was not simply to produce new artists but something far more complex: to train artisans to “apply the principles of art” to trade and manufacture; to educate students in practices of art so that they may “give instruction to others” and foster the “general advancement of public Art Education.” This outward-looking set of founding goals positioned RISD, by the early-20th century, as a leader in not only art and design learning but also in promoting the critical role of the arts in the world.

A conception of the “arts”—as a plural term—is core to RISD’s educational philosophy. Unlike other more narrowly-defined art academies or design schools in the late 19th century, RISD was built around a variegated approach to art education, supporting a school and a museum, enrolled students and the public, art and design, depth and breadth, thinking and making. This approach is as vital today as it was in 1877. The museum and the college exist as equal and integrated entities, with their own spheres of influence; degree and continuing education programs reach a range of adult and youth audiences, as well as the wider public. In fact, RISD’s comprehensive framework for education in the arts is permanently enshrined in a series of stone reliefs created in 1936 by sculptor Lee Lawrie (creator of the bronze Atlas in New York’s Rockefeller Center) that depict figures engaged in three core areas: “The Fine Arts,” “The Industrial Arts,” and “The Liberal Arts.” Appropriately, the reliefs are installed on the sides of the campus’s multi-use College Building,

RISD sometimes can feel like a university in its emphasis on breadth of learning. In fact, in the post-World War Two period, when RISD found itself increasingly in competition with universities adding departments of studio art and design, RISD’s response was to adopt, itself, a university approach, reframing its curriculum in terms of critical thinking and advanced inquiry and vastly expanding its liberal arts offerings. To this day, RISD’s approach to art and design is deeply-

informed by study in the humanities and social or biological sciences, spanning a diverse range of scholarly areas, including anthropology, biology, creative writing, literature, history, performance studies, philosophy, religion, sociology and more. Throughout their years at RISD, students are not only working with diverse media in their major studios but also immersing themselves in books; exploring museum artifacts; interpreting images and objects; writing, criticizing, and debating ideas; and observing and testing natural phenomena. This work, as former President John R. Frazier once put it, sustains a RISD education's essential combination of "know-how" and "know-why."

Although studio learning in RISD's programs has changed over time, that has not meant simply adopting the latest creative technologies. RISD offers an education that, while recognizing and incorporating the innovations of the digital age, remains committed to the value of materials-based and hands-on learning. Students use the latest software to model their work and create posters, maps, and schematics, but they also learn to design and create through more analogue means, with drawing, tools, and machines, from looms to presses to saws. The home spaces of students are an intentional combination of the old and new: laptops sit amid sketches, prints, iterative prototypes, inspirational objects, easels, mannequins, ceiling cords, and diverse implements. RISD's workshops remain viscerally rich environments, shaped by the sounds of making and assembly, the odors of paint, sawdust, or glue. Classroom walls are typically covered floor-to-ceiling with pin-up boards to facilitate critiques, and surfaces of work benches are marked by the dimples, cuts, and material traces of previous students. Generally, work spaces present tableaux of people, side by side, with their heads down, or standing before machines and printers, earnestly working on diverse projects.

An enduring aspect of RISD's studio learning, too, is its culture of critique. Critique is a formal process of feedback, conducted at key points of the semester, in which students share their work with gathered peers, faculty, and community members, all of whom participate in discussion about the student's intentions and design choices, the qualities of the work, and potential alternative ideas. Diverse perspectives and reactions, shared disciplinary knowledge, and constructive criticism combine to provide students with rich information about their work, which they are expected to integrate into its next iteration. Students are introduced to RISD's system of critique in their first semester and experience it throughout the rest of their art and design education. More broadly, the fundamental aspects of critique—sharing one's work, an openness to questioning and dialogue, a commitment to iteration—inform the dynamics of the institution, from the open, town hall-style, faculty meeting to expectations, among staff, for extended consultation and consideration of alternatives in decision-making. Critique's echoing of assessment practices, too, has provided a valuable foundation for efforts at instituting regular reflection about studio programs and their learning outcomes.

Overall, RISD's urban campus, interwoven into Providence's Downcity and College Hill neighborhoods, is a lively place to study and work. Many students at RISD excelled at a subject that was often marginalized or subordinate in their secondary schools; to be able to live at an art school, with other gifted artists from around the world, surrounded by making, creates a palpable atmosphere of enthusiasm. At RISD, students show their work in regular group shows and in public critiques, and there are multiple events per week, featuring accomplished artists, designers, and scholars, talking about their work, engaging in panel discussions, and visiting classes. For RISD's students, work and passion are indissociable. While they spend most of their time in the studios and classrooms, they also have opportunities to participate in intramural sports, to join interest clubs (some of which are shared with Brown), and to hang out at the student-run café or the "RISD Beach" (an open area in central campus). Studio facilities (including shared studio spaces in residence halls) are lit up at night with students immersed in

assignments. Toward the end of every semester, one can see groups of students carrying projects—awkwardly large paper-maché sculptures, wooden models, pieces of metal tubing, canvases—along the streets on their way to a critique. It’s exciting and a little odd to see in the middle of a city; such moments capture the spirit of RISD and its role in shaping Providence’s reputation as “The Creative Capital.”

While this report reflects RISD as an enduring institution of art and design, it also highlights a number of recent changes on campus since 2016:

- **Strategic Planning:** Finalized and activated 2020-2027 strategic plan, after extensive two-year process. Also navigated unexpected challenges of the COVID pandemic, including an approved period of remote learning (March 2020 to September 2020); a successful return to in-person learning; and sustained collaboration with state and local officials, as well as Brown University, on distancing, testing and health response protocols.
- **Student Financial Support:** Made continuing investments to the institutional financial aid budget and significantly increased the unrestricted operating budget allocation to scholarships.
- **Teaching, Learning, and Programs:** Initiated an MA in Global Arts and Cultures, an MFA in Illustration, an MA in Design Engineering (with Brown University), a Master of Marine Affairs/Master Landscape Architecture joint program (with University of Rhode Island), a first-year away program in Florence, and two new majors: Art and Computation and Sound. The European Honors Program in Rome was sunsetted in 2023 and the MA in Nature-Culture-Sustainability Studies was transformed into a graduate concentration in 2024.
- **Organization:** Expanded RISD’s Social Equity and Inclusion Action Plan (2017) to create the Center for Social Equity and Inclusion (now a division) and a new Office of Institutional Discrimination and Title IX (now the Equity & Compliance Office). Also created the Enrollment Management Office (2017), the Graduate Studies Office (2018), the Teaching and Learning Lab (2020), and the Institutional Effectiveness Office (2022).
- **Research:** Cultivated new multi-year corporate partnerships with Infosys (2018-2021) and Hyundai Motor Group (2018-present), as well as an **Institutional Research Board** partnership with the University of Rhode Island to provide access to Basic Human Subject Research Certification and Exempt and Expedited Reviews.
- **Facilities:** Built new residence hall (North Hall, 2019); rented Weybosset Street Studios (2022) for Landscape Architecture and Illustration graduate programs; renovated 20 Washington Place first-floor, the RISD Auditorium, portions of 15 West (including a Studio for Research in Sound and Technology and new Center for Arts and Language), and systems for the Central Power Plant and Metcalf studios.
- **IT Systems:** Completed two-year changeover of outdated Human Resources, finance, and student information systems to new cloud-based systems of Workday Finance/HCM and Workday Student, as well as adopted campus-wide use of Zoom, Canvas (LMS), 25Live (scheduling), and Coursedog (catalog and course management).

Most recently, RISD has been shaped by the arrival of RISD’s 18th president, Crystal Williams, in April 2022. President Williams has put a spotlight on how we serve our students while they are here and how we prepare them for the future. This has resulted in an in-depth examination of program curricula in an effort to bring their total credits in line with best practices. This examination and refinement of the curriculum resulted in integral changes that allow students to take fewer credits per semester and have much-needed time off between the fall and spring semesters. In addition, President Williams and cabinet leadership have put a focus on RISD’s

financial structure. We have increased financial aid by \$1 million year-over-year to allow students to leave the institution with less debt. In addition, we have made several recent changes to how the college operates fiscally, including developing a new multi-year model for developing budgets, with regular review and evaluation, which provides greater ability to plan long-term, as well as a renewed focus by the Institutional Advancement Division to increase unrestricted giving, thus contributing more to operating funds.

Based on the major findings of this self-study, which have been informed by recent presidential initiatives, it has become evident that RISD, in the future, will need to consider how to:

- Continue to strengthen student advising.
- Reduce barriers across departments.
- Deepen our commitments to ensuring that, upon graduation, students leave with not only exemplary technical skills and artistic sophistication, but also optimal preparation and support to successfully pursue their desired professional path.
- Examine and optimize our current use of space, one of our largest assets.

With the strategic planning process currently underway, RISD is well placed to devote efforts and resources to the above areas.

Standard One: Mission and Purposes

Description

RISD's mission statement reads:

The mission of Rhode Island School of Design, through its college and museum, is to educate its students and the public in the creation and appreciation of works of art and design, to discover and transmit knowledge and to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation.

This mission statement was written, reviewed, and presented to the Board of Trustees in 2005 in preparation for the 2006 accreditation self-study. The prior mission was drafted in 1878, a year after RISD's founding. This original mission identified three objectives: to prepare artisans to apply art principles to trade and manufacture; to train students to teach art and be artists; and to advance public art education. The 2005 revision did not dismiss these intentions but, rather, it extended them by speaking more directly to the scholarly significance and transformational capacity of art and design.

RISD's mission statement begins by noting the conjoined nature of its "college and museum." This partnership, which dates back to RISD's founding in 1877, is one of RISD's key distinctive characteristics. The college and museum, while governed by separate by-laws, are deeply integrated. Faculty teach classes that respond to exhibitions, curators offer courses in the curriculum, all first-year students write a paper about an object in the collection, and many exhibit in the student-curated Gelman Gallery.

Another distinctive characteristic articulated at the start of the mission is RISD's commitment to serve the public, as well as its students, in fostering the creation and appreciation of art and design. The RISD Museum, for example, while serving RISD's degree programs, also explicitly seeks to bring community members, school groups, tourists, and external researchers to view its collections and participate in programs each year. RISD's Continuing Education unit likewise interacts with and supports the public through non-credit courses for all ages and levels of experience, in-person and online; summer courses for which college students may receive credit; teen work readiness courses, which teach students how to thrive in college and careers; and a pre-college program that mimics the college's first-year student experience, allowing teens to experiment with new materials, tools, and techniques.

The second half of the college's mission statement—"to discover and transmit knowledge and to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation"—expresses a commitment to expansive and impactful practice and research, to creating not just art and design objects but new ideas, knowledge, and ways of living. RISD's specific pedagogy combines a deep disciplinary focus in art and design with broad liberal arts education and research opportunities, blending studio practice with rigorous contextual understanding and applied learning. RISD students acquire a broad intellectual foundation that combines studio-based skills with historical and contemporary context and critical, conceptual, and ethical thinking.

The mission's "global" reference is also significant. About 35 percent of RISD's students are international, hailing from approximately 60 countries. International students (and faculty) contribute invaluable artistic, cultural, and linguistic diversity to RISD's community, and of course many go home or elsewhere in the world to practice and teach in their respective fields. In

addition to international students coming to RISD, RISD students have opportunities to take part in a variety of travel courses offered: each year about 30 travel courses offer students the opportunity to travel to around 25 countries such as South Africa, Japan, and Chile. Continuing Education likewise attracts students from across the globe into its many programs and also offers a summer teen art institute hosted at a high school in Shanghai, China. Not surprisingly, RISD's 2020-27 strategic plan includes a stated aspiration to foster global consciousness for the greater good: "RISD will contribute to the creation of just societies, a sustainable planet, and new ways of making and knowing that equip humans to live in mutually enhancing ways with each other and with the earth."

Appraisal

RISD's institutional mission and values have not changed significantly since its founding and clearly identify its distinctive character as a college and a museum, serving students and the public, and focused on the transmission of knowledge and contributions to global society. These specific components of the mission have been explicitly identified in the strategic planning efforts of both the college and the museum, and continue to shape how RISD makes decisions. Most recently, for instance, the Board of Trustees established an Education, Mission & Strategy Committee, whose purpose is to assist the Board in fulfilling its fiduciary and oversight responsibilities, through planning that is specifically guided by RISD's educational mission. And, when developing the 2020-2027 strategic plan, the mission was front and center: RISD led with a statement of the RISD mission; used it to establish a set of nine specific core values, which specifically reflect on how the mission is realized in a RISD education; and, finally, used the statement as the basis for articulating its three core planning priorities (described in Standard Two).

Several specific efforts on campus (both prior to, and part of, the 2020-2027 strategic plan) have been inspired by the mission. RISD's commitment to contributing to global society, for example, helped guide the establishment of RISD's Center for Social Equity and Inclusion in 2019 (now a division) that works to create a campus environment that values access for all to art and design education. RISD's commitment to both access and knowledge transmission is supported by the Teaching & Learning Lab, founded in 2019, which supports faculty by promoting reflective and inclusive teaching techniques, fostering innovative approaches to curriculum development, and providing tools, reference materials, and resources on current issues (AI, decolonizing curricula, etc.) affecting learning in art and design. Finally, RISD's Center for Community Partnerships, established in 2021, focuses on the public aspect of the mission, connecting RISD community members with more than 200 local organizations each year and creating new opportunities for the transmission of knowledge off campus.

RISD's mission statement is visible across its communications. The mission appears regularly throughout RISD's printed and digital materials, including on RISD's website, in the RISD admissions viewbook, at the start of the course catalog, and in new student orientation communications. The mission is included in the Board of Trustees manual and meeting agendas and is reviewed at each Board convening. The Institutional Advancement Division uses the mission statement as the prologue to grants and correspondence with individual and corporate partners and features it in their presentations and proposals. Regular town hall meetings often begin with a slide displaying RISD's mission, and Human Resources addresses RISD's mission during new employee orientation.

Nevertheless, more might be done to highlight application of the mission and its core values in relation to the current historical moment, especially in light of changing political, economic, and

social contexts for both art and design and higher education. In her 2022 inaugural address and subsequent communications, RISD President Crystal Williams reflected on the implications of RISD's mission and values. In particular, she spoke about the RISD community's collective envisioning of "a campus and culture where the principles, goals, and outcomes of equity and inclusion are centered and central," and identified five interconnected themes that would guide her in leading RISD into the next 150 years:

- **Amplify** artists' and designers' voices and holistic well-being
- **Evolve** toward a pedagogy that creates broader student access to RISD, embraces new technologies, and adds faculty focused on new areas of knowledge
- **Cultivate** student professional development, alum connections, faculty research, and staff development
- **Engage** local and global communities
- **Connect** interpersonally and professionally students, alums, parents, and key stakeholders

Subsequently, building on these themes, the president has commissioned several studies intended to enable the RISD community to better understand how it can best fulfill the college's mission (described in Standard Two).

Projection

In Fall 2025, work began on the next strategic plan (co-chaired by the president and the provost, with consulting firm CREDO providing support). Slated to be finalized in 2027, coinciding with RISD's 150th anniversary celebration, the plan will offer opportunities to sift, synthesize, and distill the many expressions of mission and purpose so that internal and external audiences can understand, appreciate, and be guided by them with clarity.

Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation

Planning

Description

RISD's planning is guided by two priorities: to amplify the institution's core educational mission, as experienced on campus, and to sustain the school's role as a leading advocate for art, design, and culture, nationally and globally. We see these intentions as connected: the ability of students, faculty, and staff to enact the curriculum and realize their ambitions are what, in turn, enables RISD and its alums to have a broader leadership role in the arts. Given that connection, the participation of students, faculty, and staff in planning processes is essential to how these intentions are articulated and implemented.

Accordingly, RISD's current strategic plan, *NEXT: RISD 2020-2027*, was developed with broad community input over a three-year period, including a series of initial open meetings to ascertain current community values. Led by a 16-person steering committee, 21 working groups comprising 86 faculty and 60 staff articulated goals for various topics, from community engagement to student health and wellness. The draft strategic plan combined the academic plan (written by the provost based on working group reports) with other existing institutional plans (e.g., the Social Equity and Inclusion Plan, the Campus Master Plan, fundraising planning, and projections from the 2016 accreditation self-study). After meetings with approximately 500 faculty, staff, and students to gather feedback on the draft, goals were further refined and prioritized by the President's Cabinet and the Deans Council, with final approval by the RISD Trustees.

At the end of the process, *NEXT* featured long-term goals organized around three pillars: just societies, a sustainable planet, and new ways of making and knowing, all extending the institution's mission and shared academic values. At the same time, the plan was launched with the understanding that implementation would need to be iterative, with planned reviews to allow for necessary adjustments, revisions, updates, and additions to keep the plan relevant and timely over its seven-year period. A two-year review, with a set of revised next steps, was completed in Spring 2021, at which time the president, Rosanne Somerson, retired. RISD's new president Crystal Williams, who arrived roughly a year later, commissioned the Community and Culture Assessment (2023) early in her tenure and, building on that report, further refined the Strategic Plan's implementation by identifying three overlapping and complementary priorities: Financial Optimization, Holistic Student Wellness, and Preparedness for Life After RISD.

In 2023-24, a committee was formed for each of these areas (comprising faculty, staff, and students, as well as members of the President's Cabinet and the Board of Trustees) to conduct targeted studies, using quantitative data, peer benchmarking, and additional input from the RISD community. *Financial Optimization* focuses on ways "to strengthen our long-term financial sustainability, maximize the use of our limited funds and build new and expanded revenue streams that strengthen our financial base, and increase resources to support our core mission." During its work, the committee identified ways in which RISD can rethink space use—from revised scheduling grids to centralized fabrication shops—to improve both financial performance and educational outcomes. The *Holistic Student Wellness* initiative aims "to provide a comprehensive examination of student wellness, including the degree to which the living, learning and working environments we provide for students are consistent with our stated values concerning their physical, emotional and mental well-being." After examining a variety of

information sources, this group made recommendations ranging from decompressed schedules to physically centralized health and mental healthcare to cohesive advising. The *Preparedness for Life After RISD* committee was charged with making “a set of recommendations that envisions a strategic and comprehensive direction for post-graduation success that is sensitive to the differences between vocational and art and design education.” This work resulted in a recommendation for a systemic approach to career preparation, including business literacy, a stronger internship program, and enhanced alum networking. Executive summaries of these three studies, each including recommendations, were shared with the RISD community in a Spring 2025 community announcement.

The spatial and technical resources needed to support RISD’s educational goals were highlighted in the strategic planning discussions for *NEXT*. These goals were carried over to the strategic plan from the 2018 Institutional Master Plan, an expansion of RISD’s 2015 Campus Master Plan, including an inventory of all RISD-owned properties and parking lots. Both plans contain near- and long-term goals. In particular, in order to continue making progress in increasing campus accessibility per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Disability Supports Services has been maintaining an evergreen list of ADA project needs, which are reviewed annually with the Planning, Design, and Construction Office in order to select and implement projects for completion.

A cohesive thread through this work has been the college’s recognition of the essential role of responsible and responsive financial planning in making strategic planning goals and sufficient physical resources possible. The Finance and Administration Division manages both the institutional fiscal-year budget planning and projection process, in addition to a multi-level five-year fiscal plan reviewed annually by the cabinet and approved by the Board of Trustees. When setting the budget for a year, the cabinet reviews college activities from the previous year and evaluates their effectiveness, in order to determine priorities for allocations for the upcoming fiscal year. This annual review then informs the five-year plan as appropriate. The president and the senior vice president for Finance and Administration regularly review plans and related expenditures throughout the year to make adjustments as needed (see Standard 7).

With over 80% of RISD’s budget coming from tuition and fees, enrollment management planning is integral to strategic, campus, and financial planning. The Enrollment Management Division builds and utilizes dynamic five-year projections to guide recruitment (see Standard 7). The projections reflect rigorous internal and national data collection and analysis and respond to enrollment goals developed by a working group of staff from Admissions, Academic Affairs, and Finance and Administration. The division continually scans the environment for changing conditions, adjusting plans and projections as necessary.

The goal of Institutional Advancement is to secure financial resources in support of the strategic initiatives and budgetary needs of the college and the museum. The current focus of Institutional Advancement is major gift and annual gift fundraising of unrestricted and restricted dollars for crucial programs such as financial aid and those related to student experiences. The Institutional Advancement team connects with and engages key constituencies: alumni, families, corporations and foundations, and friends to strengthen and broaden the RISD community. Strong constituent connections are the foundation of enduring support.

After a year of staff transition in 2023, the new vice president for Institutional Advancement arrived in 2024, and called for a renewed focus on expanding the donor pipeline, enhanced engagement and solicitation activities, and the restructuring of the annual giving program to

grow unrestricted support. In addition, Institutional Advancement leadership worked with CCS Fundraising in 2025 to develop a plan for new strategies, metrics, and goals for annual fundraising and a campaign. The Institutional Advancement team was able to set higher fundraising goals for the museum to support growing educational demands and opportunities.

The college's Academic Affairs Division has developed processes that carefully guide planning for each academic-year cycle, as well as longer-term goals. The Academic Budgets and Resources Office, under the provost, regularly (sometimes weekly) generates information for discussion and planning with division deans and department heads. The Registrar's Office and Academic Affairs use a joint planning calendar to create annual program course tables, as well as the course announcement, in alignment with budget planning. In particular, the annual planning cycle takes into account past budget allocations, curriculum and staffing needs, capital budget requests, policy and program changes, new faculty lines, and shifting populations of students, according to annual major declarations of first-year students.

Major selection is open (described in Standard 4), which can create fluctuations in the numbers of students in each major. At RISD, space and programs' capacity are deeply intertwined, and Academic Affairs works very closely with Campus Facilities to help mitigate the effects of open major selection. The longstanding Academic Planning and Review process is led by the Provost's Office. Program reviews are conducted every six to seven years over two semesters and comprise a self-study, a review by an external panel of disciplinary peers, and a departmental strategic plan. Through the departmental strategic plan, program faculty, in consultation with the relevant dean, identify necessary resourcing or budget trade-offs needed to integrate the department's future plans with institutional planning processes. Programs that have specialized accreditation (Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and the Teaching and Learning in Art and Design master of arts in teaching (MAT) degree) are not included in the Academic Planning and Review cycle, but go through similar rigorous review processes defined by their respective accreditors. (See also Standards 4 and 8.)

Substantial planning has been devoted to social equity and inclusion and to holistic wellness in the past five to seven years, each in response to systemic inequity and mental health challenges experienced and increasingly recognized across the nation. RISD's Social Equity and Inclusion Action Plan was developed in 2017, in response to demands by students; its goals were accelerated in 2020, prompted by actions of a student-led RISD Anti-Racism Coalition and a group of BIPOC faculty, which led to the creation of a faculty Social Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee. President Williams's Community and Culture Assessment and Holistic Student Wellness study address the college's essential commitments to belonging and well-being, and lay the groundwork for future planning.

Finally, Information Technology Services recently underwent a review of its processes. Initially, the Information Technology Services Modernization Plan was developed in anticipation of the 2019 implementation of Workday (Finance and Administration and Human Resources), in addition to other institutional information technology needs. As the college progressed through its Information Technology Services Modernization Plan, the plan shifted in two major ways: it was enveloped by the regular three-year capital Information Technology Services budgeting process (which addresses more long-term planning) and it was incorporated into the annual Information Technology Services operating budgeting (which addresses more immediate technological needs). In 2025, Moran Technology Consulting reviewed the college's information technology systems and provided a set of recommendations for moving forward with technology

resource planning. These recommendations will be considered as part of the college's overall strategic planning process currently underway.

Appraisal

Implementation of the 2020-27 strategic plan was impacted directly by the COVID-19 pandemic. RISD suspended normal operations and shifted to remote teaching and learning between March 2020 and September 2020. It reopened in September 2020, with distancing protocols and remote teaching for students unable to come to campus that academic year. During this period, the overwhelming priorities were adapting RISD's essential place-based model to remote learning and working. With the adoption and wide implementation of Canvas and Zoom, students, faculty, and staff adjusted to the changed conditions through asynchronous instruction, and with the distribution of at-home kits and laptop accessories, teaching and learning quickly rebounded. The campus was reopened as a fully embodied academic space in September 2021, with management of the health crisis continuing for another year, including planning, oversight, and problem-solving related to social-distancing, masking, and other mandated health protocols, as well as travel, facility-use, and student life. The pandemic had other financial implications for RISD, with losses related largely to room and board. Belt-tightening measures, including a temporary hiring freeze and temporary reduction in capital and non-personnel budgets, allowed the college to begin to regain its footing.

Despite these challenges, the college made significant progress on its strategic plan, as noted in its 2022 formal progress report. One of the goals of *NEXT* was to pioneer research on issues of social equity in art and design pedagogy. In 2019, the college launched a new Center for Social Equity and Inclusion, co-located at the time with the Teaching & Learning Lab. (As noted elsewhere, the Center for Social Equity and Inclusion later became the Social Equity and Inclusion Division.) This then-new unit included a Social Equity and Inclusion Faculty Fellows program, as well as a semester-long decolonial teaching program, featuring courses taught by faculty for faculty. While the fellows program has ended, the decolonial teaching program continues. A significant gift allowed RISD to launch a cluster hire of 10 faculty under the umbrella of race and decoloniality in art and design, as part of greater efforts to diversify the RISD community. In addition, social equity and inclusion training is now encouraged for all employees, attention to equity and inclusion is incorporated into the search process for both staff and faculty, and the Academic Planning and Review process now asks departments to assess their attention to equity and inclusion in their curricula. Finally, a faculty Social Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee, formed in 2020, was integral in stewarding a review of all courses to tag those with social equity and inclusion content (this initiative is described fully under Standard 6).

Additional accomplishments noted in the 2022 progress report include: providing a firm financial foundation (leveraging new technologies, generating new non-tuition revenue), hiring RISD's first faculty-facing instructional designer with expertise in place-based and immersive pedagogies housed in the Teaching & Learning Lab, and a deepening commitment to programs supporting the academic and holistic success of first-generation-to-college students. The progress report also includes next steps and priorities meant to guide the following years' efforts.

Since the 2022 progress report the college has implemented a number of recommendations stemming from the foundational goals of *NEXT*. These include: a reduction in required credits for the BFA degree and making RISD's Wintersession optional (see Standard 4 for more

information), rebalancing the faculty workload to provide more time for advising and research (see Standard 6), expanded offerings at the Teaching & Learning Lab (Standard 6), and increasing financial aid and materials funding for students (Standard 7).

In particular, one of the objectives of *NEXT* was to increase and support cross-institutional inquiry and steward work toward environmental and climate justice. This has been achieved through expanded use of the Edna W. Lawrence Nature Lab—with a material collection of 80,000 specimens, aquatic systems, and access to microscopy—as an interdisciplinary research hub for exploring connections between art, design, and science. Building on its role as a core research facility under the Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) grant (funded by the National Science Foundation), this expansion has included, most recently, hosting and instructional leadership for the RISD x Hyundai Motor Group Research Collaborative, a multi-year partnership encompassing science courses and co-curricular units examining the convergence of ecology and bio-design.

RISD’s campus planning has successfully informed its capital decision-making and allowed RISD to deploy resources strategically to support the highest needs of the campus. For example, among the large-scale projects slated for completion in 2022, the residential North Hall and Metcalf renovations were prioritized and completed. Many smaller projects, both planned and unanticipated, have been completed as well. In conjunction with the process for developing the next strategic plan, planning needs related to physical resources will continue to require attention. In particular, updates will have to be made to the Campus Master Plan, including the ongoing focus on deferred maintenance and ADA accessibility, as well as increased flexible space use, which was identified as both a financial and academic priority in the recent Financial Optimization study. As noted in Standard 7, RISD has 60 urban buildings (including six on the National Register of Historic Places and 18 within a local historic district), with construction and renovation dates from 1773 to the present. Overall, with almost half of the buildings more than 50 years old, the historic nature of the campus presents a set of unique challenges that require careful prioritization and special planning.

In light of the current higher education landscape, RISD has proven its ability to be nimble in terms of planning and budgeting. In-depth analysis and careful tracking of enrollments, by the vice president for Enrollment Management in conjunction with the cabinet, have allowed the college to make difficult but necessary changes to planned expenditures. For example, enrollment planning has faced a number of ramifications emerging from the pandemic. Examining enrollments before, during, and after the pandemic, enrollments peaked in 2022 (2,620), when students who had taken time off due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions returned to their studies.

Table 2.1. Total Enrollments (Before and After COVID-19)

Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025
2,468	2,500	2,227	2,576	2,620	2,540	2,520	2,616

That artificial spike in enrollment was followed by an expected decline when enrollment stabilized in Fall 2023 (to 2,540); this was not seen as a reflection of any weaknesses in recruitment strategy for subsequent years. Enrollment Management then made a strategic decision to increase revenue, by intentionally and carefully managing an increase in first-year enrollment. This also required an adjustment to five-year projections to incorporate larger

first-year admission cohorts for several years. Most recently, planning has also been affected by budgetary constraints resulting from federal regulations. Enrollment for the Fall 2025 (2,616) class included preparing for the possibility of international student visa restrictions with deep domestic student waitlists, and the college developed best- and worst-case scenarios ahead of the academic year's census, allowing for time-sensitive adjustments to be made as needed. (Detailed data on students and enrollment is provided in Standard 5.)

In Institutional Advancement, changes have occurred over the past eighteen months to make it more efficient and focused. Under the new leadership, the Institutional Advancement staff has been reduced by approximately 25% and greater annual funds have been raised, thus lowering the cost to raise a dollar to \$0.58 from \$0.28. Institutional Advancement leadership continues to analyze all roles and functions to best focus attention on activities that provide high return on investment. Over the past five years, Institutional Advancement has increased its overall fundraising results from \$11.2 million in FY 2022 to a year-to-date number of \$31.4 million in FY 2026.

The college's endowment was over \$470 million as of December 31, 2025, with 64% of the endowment unrestricted. Major gift fundraising is thriving and supports the endowment and special initiatives. Major gift results to date this year are at \$27.5 million (as of the end of December 2025). The "quiet phase" of the current fundraising campaign has brought in \$45.6 million in gifts and pledges in FY 2025 and FY 2026 to date. The annual giving program is running ahead of the previous fiscal year because of a targeted, bespoke solicitation program. The unrestricted dollars that support RISD's budget have already reached \$2.2 million. We will remain steadfast in our focus given our "stretch" goal of \$3.4 million in unrestricted giving.

A significant and positive adjustment to planning at the academic-department level was instituted in 2021 when a departmental five-year financial and operational strategic plan was formally added to the Academic Planning and Review process. This new component, meant to strengthen departmental planning, is described in Standards 4 and 6; a projection to integrate this change with program assessment is in Standard 8. While the department plans provide a roadmap for the ensuing five years, programs still face challenges because of the open major selection process. Students formally select their major in the spring of their first year, after most of the budgeting process has taken place. Some departments experience unexpected surges in enrollment, requiring additional faculty hires or adjustments to curriculum planning, while others face lower-than-expected numbers, leading to inefficiencies in resource use. In addition, this delayed selection process impacts long-term institutional planning, as departments must remain flexible in staffing and facilities management, without clear projections of student demand from year to year. There are opportunities to consider ways to use enrollment forecasting and information from advising to provide departments with better insight into anticipated student distribution before the official declaration period. Starting in the academic year 2024-25 and being implemented in academic year 2025-26, Academic Affairs is working closely with divisional deans and with campus facilities to start the planning of major declarations sooner. Earlier anticipation, as well as the recalibration of graduate programs, will help ease the last-minute allocations that make operational activities quite arduous.

Information Technology Services made progress in implementing its Information Technology Services Modernization Plan, including steps toward a hybrid working and learning environment, integrated cloud-based solutions, and expanded security tools and operations. With the strategic information technology assessment and peer benchmark report provided by Moran Technology Consulting, a resulting key question was how to deal with RISD's decentralized

technology. Ideally, as part of the annual Information Technology Services budgeting process, units and departments across the college would inform Information Technology Services of their plans to implement new systems. However, this does not always take place in practice, which limits the ability of Information Technology Services staff to provide guidance, can create extra unplanned work for staff, and reinforces the technological silos that already exist at RISD. Moran recommended that the college develop a framework for information technology governance to more accurately plan for staffing and resources for the institution, to break down current (and future) silos, and to increase how effectively Information Technology Services utilizes data for reporting and workflows. More information on these initiatives is provided in Standard 7.

Evaluation

Description

Over the past several years, the college has developed an extensive system of data collection to evaluate its efforts and effectiveness. The Institutional Effectiveness Office plays an integral role in this system, partnering with Enrollment Management, the Registrar, Information Technology Services, Human Resources, and many other offices. Institutional Effectiveness oversees public dashboards that track student data (student diversity, geographic diversity, enrollments, retention and graduation rates, and degrees conferred), admissions data, faculty and staff diversity, and financial information (academic year student costs, endowment). Institutional Effectiveness also coordinates with partners to conduct institution-level surveys usually undertaken on a three-year cycle. Student surveys include the National Survey of Student Engagement, the CIRP Freshman Survey, and student wellness surveys. RISD Careers surveys alums on topics including employment, career preparation, and satisfaction with RISD Careers services one year after they graduate. These annual alum surveys are supplemented by periodic surveys conducted by Institutional Advancement and a third-party survey sent to all graduates of arts programs nationwide (the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project).

In addition to these established data-collection methods, the college has recently collected data related to the strategic plan and new presidential priorities. When President Williams arrived in April 2022, she made it a priority to learn how the people who make up our campus community experience RISD. The Community and Culture Assessment, created and administered by Rankin Climate, LLC, sought to learn about the experience of students, faculty, and staff, addressing sense of belonging, student academic experiences, employee workplace climate, instances of exclusionary conduct, unwanted sexual experiences, and perception of RISD's institutional actions. This was the first institution-wide climate survey in the school's history. The survey was tailored to the RISD community, partially informed by focus groups, and included both Likert-scale questions and open-ended comment sections. The survey was conducted in Fall 2023. The results were presented to stakeholders, in addition to being posted online. They were used to contextualize the inquiries of the Student Holistic Wellness and Finance Optimization task forces, as well as grant applications such as the Davis Educational Foundation grant for the Teaching & Learning Lab on inclusive critique practice. Furthermore, the results of the survey have been integrated into the main questions asked by departments in their regular Academic and Planning and Review processes.

The above describes institution-level data collection and evaluations. Units and departments throughout the college regularly evaluate their effectiveness as part of college continuous improvement efforts. For instance, the Planning, Design, and Construction unit annually

receives data from Gordian Sightline on its efforts related to campus planning and facilities work. Similarly, Information Technology Services uses service desk ticket tracking performance reports and customer feedback surveys for internal evaluations. Academic departments evaluate their programs and progress as part of their Academic and Planning Reviews, which might include review of student learning objectives, evaluation of student work, student course evaluations, and the perspectives of external reviewers. Continuing Education gathers feedback via surveys of students, instructors, parents/guardians, and event participants. Human Resources routinely deploys surveys, including the 2021 RISD Staff Engagement Survey. Fleet Library conducted its most recent visitor survey in 2023–24. The Center for Arts & Languages regularly evaluates the efficacy of its peer tutoring and student publishing programs, as well as its multilingual classroom training program for faculty. Intercultural Student Engagement evaluates through both surveys and outcome data programming for first-generation students, including its first-generation college student pre-orientation program (FGC POP) and its mentoring/support program Project Thrive; these evaluations incorporate both surveys and outcomes data.

The college recognizes the usefulness of peer benchmarking in its various evaluations, and, whenever possible and when appropriate, the institution incorporates data from peer institutions, surveys, and groups. With the institution-level surveys, the college receives and reviews data for such comparison groups as the Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design and highly selective institutions. For IPEDS data, the college has carefully chosen a group of peer institutions for important outcomes such as retention and graduation rates. As part of the annual study that RISD commissions, Gordian Sightline assesses RISD's deferred maintenance needs and approach toward them, as compared to peer institutions. For FY 2025, it found RISD to have lowered its energy consumption below that of peers, and to have lower density, more buildings, and similar age and risk. More information on budgeting for physical resources is provided in Standard 7.

Enrollment Management conducts annual admitted student surveys for undergraduate and graduate students to both enrolled and non-enrolled populations. Additionally, Enrollment Management utilizes peer groups as part of its annual reviews and planning process. Human Resources leverages data available via College and University Professional Association for Human Resources for benchmarks and peer groups. Continuing Education and Institutional Advancement also look to peer groups when evaluating its work. Fleet Library participates in the Association of College and Research Libraries annual Academic Library Trends and Statistics survey, which feeds into and expands upon the IPEDS Academic Libraries Component. The Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design then provides annual reports with comparison data to institutions.

Appraisal

In its accreditation letter for the 2016 comprehensive evaluation, NECHE noted that “the primary challenge to... planning efforts is acknowledged to be the siloing of institutional data and the failure to coordinate planning across academic and administrative areas. If the goal of embedding data-driven planning throughout the institution is to be achieved, it will be vital to build support from the bottom up, as well as top down, for this concept of integrated planning.”

The college has been actively working on breaking down these silos. With the arrival of the current president, a new focus on making data-informed decisions was established. In 2022, the college had one staff member in the Institutional Research unit (a director of institutional

research). Since then, the office has been renamed Institutional Effectiveness, led by an executive director and an associate director. While part of Academic Affairs, Institutional Effectiveness has been positioned as a college-wide resource, with a dotted line to the Social Equity and Inclusion Division. The office implemented a data request form to better track what data is requested across the institution and to what purposes. Institutional Effectiveness has implemented semesterly campus-wide data summits, at which Institutional Effectiveness provides updates and partner offices provide information on the data they oversee (past presenters have included Enrollment Management, the Registrar's Office, Student Life, Human Resources, and Institutional Advancement). Over the past several years, the college has actively built support for a more connected data ecosystem, encouraging collaboration and information sharing.

The Financial Optimization, Holistic Student Wellness, and Preparedness for Life After RISD initiatives required vigorous, data-informed, institution-wide deeper dives to advance understanding in those key areas. Significant quantitative data collection, analysis of institutional, peer, and national data, wide-ranging interviews and focus groups, as well as the latest research studies and industry reports on these topics, informed evaluation of RISD's performance in these key areas for future improvement.

Informed by the evaluation of the strategic plan, the presidential initiatives, surveys of peers/best practices, data analysis of credits at graduation, and student surveys, several major changes have been implemented in the past two years. In addition to the changes already noted above under Planning (reduced credits for the BFA, Wintersession, and faculty workload), the performance review process for staff was revised in 2023 to provide for a mid-year check-in and additional resources to inform the process.

The Community and Culture Assessment revealed overall positive perceptions of campus climate, with 54% of respondents feeling comfortable at RISD. It also highlighted challenges such as experiences of exclusionary conduct and disparities among minoritized groups. Human Resources and the Social Equity and Inclusion Division have launched and/or expanded on several efforts to address this, including a Social Equity and Inclusion lecture series, wellness gatherings, annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day events, community gatherings celebrating the LGBTQIA+ and Staff and Faculty of Color communities, luncheons for Black History Month and National Native American Heritage Month, and a Pride Parade. Two units within the Social Equity and Inclusion Division, Equity & Compliance and Intercultural Student Engagement, have collaborated on events focusing on exclusionary conduct, including workshops on safe zones and microaggressions.

Adjustments made to the Academic Planning and Review process in 2021 have provided a more meaningful forum for programmatic self-critique. Programs are able to focus on integral questions toward continuing to innovate, expand knowledge, and support the work of students and faculty. The college has also established a schedule for reflecting on student learning outcomes and reporting on those reflections. More information, evidence, and examples are provided in Standards 4, 6, and 8.

Projections

Academic Affairs, divisional deans, and Facilities will continue to work together to start the planning of major declarations sooner. Enrollment forecasting and information from advising reviewed in the Deans Council will provide better insight into anticipated annual student

numbers in major departments. These offices will develop a review process that uses such insights for division budget requests and longer-term space planning for departments. For instance, departments and divisions with recurring fluctuation may want to develop multiple plans, accommodating minimal/medium/significant change. Work has already begun on this and changes and any impacts will be assessed starting in 2027–28.

Standard Three: Organization and Governance

Board of Trustees

Description

The Board of Trustees of Rhode Island School of Design is the fiduciary body charged with governing the institution, including both the college and museum; ensuring its fiscal integrity; preserving its educational quality; and supporting its mission. The Board's bylaws (amended May 2025) describe composition, structure, meeting schedule, and voting procedures for the Board.

The current Board composition consists of 29 Board members and three ex-officio trustees. Officers of the Board include two Board co-chairs and three Board vice chairs. The board is composed of RISD alums (typically about half of the body), parents of RISD students or alums (usually about a quarter of the seats), and professionals holding expertise in cultural institution operations, education, business and finance administration, investment, and accounting. The ex-officio trustee roles include the Chair of Emeriti Trustees; the president of the Alumni Association; the chair of the Families Association; and the RISD president. The Board reflects the global nature of the college, with several current trustees in Hong Kong, South Korea, and India.

Members of the Board are typically assigned to one or more of the following Board committees: Executive Committee (Compensation Subcommittee); Oversight Committee (Audit Subcommittee); Education, Mission and Strategy Committee; Stewardship and Sustainability Committee (Investment Subcommittee); Advancement and Reputation Committee; and the Museum Committee. The committees and sub-committees meet at least three times a year, often prior to the full Board meetings. Committee members are selected based on relevant expertise and are led by committee chairs and staff liaisons. Overall, the Board has defined specific responsibilities and expectations for itself as a body, its committees and committee chairs, and its members as individuals.

The Board Manual lists as first among the Board's core fiduciary responsibilities to "recruit, appoint, support and evaluate the President." As established in the Board Bylaws, Article II, Section 2.1 General, the Board delegates to the president and to her leadership team the authority to carry out RISD's mission, including risk assessment, and reviews the performance of the president in closed session on an annual basis. For example, the senior vice president for Finance and Administration carries out the responsibilities of the Board Committees in various fiscal areas, including monitoring cash flows, maintaining compliance with debt issuances, and partnering with rating agencies.

Updated data on key performance indicators are included in the materials for each Board meeting, including data on admissions (applicants, admits, deposits for both undergraduate and graduate students), the budget (operating revenue and expenses); advancement (endowment, giving), and student outcomes (retention, graduate rates, degree recipients). The Board is currently reviewing a revised set of key performance indicators that it will use to help assess progress.

The Board communicates as needed with the campus community via emails archived at risd.edu, for example: a January 2025 update to the community regarding divestment, a March

2025 update to the community about the February 2025 Board meeting, and announcements of news such as presidential searches and Board elections.

As described in RISD's Policy on Conflicts of Interest for Trustees and Senior Administrators, an Annual Conflict of Interest + IRS Form 990 Disclosure Questionnaire is distributed to trustees (and senior administrators). Responses to the questionnaire verify that, for FY 2026, more than two-thirds of the Board members, including the chair, are free of any personal or immediate familial financial interest in the institution, including as employee, stockholder or shareholder, corporate director, or contractor.

Appraisal

Since the 2021 interim report and feedback from NECHE, the college has made several notable changes to the structure of and processes supporting the Board of Trustees. In 2022, the Board worked with an external consultant on the climate, culture, and general assessment of the Board, which resulted in the current structural changes to the Board leadership, including moving from one chair to two co-chairs. Building on that work, in 2023, the president and Board co-chairs undertook a two-day, off-site retreat, led by an external consultant to develop a meeting structure that allows for conducting Board business alongside generative and educative opportunities. Several guiding documents were updated in 2024, including the Bylaws, committee charters (for the modified committees), and Board Statement of Responsibilities and Expectations. The Board approved an updated process for selecting new trustees. Committees were substantially restructured and their charters revised and approved October 16, 2024. With the restructuring of Board committees in 2024, trustees are more engaged with additional opportunities for focused discussions. Since 2024, the Trustee Affairs Office hosts an annual new trustee orientation to welcome and inform new trustees on their role and responsibilities and introduce them to the college, its mission, and its leadership.

The Board now meets for two days instead of just one, with meetings in October, February, and May/June. Each meeting of the Board may include preparatory reports from faculty and student representative bodies when available, as well as productive sessions to further support trustees' relationship to the college and development as a body. The president meets regularly with Board co-chairs to keep them informed of campus activities as well as to strategize around the engagement of trustees and work of the Board.

New trustee appointments are confirmed during the May meeting with service beginning the next academic year. Appointments are for three-year terms with the potential to be re-appointed for four additional terms, allowing for a total of 15 years of service. Before the end of each term, the Oversight Committee evaluates the service of each trustee and makes a recommendation to the Board regarding reappointment; a vote by the Board of Trustees follows. Work has been done in the last three years to strengthen the evaluation process and to systematize the nomination process. This area remains of great importance as proper governance is essential to the running of the college.

Internal Governance

Description

Administration and Staff

The president is responsible for providing vision and leadership for RISD's future growth; unifying, supporting, and leading the administration; continuing to recruit and retain excellent faculty and staff; assessing and evolving RISD's academics, fostering continued excellence on campus and beyond; advocating for and empowering students; championing the Social Equity and Inclusion Action Plan; and engaging and partnering effectively with the Board of Trustees to secure RISD's future.

The President's Cabinet of 12 consists of: the provost (and chief academic officer); senior vice president for Finance and Administration; vice presidents for Human Resources, Institutional Advancement, Social Equity and Inclusion, Enrollment Management, and Student Life; General Counsel; Chief Marketing and Communications officer; special assistant to the president and secretary to the Board of Trustees; chief information officer; and the director of the RISD Museum. Approximately 75% of current cabinet members have joined the college since 2023, resulting in a great deal of new expertise and leadership at the college. The new members of cabinet have also added to the diversity of leadership, including visible and invisible forms of diversity of experience that impact and deepen the cabinet's ability to advance the institution's social equity and inclusion values and goals, including race, sexual orientation, first-generation-to-college, first-generation Americans, trans, and religious diversity.

The President's Cabinet meets weekly to address pertinent matters and institution-level decisions, and each member communicates relevant information back to their teams. The president and cabinet hosts annual/semi-annual Town Hall and State of the College meetings open to all faculty, staff, and students for opportunities to both share updates, as well as hear directly from these constituencies. Additional opportunities for information sharing hosted by members of the President's Cabinet include finance update sessions and meetings of the Communicator's Network. The cabinet also hosts monthly brown-bag lunches open to the whole community for informal conversation. The President's Office sends and archives frequent community announcements, on topics ranging from commencement events to international visas.

The RISD Staff Council is an advisory body of elected staff representatives that provides a forum to discuss the needs, concerns, and interests of all RISD staff members. Its members meet at least twice a semester, with at least one meeting per semester open to all staff. The Staff Council Executive Board meets regularly with the RISD president, senior vice president for Finance and Administration, and the vice president for Human Resources to bring forward concerns, questions, and updates. The Staff Council helps advance institutional initiatives as appropriate by serving as an intermediary between senior administration and staff. There are also quarterly administrative managers meetings, in which staff from across the college provide updates and share information on a variety of topics that directly impact the administration of the college. Topics at recent administrative managers meetings have included employee onboarding, the NECHE self-study, budget updates, updates on procurement procedures, and updates from Social Equity and Inclusion highlighting their work to advance a culture of belonging at RISD.

The Deans Council straddles administrative and faculty concerns. The four academic deans, the associate provost, and the provost discuss academic initiatives, use of academic space, faculty issues, resource allocations, and other matters regarding policy and operations of the academic

program. This group is chaired by the provost and typically meets weekly. Once a month, the Deans Council joins the president and cabinet for a meeting about the college.

Faculty

Within the governance model at RISD, the faculty have a long-standing structure to ensure their participation in college matters, which is described in the Faculty Handbook. Leading faculty governance is the Faculty Steering Committee, composed of nine faculty members (who are elected annually) and currently led by two co-chairs and a vice chair. Each of the four academic divisions have a representative on this committee, along with a representative for the library, part-time faculty (added in 2021), and at-large members.

The Faculty Steering Committee sets the agenda for the monthly Faculty Meetings. Per the Faculty Meeting bylaws in the Faculty Handbook, full-time faculty are expected to attend these meetings, and part-time faculty may also attend. All full-time faculty and full-time professional librarians are members of this group and are entitled to vote. For the monthly Faculty Meetings, the provost is frequently invited to present about specific topics and works to honor the requests from the faculty.

Representatives of the Faculty Steering Committee are invited to engage with the trustees at every meeting. At most Board of Trustees meetings, the Faculty Steering Committee co-chairs provide a report, often in the form of a letter, that is included in the Board book materials for trustees. Faculty Steering Committee members are also occasionally invited to engage with the Board of Trustees, both formally (such as an agenda item on board meeting schedule) and informally (for example, engaging socially at a private reception or dinner).

In addition to the Steering Committee, faculty governance is composed of a range of committees, which also meet regularly. Three standing committees anchor the faculty's oversight of academic matters, including the Admissions Committee, the Committee on Faculty Appointments, and the Instruction Committee. The Instruction Committee's work is further delegated to the three subcommittees: Curriculum, Academic Policies, and Wintersession.

The role of the RISD Curriculum Subcommittee is to provide college-wide peer review of changes to degree program courses and curricula. This group approves changes to curricula after approval by the appropriate department faculty and their supervising dean. The Academic Policies Subcommittee reviews academic policies and proposed changes in academic programs that are not solely department-specific, and aims to provide consistency in academic policy within the college, as well as in relation to NECHE and other broader standards, where appropriate. The Wintersession Subcommittee focuses on the general administration of Wintersession, including approving courses and recommending policies. It is through the Instruction Committee and its subcommittees that faculty are responsible for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum.

Students

RISD's student government is named the Student Alliance, or "The Alliance" in student parlance and campus culture. The Alliance provides an opportunity for students to lead and to advocate for other students. Composed of elected and paid student representatives, it "represents all student voices in order to facilitate and advocate [for] ideas and solutions within

the RISD community.” Elections take place in the spring, with elected students assuming their roles in the following academic year.

While a student government structure has been in place, engagement has decreased since the pandemic and has not yet rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. This level of student engagement has been exacerbated by changes in leadership, both within the Alliance and within the Center for Student Involvement. Furthermore, campus culture moves students to prioritize their studio work over volunteer activity, which makes participating in the Student Alliance difficult. Efforts were undertaken to revitalize the Alliance in 2022-23, including gathering information from focus groups on the challenges the organization faced. While elections did take place and members were appointed in the 2023 and 2024, concerns about structure persisted and have impacted the Alliance’s efficacy.

Appraisal

Administration and Staff

In 2020, RISD engaged Segal Consulting to conduct a comprehensive administrative review that included a campus-wide organizational and operational assessment focused on structures, roles, and staffing across the administrative areas and functions; a high-level examination of effectiveness, efficiency, and cost effectiveness of the functions and roles; and a peer benchmarking study. The report includes a road map for addressing the needs, opportunities, and challenges identified in the assessment (including increasing efficiencies through changes to the organizational structure and consistent administrative practices). In the last couple of years, a centralization and clarification of procurement policies, as well as better defined oversight of academic deans in their divisions, has resulted from the implementation of the report’s recommendations. Other recommendations are being moved forward, though done in a way that is responsive and anticipatory of the current context in which RISD finds itself.

In this period of major changes common across higher education institutions, the cabinet and the college have been nimble in the ability to enact change to its structure as needed. Since the interim report, a new president was appointed, which, as is often the case, led to changes in cabinet members. Since the arrival of the provost, Academic Affairs has been organized to include an associate provost, with a focus on faculty affairs, and an assistant provost for Academic Engagement. Both positions were established in 2025, following the removal of academic positions seen as superfluous. Student Life and its vice president were moved back to Academic Affairs in 2023, from its temporary position in Enrollment Management, allowing the college to signal its support of students in a fully holistic manner. Changes were also made to the long-standing Position Review Committee, which reviews new positions and modifications to existing positions, to be more efficient and transparent.

Under COVID-19, the provost and the senior vice president for Finance and Administration collaborated often on messaging to the RISD community, providing a united front in the face of uncertain times. While that topic no longer needs such collaboration, the current landscape of higher education raises its own concerns among faculty, staff, and students. To better engage in the larger context of higher education, the cabinet has undertaken its own book club, with monthly meetings to discuss how to apply insights from their shared reading to strategic and operational planning. Otherwise, the provost, the senior vice president for Finance and Administration, and the vice president for Enrollment Management are working together to update the RISD community with what has been termed “the financial roadshow.” Together, they have presented on topics that have college-wide financial implications. College leadership has also held sessions focused on specific topics, such as changes to curriculum, new regulations

coming from the federal government (including for financial aid), shifts in enrollment patterns that could be attributed to these federal changes, and the current and near-future state of the budget.

Overall, opportunities to increase communications among senior administrators and staff and faculty has increased substantially. Notable channels for communications include semesterly town halls, regular email announcements, administrative managers meetings, provost's open hours for staff, faculty, and students, lunches with the cabinet, and informal in-person meetings with faculty, staff, and students regarding many topics, including the federal landscape and its implications for higher education and RISD specifically.

Faculty

While a structure of standing committees provides a framework for faculty to actively participate in campus-wide discussions, faculty participation in committees, and interest in taking on leadership roles chairing committees, was noticeably diminished after the pandemic. In addition, elections for committee slots have faced challenges, with multiple voting rounds needed (as opposed to the usual May main ballot and September follow-up ballot). The process to assign faculty to committees to fill appointed slots and vacant elected slots, and then to choose committee chairs, thus has often not been completed until well into the semester. In 2025–26, the Faculty Steering Committee, which handles elections, renewed efforts to fill slots in a timely manner and to locate willing chairs of committees. So far, these efforts have been successful, although timing remains an issue.

Despite the diminished effectiveness of the current Faculty Meetings and standing subcommittees, major initiatives were still successfully undertaken. These accomplishments point to the effective leadership provided by the provost, who has been a constant, providing stability during turnover in faculty committee members and chairs. That changes were implemented also provides a counterpoint to the “culture of mistrust or suspicion” and poor collaboration between administration and faculty noted in response to the 2021 interim report. Faculty voices were heard and were important elements in discussions and the eventual approval of four major changes: reducing the number of credits for most undergraduate degrees to BFA programs from 126 to 120, making Wintersession optional, implementing enhanced advising, and rebalancing faculty workload. Under the current provostial leadership, it is therefore expected that collaboration will continue to occur, with processes being effectively managed. To further support such collaboration, a new position of associate provost was established in Summer 2025; this position provides a bridge between the administration and the faculty.

Students

Led by the Center for Student Involvement, and under the guidance of the associate dean of students, steps have been taken to determine how best to move forward with re-establishing the Student Alliance as an active organization through which the student voice can be heard. Two graduate student researchers, under the supervision of the director of the Center for Student Involvement, were charged with benchmarking models at other small, private, and Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design-affiliated institutions, as well as conducting internal benchmarking within RISD's ecosystem. This included conversations with cabinet members, Deans Council members, and students. A student survey was also implemented. The aim of this work is to ensure both functional and comprehensive pathways

for student advocacy and to further enable student input into administrative decisions in which students have a direct interest.

We anticipate expanding the current model, from one that solely focuses on the classroom/studio experience to one that encompasses the totality of a student experience (residential, student organizations, health and wellness, etc.). One immediate impact has been establishing position descriptions for student representatives and restructuring the positions so that they no longer represent academic departments but rather serve as peer advisors who are selected, trained, and supervised by the student success project manager. The relaunch of the Alliance is scheduled to be completed by Fall 2026.

Projections

The Oversight Committee of the Board of Trustees will implement a regular (i.e., every 10 years) external review of the Board, supplemented with an informal internal process to take place in intermediary years (i.e., every two years). The committee will determine next steps, timeline, and methods in 2026.

Student Life will oversee the implementation of the new student governance model based on the research of best practices already completed. The new model should be in place for Fall 2026, after which Student Life will review its progress to determine its effectiveness.

Begun in Fall 2024, the Faculty Steering Committee has worked to evaluate the effectiveness of current faculty governance structure. With a goal of encouraging faculty participation in committee work, the Faculty Steering Committee has proposed the elimination of obsolete committees, the strengthening of essential ones, and the continued work between faculty and administration to keep and enhance collaborative work via governance mechanisms. Already, positive shifts have occurred through the integrated work done by the Faculty Steering Committee members and the Secretary to the Committee on Faculty Appointments, who has provided integral support. In the summer of 2026, the Deans Council will propose committee charges to the Faculty Steering Committee, so as to aid faculty in bolstering their governance.

Standard Four: The Academic Program

RISD offers 18 bachelor's degree programs (all are four-year programs, except for the Bachelor of Architecture and the Brown|RISD Dual Degree, which are five-year programs) and 19 master's degree programs, with lengths of 1-3 years; all programs are place-based and in person. RISD's art and design programs are shaped, in particular, by discipline-based methods, material-based learning, and open critical dialogue, qualities that prepare students to fulfill RISD's mission and uphold the value of making for empathy, problem-solving, and innovation in today's society. Within departments, the institution-level mission is further delineated and thus aligned with their respective purpose statements and student learning outcomes. These program purpose statements range in length, specificity, and tone. Via the periodic Academic Planning and Review process, programs can regularly affirm that their purpose statements align with the college's.

In general, studio learning at RISD is immersive, involving a commitment of time: developing technique, devising and iterating concepts, and creating work. The standard meeting time of a studio course is five hours per week, and students in a major, often taking multiple studio courses, spend much of their learning time in dedicated department facilities and workspaces (known colloquially as "homespace"). Occupying an educational environment characterized by deep commitment, intensity of work, and professional mentoring, a RISD student does not simply major in, for instance, illustration, as much as comes to identify with that vocation and its culture, becoming an *illustrator*.

As mentioned in the institutional overview, critique is an integral part of RISD's pedagogy. Students are introduced to RISD's system of critique (or "crits" in RISD parlance) in their first semester and experience it throughout the rest of their art and design education. The ability to give and receive constructive criticism and then integrate that feedback into the next iteration of a project serves artists, designers, and scholars long after they have graduated. Crits are not just a time for faculty to discuss a student's work, but also an opportunity for students to provide feedback and support, especially during end-of-semester crits when students, faculty members, and guest critics come together in every department to engage in this pedagogical exercise. Each semester ends with "crit week," a schedule of final critiques, which is posted by Academic Affairs, allowing members of the RISD community (staff, faculty, and students from other programs) to attend open crits and observe the process. For graduate students completing their master's degrees, their work is brought together and curated into one large "Grad Show," held in most years in the nearby Rhode Island Convention Center. Open to the public, this annual show highlights the creativity that students exhibit at all stages of the thesis process, from sketches and drafts to completed works. Grad Shows are held right before commencement, allowing students' visiting parents, family members, and friends to experience the results of their work at RISD.

RISD's academic year is built around fall and spring semesters, in addition to a five-week term known as Wintersession (most students do not take summer courses). Each program is coherently and progressively designed, and each publishes a statement of its values, its curriculum, its learning outcomes, and examples of work on the institution's website, as well as in the program sections of the institution's online course catalog. These learning outcomes generally include historical knowledge of the discipline and its contemporary discourses, technical skills, concept development, research methods, and communication skills.

RISD's extremely competitive admissions rate (23% of completed applications for students entering in Fall 2025 cohort), high retention rate (93% for the Fall 2024 cohort) and the fact that 60% of its alums report their overall educational experience as "excellent," compared to 39% of alums at other institutions in the Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design (per the 2022 Strategic National Arts Alumni Project), further demonstrate RISD's academic quality and integrity.

Assuring Academic Quality

Description

Department heads and deans are responsible for the daily management and supervision of specific academic programs. General academic strategy and oversight are provided by the Deans Council, chaired by the provost, as well as the faculty Instruction Committee and its subcommittees (Academic Policies, Curriculum, and Wintersession). The Faculty Meeting, led by its Steering Committee, engages faculty members in governance work and regularly considers input related to academic programs. All changes to curriculum must be approved by the Curriculum Subcommittee, after approvals from department faculty and their supervising dean, in a process of careful vetting. Substantive changes or new programs must go before the full Faculty Meeting for a vote.

Individual academic programs are reviewed once every six to seven years in a two-semester Academic Planning and Review process. This process consists of: 1) a self-study, involving department heads and faculty engaged in assessment of student learning and focused on key questions; 2) a report from an external panel focused on key questions; and 3) a departmental five-year strategic plan. Since 2016, all programs have either completed their reviews or are scheduled to do so in the next two years (except for the two new BFA programs and graduate concentration begun in the past two years (2024 and 2025)). Examples of recommendations stemming from Academic Planning and Review reports are discussed in Standard 6.

All programs have developed student learning outcomes, describing the knowledge and skills students should gain during their studies at RISD. As described more fully in Standard 8, programs assess at least one student learning outcome per semester. The faculty reflect on student performance across the program, including strengths of the students and also possible areas for improvement. As with the departmental strategic plan from the Academic Planning and Review, the faculty also reflect on possible actions to continue to improve student learning. Programs have regular opportunities to review and update their student learning outcomes, including during the Academic Planning and Review process. As part of the framework of assessing student learning outcomes each year, programs are asked to confirm their student learning outcomes or provide any recent changes to them; student learning outcomes are provided both in the course catalog and also on the program's page on RISD's main institutional website. More information on student learning outcomes, including projections, is provided in Standard 8.

Academic departments engage in an annual process of operating and capital budget planning beginning in August of each year (for the following fiscal year) led by Academic Budgets and Resources in Academic Affairs. Department heads invite input from department faculty before making requests, which are reviewed and moved forward by the dean of each respective division, then reviewed and approved by the provost in consultation with the director of academic budgets, the associate provost, and the leadership in Facilities. Department strategic plans lay the groundwork for requests for resources to achieve curricular and staffing goals.

New academic programs may be proposed using a five-stage New Program Proposal Process. This process includes reviews of intent and feasibility by the Deans Council, Instruction Committee, and Faculty Meeting, and a more detailed review of the program's pre-launch development, including reviews by RISD's Board of Trustees and NECHE (when necessary) and approval of the finalized curriculum by the Curriculum Subcommittee. After implementation, a curriculum assessment is required in year three and a full program review in year five.

All agreements with other institutions regarding degree-awarding programs are reviewed by General Counsel and go through the same Academic Planning and Review process as all other RISD programs. For instance, RISD has several agreements with Brown University, including cross-registration (all students may cross-register at Brown University and complete courses that count towards their RISD degree), the highly-selective undergraduate Dual Degree program, in which students earn both a RISD degree and a Brown degree in five years, and the Master of Arts in Design Engineering, which combines RISD and Brown courses in its curriculum. RISD's agreements with Brown University for these programs are clear, explicit, and involve regular review by the divisions and offices involved, from Admissions and Enrollment, to Budget and Finance, and of course Academic Affairs.

Competencies in the English language, including writing and oral communication, are part of RISD's Liberal Arts requirements. Undergraduate and graduate students for whom English is not their primary language are required to demonstrate proficiency through TOEFL, IELTS, or Duolingo exams; these students are additionally supported through multilingual learner support programs at the Center for Arts & Language and dedicated language-intensive courses, taught by specially-trained professionals.

Overall, academic expectations and their assessment are established and overseen through curricular review and benchmarking through Academic Planning and Review; regular syllabus review by departments, deans, and the Curriculum Committee, who also provide updated syllabus guidelines and sample diversity/civility statements for all courses; and shared academic policies, from registration procedures to credit load definition.

Appraisal

RISD's systems of academic governance are effective in ensuring that changes in academic program structure or academic policies are fully vetted. However, the Community and Culture Assessment thoroughly surveyed different constituencies on campus to reveal important information, including the wish for clearer and more consistent communication between faculty and the administration. This has been addressed in several ways in the past three years, including the provost and president each meeting monthly with the Faculty Steering Committee executive members, and the provost holding monthly open office hours, as well as offering open-to-all scheduling availabilities and welcoming invitations to the Faculty Meeting to give updates and answer questions.

The Academic Planning and Review process for departments was significantly revised in Fall 2021 by the Deans Council. The revision addressed issues raised in previous years, by shortening the overall process (from two years to two semesters), focusing the departmental self-study on essential questions and directly on current student learning, and giving departments more agency in planning for their identified needs and aspirations. The latter now is achieved, specifically, via a departmental strategic plan, which requires a clear statement of, and rationale for, each proposed change to degrees, curriculum, hiring, facilities and/or other initiatives, as well as a well-described strategy for implementing each change, including a

timeline for budget and enrollment cycles, appropriate institutional reviews and approvals, and identified resources (funds, space, faculty hires, etc.).

Facilitated by the academic division deans and the Institutional Effectiveness Office, RISD has been building greater resources regarding the assessment of student learning outcomes. Following the coherence of that journey, additional work is underway to even better understand alumni's outcomes, beyond first-destination surveys. Such changes foster greater capacity for RISD to improve on its established academic excellence and respond to changes in art and design education, both in American higher education and in a global context.

The New Program Process, first implemented in 2016, was revised for clarity by the Deans Council in 2022. Several current programs have successfully gone through the process, including the master's degree in Design Engineering, the master's degree in Illustration, the master's degree in Global Arts and Cultures, the graduate concentration in Nature-Culture-Sustainability Studies and the new undergraduate majors, Art & Computation and Sound.

Since 2020, academic programs and curricula institution-wide have been tasked to address social equity and inclusion principles, which were initially driven by student demands made that year for changes in the curriculum. Changes have been made to required courses, and the process to tag Social Equity and Inclusion-priority courses began in Fall 2024, with Social Equity and Inclusion-tagged courses being offered across each academic division in Fall 2025 (see also Standard 6 for more on this initiative).

In 2023–24, reviews of student and faculty workload by institutional work groups led to a decision to reduce the number of credits required for the BFA, through various mechanisms including an optional winter term, with the goal of bringing RISD in line with a more usual standard of 30 credits per year and 120 credits for a bachelor's degree. This gives students the opportunity for intentional in-depth creative explorations and a more flexible curricular pathway. Evaluation of the impact of these shifts will occur as they are implemented.

Undergraduate Degree Programs

Description

Undergraduate programs at RISD are carefully constructed, including a shared foundational year, process for major selection, and sequenced major courses that progressively enable students to master skills relevant to their discipline, as well as other major courses and electives that foster the skills needed to participate ethically and actively in today's world.

RISD's primary undergraduate degree is the four-year Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA). A five-year Bachelor of Architecture (BArch) is also offered, which is accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board. The structure and intent of the BFA and its component programs are clearly articulated in RISD's online course catalog, as well as on RISD's institutional website. The BFA and BArch begin with a unique first-year curriculum, shared by all students. It includes an Experimental and Foundation Studies First-Year program (18 credits), with required studio courses in Drawing, Design, and Spatial Dynamics. These studio courses focus on conceptual and aesthetic development, individual expression, and craftsmanship, and are built around assignments and critiques that encourage students to think deductively and

intuitively, and examine the potential of materials as they take projects from concept to completion.

The first year, and every year to degree completion, also includes a robust Liberal Arts program (2–4 courses a year), with the first-year requiring a two-course sequence taught by the Theory and History in Art and Design Department and an introductory course offered by the Literary Arts and Studies Department. The learning outcomes from these courses concentrate on the core skills of clear, purposeful writing, discussion, and presentation, research methods and information literacy, application of discipline-appropriate analytical and theoretical frameworks, and critical and contextual thinking that informs creative practice. The History, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences Department oversees the fourth required Liberal Arts course, which was formerly taken in a student's first year but beginning with AY 2025–26 has been moved to the third year and renamed *Advanced Inquiry Seminar* to reinforce information literacy, research, synthesis, and communication skills. Together, the curricula in Liberal Arts and the first-year curriculum in Experimental and Foundation Studies cover a range of general education learning objectives and enable students to explore artistic, cultural, and intellectual traditions and practices through interdisciplinary perspectives. Broad learning outside the major is intended to help students enrich their art and design practices by preparing them to think expansively, communicate effectively, and navigate complexity with intellectual rigor and ethical awareness, or, in the words of the Liberal Arts Division purpose statement, “to articulate ideas with independence and confidence, think creatively, critically, and analytically, and develop a lifelong curiosity about the world.” Demonstration of general education competencies outside the major is achieved through annual assessment in the Liberal Arts departments and in the division as a whole, which started before the pandemic in 2019 and was renewed in earnest in 2023 (see more detail in General Education, below).

Major program curricula, discussed further below, are disciplinary and immersive, and course requirements are carefully sequenced, focusing on developing a high level of proficiency with the materials, techniques, and processes of each discipline. Each major department has an overview describing their learning outcomes in the course catalog. From sophomore year to graduation (three or four years), students fulfill studio majors (51 credits) and, if they choose, a concentration. Throughout their program, in addition to the required courses described above, students also fulfill an additional 27 credits of elective courses in the Liberal Arts from among more than 250 offered by the division, as well as non-major studio electives (12 credits) in other departments. Students may also fulfill electives by taking courses at nearby Brown University, with which RISD has a long-standing (since 1901) cross-registration agreement.

Appraisal

Starting with the class entering in Fall 2025, the BFA will require completion of 120 credits (reduced from 126), with three fewer in Liberal Arts and three fewer in the major. Also, beginning with the Fall 2025 class, RISD's Wintersession term, previously required, will become optional after the first year for BFA-seeking students. This is intended to cap the number of credits a student takes each year to 30 and to provide more flexibility each semester for students to fulfill their requirements. This shift will be in transition until students who entered before 2025 cycle through their programs; in the course catalog, each department shows curriculum tables for both 120 and 126 credits. The credits for the BArch remain unchanged.

Recently, faculty, administrators, students, and alums on the Preparedness for Life After RISD Committee made recommendations for addressing ways to link the academic education RISD

students receive and the professional skills they can extract from it. This is a pressing question because of the changing tides in creative industries and larger questions about the value of higher education. While acknowledging RISD's excellence in instilling transferable skills that might enable one to succeed in the world over a longer term, the committee recommended that departments should build stronger field-specific career advising and sustainable alum networks, cultivate more direct connection of outside career experiences, and increase students' ability to enroll in interdisciplinary and collaborative studios and to learn about creative entrepreneurship.

As the curriculum shifts, the demand for non-studio electives is being assessed and augmented in intentional ways—the change in the no-longer mandated Wintersession term, as well as the opportunity for graduate students to be mentored through thoughtful pedagogy means different kinds of course offerings, upon which RISD continues to reflect.

General Education

Description

RISD does not have a stand-alone general education, or “gen ed,” program. However, according to previous studies (Report on General Education at RISD August 2015 and Report on General Education Ad Hoc Committee 2018-2019), general education competencies are well represented in the learning objectives of required courses in Liberal Arts, as well as in Experimental and Foundation Studies First Year. Based on a total of 120 credits, students take 69 credits outside of the major. These credits include:

- Nine credits of required first-year courses in the Liberal Arts Division (six credits in History and Theory of Art and Design, three credits in Literary Arts and Studies)
- Three credits in the “Advanced Critical Inquiry” course in junior year offered by the department of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences
- 27 credits distributed in the Liberal Arts Division
- Three credits in the required first-year Experimental and Foundation Studies curriculum (FOUND 1006 Studio: Spatial Dynamics)

The breadth of general learning at RISD, in addition to the in-depth mastery of the major, reflects the institution's mission to educate students not only to thrive as art and design professionals but also “to discover and transmit knowledge and to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation.” This is aligned with RISD's values, which are centered on “engagement with the wider world.”

Over the past few years, Liberal Arts department heads and coordinators of required Liberal Arts courses have worked together to develop a more holistic understanding of how key competences are introduced in the first year and reinforced throughout a student's course of study. This collaborative review helped the division identify where departments were unintentionally duplicating learning goals and clarify how each course could better contribute to a shared set of outcomes. As a result, the division streamlined objectives to sharpen the focus of each course and more intentionally distribute core competencies across the curriculum. For example, the first-year Literary Arts and Studies course (E101), while always writing-intensive, now places even greater emphasis on scaffolding writing and close, critical reading, while other departments deepen complementary competencies such as information literacy, research methods, and presentation skills. In 2024-25, the Liberal Arts Division established regular formal

assessment of those new objectives, with a shared process of departmental faculty reflection and student feedback.

Recent program statements in Experimental and Foundation Studies First Year emphasize “Deliberate looking, critical reasoning, focused thinking, and intentional making, which in turn encourages a deeper understanding of particular artworks and insight into the history of made objects,” and “rigorous conversations on contemporary visual culture alongside political, economic, and cultural hierarchies” (Design), as well as “considerations of force—the consequence of energy—and its effect on structure, virtual conceptions of space, and part-to-whole relationships” and “responsible use of resources, and environmental and social awareness” (Spatial Dynamics). With their recent updates to program statements and learning objectives for required Drawing, Design, and Spatial Dynamics studio courses, Experimental and Foundation Studies first-year faculty have been able to establish learning domains and to coordinate learning in each studio relative to one another. This was an important step toward the regular assessment of the objectives currently underway.

Appraisal

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 2020 and 2023 showed RISD students had on average higher scores than students at schools in the Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design for several general education areas: speaking clearly and effectively; thinking critically and analytically; working effectively with others; developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics; understanding people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, political, religious, nationality, etc.); solving complex real-world problems; and being an informed and active citizen. This indicates that efforts in teaching general education have been successful. These results are very much in line with the set of art and design institutions that comprise the college’s most meaningful peer comparison group. Regular assessments by RISD faculty offer more precise interpretations about trends and potential areas of improvement.

Another concern is the balance of general education in the BFA degree. Derived from a highly influential Bauhaus curriculum that located fundamentals in a “preliminary course,” the BFA curriculum at collegiate art schools, including RISD, until recently stressed general education competencies in the first year. While students at RISD nevertheless take 27 credits of electives after the first year, there were no guarantees that such electives would address or assess advancement in general education knowledge or skills. As part of the Academic Planning and Review for History, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences in 2024, suggestions by the external panel (composed of experts in the field) led the department to move its first-year course (S101) to the junior year (creating an “S301”), beginning with the class of 2025. This provides a better balance with required general education learning across the time of the BFA and BArch degrees. S301 objectives will be regularly assessed starting in 2028 (the first year when this course will be offered in the third year), along with broader assessment of learning in the History, Philosophy and the Social Sciences Department overall (see Standard 8).

The Major or Concentration

Description

At RISD, a major course of study in a specific fine arts or design discipline begins in the sophomore year. Students declare their major or degree program during Wintersession of their

first year. Experimental and Foundation Studies' curriculum and advising, along with programming by the Student Life Division (described in Standard Five) are intended to expose students to multiple disciplines and to develop students' art and design sophistication, so that they may make more confident choices about their academic and artistic trajectories. Students begin their major coursework in the sophomore year with an introduction to discipline-specific methods, histories, and principles. The junior year advances students into techniques and theoretical frameworks, while the senior year culminates in thesis or capstone work demonstrating mastery of their chosen art or design discipline. This progression, combined with liberal arts requirements, is designed with clear learning objectives that align with professional standards and contemporary practices in the field.

Students at RISD also have the opportunity to pursue either an interdisciplinary concentration (Computation, Technology, and Culture; Drawing; Nature-Culture-Sustainability Studies) or a Liberal Arts-focused concentration (History, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences; Literary Arts and Studies; Theory and History of Art and Design). Ranging in requirements from 15 to 24 credits, these concentrations guide students in exploring thematic, theoretical, and practical pathways—ranging from critical inquiry to hands-on making—while cultivating the interdisciplinary thinking and creative fluency that drive innovation across art, design, and scholarship.

Departments use varied and multiple means to prepare students for professional practice and to be successful in their careers post-RISD. Several programs have a course specifically about “professional practice.” In Architecture, Furniture Design, Illustration, and Jewelry + Metalsmithing programs, for example, students are required to take a course specific to professional practice, while Painting offers an optional course. As the Architecture course notes, such courses are “intended to help prepare students for the challenges and opportunities confronted by a life” in their chosen field. Topics in such courses include resume and website building; post-graduation education and residency opportunities; financial and legal concerns; alternative careers; and non-profit opportunities, etc. A main focus of these professional practice courses is presentations by guest speakers active in the field.

Gaining experience through internships is another way students engage with the professional world. Internships can be completed for credit, whether as a required course (such as Architecture) or to fulfill elective credit. There are also opportunities outside of the curriculum to learn about professional life post-graduation. RISD Careers has a full slate of workshops related to career preparation, including panels of students and alumni discussion career options in art and design, talks on the business-side to a career in art and design, information on residency and grant resources, entrepreneurial opportunities, and many other aspects of preparing for life after graduation.

Finally, RISD's interdisciplinary concentrations were designed to encourage students to explore beyond their primary majors, offering students the opportunity to deepen their knowledge in a specific area of study. These focused programs not only build expertise in complementary disciplines but also bring students from different majors together, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and dialogue.

Appraisal

RISD's undergraduate offerings have remained largely the same since the 1990s—the last new major before 2025 was Furniture Design, launched in 1995. Historically, at RISD, every major has been synonymous with an administrative department, which effectively equated the creation of any new major with substantial administrative structure (dedicated faculty lines, specialized

shop equipment, facilities, and support staff). The two new undergraduate majors, housed within a single, new department—Computation, Technology, and Culture—could offer a forward-looking model for RISD, in which academic departments each administer more than one major. This model would help streamline administrative structures and potentially allow for greater intellectual flexibility.

RISD has an open major selection model, with no limits based on a major's capacity, and which prioritizes, instead, student exploration and informed decision-making. This flexibility sets RISD apart from traditional direct-entry major selection models and is a highly distinctive aspect of a RISD education. (The planning challenges that come with open major selection are noted in Standard 2).

While most RISD majors provide opportunities for students to take elective courses, the tightness of a scaffolded curriculum and schedule is an issue for those seeking to engage in interdisciplinary work or enroll in courses outside their department. RISD remains a largely academic-disciplinarily siloed institution, with minimal cross-disciplinary engagement at the school-wide level, and even less across divisions. Although there are strong examples of interdisciplinary initiatives, such as the Hyundai Research Collaborative program or the joined courses of the long-standing Witness Tree project, these are available to a limited number of students. Furthermore, students frequently encounter structural limitations when trying to move beyond their major.

RISD would benefit from a more intentional effort to adjust its scheduling, as well as its degree structures, to allow for greater academic flexibility, expand elective offerings, and develop dedicated spaces for cross-disciplinary engagement. The Financial Optimization report, which highlights optimizing RISD's space use first and foremost, notes fostering greater interdisciplinary collaboration as a benefit. Without such changes, interdisciplinary work at RISD will continue to be an exception rather than a norm.

Finally, the Preparedness for Life After RISD report has raised the issues of new pressure and anxiety about careers after graduation, and both an underutilization of resources and a lack of integration of such resources into the student experience. Exposure to information about professional practice and strategies for a successful career is not consistent across programs, and only a few programs require a course devoted to professional practice. Departments also vary in the number of internships available to their students and not all take advantage of RISD's extensive alumni networks. RISD Careers offers resources such as internship support, workshops, and information sessions, but it is unclear the extent to which departments maximize these options.

The role of the museum in the programs is of note. Each academic term, courses across divisions use the museum's collections for inquiry-driven learning, from close looking in the galleries to hands-on engagement with objects behind the scenes. Students also build professional and transferable skills through developing interpretive and exhibition content for public audiences, and collaborate with curators, educators, conservators and other museum staff. These experiences prepare graduates to navigate careers in the art world, whether that be museums, creative practice, design or education, but also for a wide range of professional paths where critical thinking and creative problem solving are essential.

Graduate Degree Programs

Description

RISD offers 19 master's-level graduate programs, ranging from one to three years. In addition to program curricula, every division offers graduate-level elective courses, open to all graduate students, which allow students to explore interdisciplinary topics or forms of making outside of their disciplines. Detailed descriptions of these programs, curricula, learning outcomes, and thesis project expectations, and support for the RISD graduate learning community are outlined on the Graduate Study page of risd.edu.

Four programs have been approved since the last comprehensive evaluation. In 2018, RISD launched two new, 1.5-year, interdisciplinary Master of Arts pilot programs, including Global Arts and Cultures, focusing on critical study of the arts and cultural production, and Nature–Culture–Sustainability Studies (NCSS), combining political ecology with environmental, social, and political theory. The NCSS MA program was sunsetted in 2024 due to low enrollment, following a study done in years prior. However, since strong student interest in the topic remained among graduate students in other disciplines, the dean and faculty in Liberal Arts collaborated with graduate program directors across departments to re-envision NCSS as a graduate concentration.

In summer of 2021 RISD and Brown University launched a joint, 11-month Master of Arts in Design Engineering (MADE). The program combines study in design and engineering, building on the resources of both institutions and collaboratively exploring interdisciplinary and alternative approaches to areas such as public health, education, and climate change. In addition, in 2022, RISD launched a two-year MFA in Illustration that focuses on visual literacy, artistic voice, and critical perspectives in the public realm. Both programs, per RISD's New Program Proposal Process, will undergo a three-year curricular assessment during the 2025–26 academic year, followed by an Academic Planning and Review evaluation in 2027–28.

Applications to RISD's graduate programs are reviewed through a collaborative process led by graduate program directors and by Enrollment Management and Admissions. Depending on the number of applications, the graduate program director, along with program faculty, conduct an initial screening to ensure each submission meets the program's baseline qualifications. Appropriate candidates are interviewed by the graduate program director and relevant program faculty members. In some programs, current graduate students also participate in the review. There is no single admissions assessment process across graduate programs at RISD; each department establishes its own criteria and procedures in accordance with the unique structure and priorities of the program, and in collaboration with Enrollment Management and Admissions.

The successful completion of a degree is determined by the coursework and research undertaken throughout the program, culminating in the thesis or small-group degree projects. All programs require a thesis, with varying requirements. All theses include a written component and are created by students in consultation with a thesis committee, composed of a thesis committee chair, a thesis advisor, and a guest critic. Guest critics can be subject-matter experts working in the field, or RISD faculty not already on the thesis committee. Most programs (17 out of 19) also require participation in the end-of-year thesis exhibition. RISD's graduate theses, archived in RISD's Digital Commons and accessed around the world, are a direct expression of RISD's mission, especially "to discover and transmit knowledge and to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation."

The graduate experience includes art and design research, practice, and teaching, supported by additional opportunities to enrich students' academic and professional journeys outside of the classroom. The Master of Architecture degree requires a credit-bearing internship to meet the criteria for the National Architectural Accrediting Board. The Master of Art in Teaching program, accredited by the Rhode Island Department of Education, requires student teaching in elementary or secondary school in preparation for teacher certification.

Across programs, graduate assistantships offer roles in program-related activities, department-based research, and teaching assignments. For those graduate students interested in teaching, the Teaching as Practice initiative allows students to serve as teaching assistants or instructors of record for introductory courses, and to develop and propose original courses during the Wintersession. These graduate students go through the Wintersession Committee process for course approval and work with the director of Graduate Studies to prepare the course. RISD offers syllabus-writing workshops through Graduate Studies, providing ongoing support throughout the course development process. (For more details on graduate-student teaching opportunities, support, and procedures, see Standard 6.)

Graduate students engage in practice-based research as a fundamental part of their studio work and available research opportunities. This work includes critical reflection to derive insights, iterative analysis and feedback to refine ideas, and thorough documentation and presentation of their findings through various mediums such as recordings, written reflections, and artifacts.

RISD provides a variety of opportunities for graduate students to receive financial support. The creation of the Society of Presidential Fellows in 2019 allows programs to provide full tuition support to outstanding graduate students who are poised to have a significant impact on their respective fields of study and who, but for the support of the award, would be unable to afford to attend RISD. Graduate assistantships noted above are salaried positions and do not count as financial aid or scholarship funds. The Graduate Commons Grant is a competitive annual award fostering creative explorations and goal-oriented projects. The Graduate Student Conference & Exhibition Fund assists students invited to present their work at public events like exhibitions and conferences. For funding to support research endeavors, students can collaborate with the office of Academic and Creative Partnerships in Academic Affairs to apply for additional grants and awards. The SPUR Fund encourages research promoting equity, inclusion, and social change. The Somerson Sustainability Innovation Fund offers substantial support for transdisciplinary research addressing sustainability. The Arts Innovation Research initiative supports projects that meld art and science through both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Moreover, RISD Careers facilitates further funding options. The Maharam Fellowship supports internships that contribute to social progress or environmental protection. RISD graduate students regularly are awarded Fulbright scholarships; over the past five years, eight students enrolled in graduate programs have been recognized for a Fulbright scholarship. The Turner Fund Performing Arts Internship Grants offer financial support for internships in theatrical and performance design. Lastly, the Anderson Ranch Artists-In-Residence Program, a partnership between Anderson Ranch and RISD, provides an intensive five-week residency that includes residency costs, housing, studio space, and meals, allowing for uninterrupted creative work.

Appraisal

For years, RISD has worked to delineate its graduate education from its undergraduate education, with mixed results. The current landscape of higher education nationally and globally, as well as federal-level changes in professionally-named programs and financial aid framework have accelerated trends in declining graduate students' enrollment. RISD is not immune to this movement and, while deans, department heads, and graduate program directors are actively

addressing the immediate consequences of such changes, they are also working on a long-term curricular planning to rectify longstanding issues such as the need for clear delineations between undergraduate and graduate learning, professional fluency, and international legibility. At present, graduate students may enroll in upper-level undergraduate courses, usually with added coursework to reflect students' more advanced level. However, this practice is inconsistently applied, especially in non-skill-based courses. To address this gap, graduate program directors and the deans are engaging in ongoing conversations about strengthening the graduate curriculum and, beginning in 2026, courses exclusively dedicated to graduate students will be offered in Wintersession.

Almost all graduate programs culminate in students exhibiting a thesis body of work in the Grad Show and writing an accompanying thesis book (submitted digitally and/or in print). Both are central to the RISD graduate student experience. They represent the realization of extended inquiry, evidence of learning outcomes, original contributions to the field, and groundwork for future practice. While the Grad Show is a consistent experience across graduate programs, thesis book experiences vary widely across programs. The Center for Arts & Language offers valuable resources, tutoring, and workshops to support thesis writing.

RISD graduate programs are designed to support students' success in professional fields post-graduation (see Standard 8 for more details on post-graduation outcomes). Notably, programs such as Architecture and Landscape Architecture include a 3-credit course specifically focused on career readiness. Other programs emphasize the development of skills necessary for students to pursue careers as artists with sustainable studio practices or to participate effectively in professional studio environments. Nonetheless, as noted under The Major or Concentration subsection, some students and recent graduates have expressed concerns regarding their professional success and employability post-graduation. Feedback indicates a need for greater consistency in the specific professional preparation and opportunities offered, such as courses, workshops, and guest speakers, across programs.

Since RISD's last NECHE accreditation, there has been notable growth in opportunities for graduate students to participate in practice-based research experiences through RISD programs and offices. This growth is likely to continue as departments identify new resources and partnerships to build on these efforts. Strategic planning, additional staff, regular communication, and shared processes for supporting student applicants will be critical for creating efficiencies to do this work for the staff and the departments involved. These improvements would also allow RISD Marketing and Communications to quickly identify new projects to showcase and amplify the unique research being done by students.

Transfer Credit

Description

The RISD course catalog is publicly available online and provides clear policies regarding the awarding of transfer credit. The college currently does not have any articulation agreements with other institutions. Transfer credit is approved by the faculty department head in the department in which credit is being sought, across both studio and Liberal Arts. In studio areas, this approval is often accompanied by a portfolio review of work, ensuring that appropriate learning outcomes have been met to award RISD credit. Transfer credits are only evaluated for transferability toward RISD degree requirements and are not added to a student's RISD record if the credit is not applicable to a RISD degree requirement.

Transfer credit cannot total more than half of undergraduate degree credit at RISD. Limits on the number of credits allowed via transfer ensure that intermediate and advanced coursework is not diminished. This includes a limit of 12 semester credits after matriculation (typically completed in summer or during a leave of absence). Additionally, while students may transfer in as many credits as applicable to their RISD degree requirements from coursework taken elsewhere prior to RISD matriculation (but not exceeding half of their total degree credits), it is highly unusual for students to enter RISD at the junior level due to the specific sequenced requirements in the major programs.

Transfer credit is accepted at the graduate level in the departments of Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Interior Architecture only. The credit may be applied in limited circumstances as determined by the department. Normally, a maximum of 12 credits may be transferred for these departments. The credit must be approved for transfer by the student’s department head and the division dean, with a minimum grade of “B.”

Appraisal

For the past three years, incoming transfer students have most often entered RISD as sophomores (with the implementation of Workday Student in April 2024 data is limited to the past three years).

Table 4.1. Entering Class Level of New Transfer Students as of Fall Census

	2023		2024		2025	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
First Year (0-30 Credits)	10	24%	19	44%	22	45%
Sophomore (31-60 Credits)	29	71%	24	56%	26	53%
Junior (61-90 Credits)	2	5%	0	0%	1	2%
Total	41	100%	43	100%	49	100%

At the undergraduate level, there is room to strengthen the institution’s processes for evaluating and overseeing transferable credits. Major departments currently use a variety of approaches, which can lead to inconsistencies across majors, and most lack clear, upfront criteria to guide students on what will be accepted. Although the registrar coordinates reviews through the appropriate academic units, clearer, shared guidelines and timelines would help ensure that decisions are transparent, timely, and fully aligned with degree requirements. Developing a unified framework—supported by consistent documentation and proactive communication—would reinforce academic standards and better support student success.

Integrity in the Award of Credit

Description

RISD follows standard academic conventions (program, degree, major, department, course, etc.) and ensures all degrees meet accreditation standards for credit hours. Each program’s degree requirements, organized by the typical two-, four-, or five-year timelines, are clearly outlined in RISD’s course catalog. Courses are scheduled carefully across fall, spring, and winter, ensuring students can take the classes they need in the correct sequence to graduate on time.

RISD adheres to credit-hour definitions used across higher education; the definitions are explained in the academic policies section of the online course catalog. A three-credit course equals 135 hours of total work. In RISD's 13-week semesters, this equals about 10.5 hours per week. A lecture/discussion course that meets three hours per week would typically expect students to have an additional 7.5 hours of outside work to complete. A three-credit studio course, which, at RISD, meets five hours per week, would typically expect students to have an additional 5.5 hours of outside work to complete. A six-credit studio course may still meet five hours per week but would then typically expect students to have an additional 16 hours of outside work to complete. Or, if meeting twice per week for five hours each, the outside work would equal 11 hours.

RISD uses Workday, the student information system, to track each student's progress toward their degree. This system is accessible to students, advisors, and faculty. Policies on class standing, leaves, reinstatement, transfer credit, and access to transcripts are publicly available in the course catalog. Academic progress is regularly reviewed by the Academic Standing Committee and the student's department head or graduate program director, who provide support if concerns arise.

All credit-bearing courses and programs undergo a thorough review and approval process involving: department and division leadership, Academic Affairs, Curriculum Subcommittee, and Instruction Committee. These groups ensure that learning outcomes, syllabi, and grading rubrics meet RISD's standards. Faculty follow standardized syllabus guidelines, clearly explaining grading criteria, learning outcomes, and the meaning of letter grades.

Joint/dual degrees meet both RISD and accreditor standards. Examples include the Brown|RISD Dual Degree (BRDD) – a five-year undergraduate program; the MA in Design Engineering (MADE, with Brown University); and MLA/MMA in Marine Affairs (with the University of Rhode Island). Oversight is provided by dedicated joint committees.

Undergraduates must complete at least two years of full-time study at RISD, including at least half their credits. Programs are designed to guide students through introductory, intermediate, and advanced coursework.

Many transfer students attend the Summer Experimental and Foundation Studies Program, a six-week course that offers nine of the 18 required first-year credits. To complete the full 18, students must transfer in eligible coursework or complete additional RISD courses.

For students transferring in credits, RISD awards credit for: College Board AP exams (with high scores), International Baccalaureate (IB) and British A-Levels. RISD does not award credit for prior experiential learning. Transfer credit from other institutions, study abroad, or Brown cross-registration must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate department.

In regards to academic integrity and technology, RISD maintains a strict academic code of conduct, reviewed regularly. In 2023, the policy was updated to address the ethical use of artificial intelligence.

RISD has not offered distance or correspondence education, except during the COVID-19 pandemic under temporary NECHE and NC-SARA approval. Courses are taught in person, with regular opportunities for feedback and critique.

While RISD does not offer competency-based badges, it offers baccalaureate and master's degrees, interdisciplinary and Liberal Arts concentrations, and a certificate in Collegiate Teaching in Art and Design. All are documented on official transcripts and academic records.

Appraisal

Overall, RISD's six-year graduation rates (89–92%) for recent cohorts reflect the effectiveness of its practices related to course credits, tracking student progress, course and program quality, and foundational program. In comparison, the average six-year graduation rate for the institutions belonging to the Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design is around 63%. (More information on and analysis of graduation rates is provided in Standard 8.)

Courses are clearly designated for graduate or undergraduate credit; however, numbering conventions vary by department. In some majors a 2000-level course signals a sophomore studio, while in others it simply denotes topical sequence or medium complexity. Because there is no shared schema, students, advisors, and external reviewers cannot reliably infer a course's undergraduate class level (e.g., sophomore vs. junior) from the subject code and number alone. A comprehensive, college-wide evaluation of the course-numbering system—coordinated through the Curriculum Committee and involving all departments—could establish uniform level bands (for example, 1000 = first-year foundation, 2000 = sophomore, 3000 = junior, 4000 = senior). Adopting consistent identifiers would streamline advising, registration, transfer-credit assessment, and accreditation reporting while enhancing transparency for students and faculty alike.

Projections

Faculty in the History, Philosophy and the Social Sciences Department will evaluate the impact of moving S101 to the third year and changing it to S301, and will assess that the objectives for the course are being met. These assessments will be able to start in 2028, the first year in which this course will be offered in the third year.

Deans, department heads, and academic administration will collaborate to identify actions to mitigate obstacles to interdisciplinary learning, including curriculum-related aspects (rigid major requirements, too few electives) and logistical concerns (scheduling and space) in order to increase interdisciplinary opportunities.

Building on the work done for the Preparedness for Life After RISD initiative, deans, department heads, and graduate program directors, with assistance from RISD Careers, will determine possible ways to elevate the inclusion of professional practice (including internships) consistently across both undergraduate and graduate programs. Programs will review their curricula and best practices in 2026–27 and propose changes in 2027–28 to begin in 2028–29.

Deans, department heads, and graduate program directors will implement strategies to strengthen the graduate curriculum. To that end, we will provide a greater number of graduate-student-only courses, incorporate greater curricular attention to professional practice, and clarify definitions and standardize minimum requirements for a RISD graduate thesis, including graduate thesis exhibition. We will examine expectations for graduate courses in relation to requirements, credit hour policy, and learning outcomes. Changes will be put in place in AY 2027–28.

Deans and department heads, in consultation with the Registrar's office, will develop clear, consistent criteria to be shared and used across departments and programs for evaluating transfer credits. A proposal will be shared with standing faculty committees for discussion and approval in AY 2027–28.

The Registrar's Office, deans, and department heads will continue the work that began with the new Computation, Technology, and Culture department to rationalize the course numbering system, so that it more uniformly clarifies course learning levels, course sequences, and, potentially, course components.

Standard Five: Students

RISD enrolls approximately 2,600 (2,616 in Fall 2025) undergraduate and graduate students from around 60 countries across around 40 degree programs (across the undergraduate and graduate levels) in fine arts, architecture, design, and the liberal arts.

Figure 5.1. Undergraduate and Graduate Total Enrollments

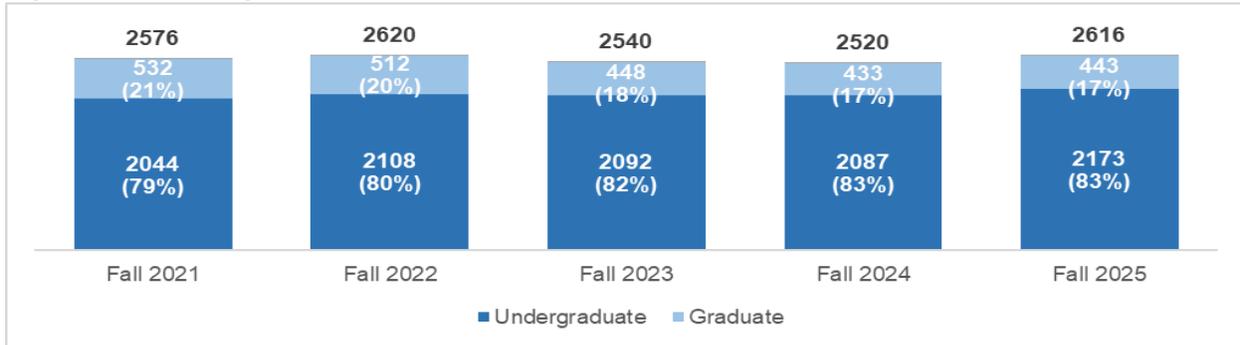


Table 5.1. Student Demographics/Characteristics: Fall 2021-Fall 2025

	Fall 2021		Fall 2022		Fall 2023		Fall 2024		Fall 2025	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Enrollment	2,576	--	2,620	--	2,540	--	2,520	--	2,616	--
Female	1,710	66%	1,763	67%	1,769	70%	1,795	71%	1,910	73%
Male	866	34%	857	33%	771	30%	725	29%	704	27%
Non-Binary Legal Gender	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	0%	3	0%	4	0%	2	0%	4	0%
Asian	503	20%	509	19%	538	21%	565	22%	612	23%
Black/African American	112	4%	112	4%	112	4%	114	5%	107	4%
Hispanic/Latino	212	8%	215	8%	216	9%	192	8%	180	7%
White	640	25%	618	24%	596	23%	564	22%	624	24%
Two+ Races	146	6%	130	5%	107	4%	113	4%	122	5%
US Nonresident	906	35%	984	38%	930	37%	924	37%	922	35%
Race/Ethnicity Unknown	54	2%	49	2%	37	1%	46	2%	45	2%
Domestic	1,670	65%	1,636	62%	1,610	63%	1,596	63%	1,694	65%
International	906	35%	984	38%	930	37%	924	37%	922	35%

First Generation (UG Only)	276	14%	289	14%	293	14%	292	14%	326	15%
Multigenerational (UG Only)	1,691	83%	1,771	84%	1,742	83%	1,732	83%	1,748	80%
Unknown FG Status (UG Only)	77	4%	48	2%	57	3%	63	3%	99	5%
Pell Recipient (UG Only)	445	22%	437	21%	417	20%	416	20%	387	18%
Non-Pell (UG Only)	1,599	78%	1,671	79%	1,675	80%	1,671	80%	1,786	82%

*All RISD students are full-time

Admissions and Financial Aid

Description

Admissions

RISD's ideal applicant is an ambitious, curious, and technically strong artist, designer, or scholar, prepared to thrive in RISD's rigorous academic environment and contribute to the institution's dynamic and diverse studio culture.

Table 5.2. Applications Funnel: Fall 2021-Fall 2025

	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025
First-Time Undergraduate Applications					
Applicants ¹	4,742	5,099	7,126	6,692	6,561
Admits	886	888	984	1,249	1,534
Enrolls	496	481	504	518	548
Brown RISD Dual Degree Program (BRDD) Applications*					
Applicants	591	650	766	709	682
Admits	20	23	24	23	23
Enrolls	15	15	15	14	14
Transfer Undergraduate Applications					
Applicants	358	34	384	376	369
Admits	50	20	98	113	111
Enrolls	26	14	41	43	48
Graduate Applications					
Applicants	2,042	2,031	1,746	1,914	1,908
Admits	668	503	593	613	673
Enrolls	266	193	195	207	207

¹ Completed applications

* BRDD applications are also included as part of the First-Time Undergraduate Applications figures.

RISD's undergraduate population makes up roughly 80% of the student body, with a significant portion entering through first-year admission. Admission is highly competitive, with a three-year average acceptance rate of 16.6%. From Fall 2021 to Fall 2025, RISD saw a 38% increase in completed first-year applications, reflecting strong recruitment and outreach.

First-year applicants apply via the Common Application, selecting either Early Decision or Regular Decision. A visual art portfolio is a required and critical part of the application. Admissions follows a holistic review process, considering academic achievement, artistic potential, and personal qualities

The Undergraduate Admissions Committee, composed of elected or appointed faculty, reviews applications. For the Fall 2025 admission process, a new committee review structure was implemented for all first-year students. The committee is composed of Admissions staff as well as faculty. This structure allows for more extensive dialogue about applicants who would best benefit from a RISD education. Reviewers follow a detailed reading manual and assessment matrices that consider academic, artistic, and personal attributes. RISD practices a masked race policy, in line with the 2024 Supreme Court rulings, ensuring reviewers do not have access to applicants' racial identity.

On-campus, off-campus, and virtual recruitment events provide prospective students with comprehensive insight into RISD. RISD 101, an informational video series, is available on YouTube. In 2024, RISD launched in-person portfolio workshops in cities including Houston, San Antonio, Chicago, and Detroit to support underserved and first-generation-to-college applicants.

Applicants to the Brown|RISD Dual Degree Program (BRDD) must be admitted to both institutions individually. BRDD candidates are expected to demonstrate artistic rigor, academic curiosity, and interdisciplinary ambition. Applications for this program have risen overall from 2021 to 2025 from 591 to 682. Applicants to RISD Florence, a program in which students spend one semester of their first-year abroad, must show strong artistic talent and interest in cross-cultural engagement (2025 is the first year for this program, with approximately 20 students enrolled in each semester).

Transfer applicants must meet specific eligibility criteria and undergo a pre-screening process to determine credit qualifications and portfolio strength. Applications are submitted through RISD's institutional application platform. Overall, the number of completed applications for prospective transfer students increased by 3% from Fall 2021 to Fall 2025, with the number enrolled increasing from 26 to 48 (+85%) during that time. The increase in incoming transfer students in Fall 2025 helped offset the decrease in new graduate students, described below.

The admission officers provide the initial portfolio review and pass the strong applicants onto the department heads to conduct final reviews. The Experimental and Foundation Studies (EFS) division may require some students to complete a summer EFS program as a condition of admission. All incoming transfer students receive a transfer credit evaluation prior to matriculation.

Graduate applicants are encouraged to "cultivate critically-informed practices that lead to big ideas and unexpected outcomes." Graduate recruitment includes tailored digital content, virtual info sessions, and recorded materials are available for prospective students. Graduate

applicants apply through RISD's institutional application portal. All programs (except the MA in Global Arts and Cultures) require submission of a visual art portfolio.

Applications are reviewed by graduate program directors, who apply discipline-specific criteria. The process follows a holistic approach and adheres to RISD's masked race policy, with thorough training provided for reviewers in collaboration with General Counsel. Completed graduate applications decreased by 7% from Fall 2021 to Fall 2025, with those enrolled decreasing by 22%. It is important to note that changes to federal regulations regarding visas and student loans went into effect for students entering in Fall 2025. These changes directly affected international students, who had comprised on average 63% of graduate applicants over the previous four years.

Financial Aid

RISD is deeply committed to making a world-class art and design education accessible through a strong financial aid program. In FY 2026 alone, RISD has budgeted \$43 million for institutional scholarships to support both undergraduate and graduate students. This significant investment reflects the institution's need-aware admissions philosophy, which balances a student's qualifications with their financial need to ensure fair, ethical, and mission-aligned decisions.

RISD's Student Financial Services Office provides comprehensive financial counseling to prospective students, current students, and alumni, equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to make informed, sustainable decisions about financing their education. This support includes targeted outreach during the application and admission process, prior to enrollment, and throughout a student's time at RISD. Such counseling provides information on the variety of financial support options available to students, including institutional, federal, state, and outside scholarships and grants; federal work-study; stipends and assistantships; and student loans. To simplify the financial aid application process, RISD has eliminated the CSS Profile and for the past two recruitment cycles used a streamlined internal financial aid form for institutional funding. Students seeking federal aid must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

In FY 2025 (the most recently completed fiscal year), approximately 35% of undergraduate students received some form of financial aid. Due to sustained high demand, RISD does not award institutional funding to students without need, focusing its resources on making education more accessible for those who need support the most. For FY 2025, 17% of both first-time full-time students and all undergraduates received Pell grants, with the awards averaging \$5,801 and \$6,161 for the year, respectively. RISD is also seeing growing demand for financial support among graduate students—95% receive aid, which includes fellowships, stipends, assistantships, federal work-study, and loans. The institution is actively reviewing strategies to rebalance aid distribution and increase support for the undergraduate population while maintaining comprehensive assistance for graduate students.

Student financial aid and debt, including data, are addressed in more detail in Standard 7.

Appraisal

RISD's unique curriculum and reputation make it a first-choice school for students with strong art and design skills. RISD takes great care to admit a class of students each year who have exhibited the skill and drive toward completion of a degree. Students receive support through their time in many ways to help with financial, academic, and health barriers. Given all of this, RISD has retained on average 94% of its first-year students in entering cohorts from Fall 2020

through Fall 2024; the national average for private four-year nonprofits was 81% for Fall 2020 through Fall 2022 cohorts (the most recent comparison data available). RISD continues to successfully graduate students with a six-year graduation rate of 89%–92% compared to the national average for private four-year nonprofits of 69% (most recent data for those graduating in 2021 through 2023).

RISD regularly critiques and adapts its admission practices to ensure access, accessibility, and equity. For example, beginning with the 2023–24 application cycle, RISD removed its longstanding “RISD Assignment,” a prompt that required students to create a visual art submission as part of their undergraduate admission portfolio. For decades, a drawing of a bicycle on paper of a specific dimension was required. While the assignment was changed in 2014 to allow varied media, qualitative and quantitative research showed the assignment posed a significant barrier for applicants while providing little impact on the overall evaluation of candidates. Because of this, the RISD Assignment was removed. Students continue to submit a portfolio with up to 20 different creative representations of their talents. This along with the academic transcript and supplemental essays and recommendations allow for a comprehensive admission review.

The pandemic prompted Admissions to employ virtual recruitment efforts, and those efforts now continue, as they allow students and families with limited ability to travel to learn about RISD from afar and make more fully-informed decisions. In 2021, Admissions took further action to reach broader audiences and increase transparency, launching the virtual Application Preparation and Portfolio Development series.

RISD has adapted well to the changing legislative landscape of college admissions. In partnership with General Counsel, Admissions provides training to ensure that everyone involved in the admission decision-making process understands legal issues affecting the selection process.

Financial aid strategy is carefully evaluated throughout the year by RISD’s leadership, including the vice president for Enrollment Management, assistant vice president for Enrollment Services, and the director of Financial Aid. These evaluations focus on awarding policies, student debt loads, admission yields, retention, and enrollment targets.

The percentage of enrolled students receiving Pell funds decreased overall from 22% in Fall 2021 to 18% in Fall 2025. As noted in the description, the college focuses financial aid resources for those students most in need. As a result, the average amount of institutional grants that incoming first-time full-time students received has increased by almost 25% from FY 2021 to FY 2025. (see table in Standard 7). Moreover, for the same time period, Pell recipients persisted from first year to second year at the same rate as non-Pell recipients: 94%. For graduation rates for those years, an average of 86% of Pell recipients graduated within 150% of time, close to the overall average of 91% (see Standard 8 for retention and graduation rate data).

Student Services and Co-Curricular Experiences

Description

RISD’s Student Life Division, overseen by the vice president for Student Life and Engagement and the associate dean of students, comprises offices that range from Health Services to

International Student and Scholar Affairs, and Residence Life to Disability Support Services. Student Life has a mission-aligned and accessible philosophy—namely, that it “provides opportunities for all students to develop personally, socially and intellectually. In support of the college’s academic mission, we foster the skills engaged citizens need for success and achievement. We create active learning environments that support students’ co-curricular experience. Our programming and services reflect the values of community, inclusiveness, responsibility, leadership and well-being.” This philosophy is articulated throughout the admission and orientation process, as well as in campus communications during a student’s enrollment.

RISD provides both in-person and virtual information to prospective and incoming undergraduate and graduate students. Every April RISD holds two Admitted Students Days, during which admitted students and their families/guests learn about academic and co-curricular offerings and supports. Beginning with AY2025-26, the college also offers students who enroll an online pre-orientation to better prepare themselves for their arrival to campus and in-person orientation. During the three-day in-person orientation, just prior to the start of classes, incoming students learn about topics such as living and dining on campus, wellness practices, community standards, and first-year academics. They also receive their supplies kit for their first-year Experimental and Foundation Studies courses. Incoming international students arrive three days prior to the general new student orientation to learn about resources more focused on their needs (International Student and Scholar Affairs office, wellness resources in the US, international travel, etc.). Parents and families are also invited to attend new student orientations.

Once students are enrolled and living and learning at RISD, the online Student Hub offers a virtual one-stop shop for student services information. Most student services utilize the scheduling tool Penji, where the consistent interface and single sign-on makes appointment scheduling easily accessible for students. The Involved @ RISD website provides students and the RISD community with a campus-wide menu of programs for both academic and co-curricular activities.

RISD offers comprehensive health and wellness support through the offices of Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Health Services, and Health Education and Promotion and regularly assesses student well-being. The college invites incoming first-year students to complete the CIRP Freshman Survey, which contains items related to wellness. From the 2019 implementation to the 2023 implementation, the percentage of incoming first-year students at RISD who have frequently felt overwhelmed was steady at 46-47%, while those who indicated they frequently felt depressed decreased from 29% to 26%. For the comparison group of highly selective four-year private institutions, the rate of frequently feeling overwhelmed was 47% for both years, while frequently feeling depressed grew from 18% to 22%. Every three years RISD also conducts wellness surveys that all students are invited to take. The Healthy Minds Survey was implemented in 2018 and 2020. Analysis showed that reports of depression increased (from 49% to 61% for RISD; from 52% to 58% for the art and design school comparison groups), as did anxiety (from 42% to 50% for RISD; from 43% to 47% for the comparison group). In 2025 the college implemented the American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment, which includes more questions about physical wellness. Participants were asked about high distress caused by academics; 55% of RISD respondents reported feeling high stress, compared to 41% of the national sample. Thirty-six percent (36%) of RISD respondents reported being diagnosed with depression, compared to 26% of the national sample (this survey does not provide an art and design school comparison group).

Such data confirms what many have observed and makes the counseling and health services at the college that much more important. The Student Hub webpage provides extensive information for students on resources to support them. CAPS offers current undergrad and grad students one-on-one counseling, provides medication consultation/management, and makes referrals. Students can meet with CAPS staff virtually or in person. The team of nurse practitioners at Health Services offers students a variety of physical wellness support, including treating non-emergent illnesses and injuries, physical exams, nutritional support, etc. Health Education and Promotion provides events, workshops, and peer education so students have the tools, skills, and knowledge to achieve a personal state of wellness. Another resource for students is the CARE Network, a team within Student Life. The CARE Network was developed in 2016 as a comprehensive referral system to help students get connected to the support systems they need in order to persist and thrive at RISD. Partner offices include Disability Support Services, Health Services, International Student and Scholar Affairs, and Public Safety, among several others. Students needing specialized care outside the scope of services at RISD can work with in-house providers to find appropriate referrals and services off-campus. RISD maintains a level of service for study abroad and RISD Global programs similar to those on campus via contracted providers.

With international students comprising 35% of the student body in Fall 2025, the International Student and Scholar Affairs office plays an important role in supporting many students. They offer advice on F and J immigration compliance, cultural and language adjustment and transition, and navigating US systems (Social Security, IRS/taxes, Division of Motor Vehicles, etc.). The office provides these services to not just current students, but also prospective, incoming, and recently graduated students.

Intercultural Student Engagement (an office within the Social Equity and Inclusion Division) promotes cultural awareness, dialogue, and interaction while serving as a hands-on resource for students of color, LGBTQIA+ students, students with a faith practice, and those dedicated to creating an inclusive community. Intercultural Student Engagement advises students on social, cultural, and personal matters and supports leadership development as part of advising student cultural groups, and also oversees RISD's programming for first-generation students. The First-Generation-To-College Pre-Orientation Program (FGC POP), introduced in 2021, is a two-week summer immersion program taught by full-time faculty, which teaches foundational artistic and academic skills, explores identity and belonging, and introduces key support resources. The longstanding Project Thrive program sustains similar support for first-generation students between the first year and graduation, while adding a faculty and staff mentoring program; graduate students may also take part in Project Thrive programming. Together, FGC POP and Project Thrive serve an average of 120 undergraduate and graduate students each year.

Several Student Life departments partner with academics to offer programming toward major selection. Two of the cornerstone programs are Open Studios, in which students learn first-hand what each program's curriculum looks and feels like, and Meet Your Major, an event preceding major selection, in which student and faculty representatives share information and insights. In addition, RISD's Student Success Office, composed of one full-time staff member, supports students with incompletes by assisting with their planning toward completion. The office also focuses on students who take a leave and helps in their transition out of and back into the curriculum. This support service is in addition to the advising provided by full-time faculty (more information about advising support is provided in Standard 6).

Alongside Student Life, an expansive group of co-curricular/academic support offices serves RISD students in direct connection with the academic curriculum. This group includes, for example, the Fleet Library, Center for Arts & Language, RISD Exhibitions, the Edna W. Lawrence Nature Lab, RISD Careers, and RISD Global. These offices broadly characterize their purpose as offering academic support and research opportunities as well as interdisciplinary community made possible by their cross-college, extra-departmental programs. These offices vary in subject interest, size, and purpose, but most share a set of student-centered values and common modes of engagement.

RISD has a dynamic student club structure that averages 50 sports-, interest-, and affinity-based clubs per academic year. Clubs are funded through student activity fees allocated yearly. Membership in all clubs is open to all students. RISD is not part of a collegiate divisional conference for athletics but offers 13 gender-inclusive intramural sports clubs, seven of them competitive (hockey, basketball, kendo, rock climbing, rowing soccer, and volleyball) and six recreational (rock climbing, equestrian, cycling, ski and snowboard, surfing, and wilderness). RISD also maintains a fitness center in the heart of campus, proximal to first-year residences and the main dining hall. Visits to the campus fitness center average about 5,000 per year. RISD students also have access to fitness facilities at Brown University; per data provided by Brown University, about one-third of both undergraduate and graduate students at RISD have taken advantage of Brown's fitness options in recent years.

RISD offers more than one hundred student leadership opportunities for both undergraduate and graduate students. Some student leader roles are paid, on-campus, student employment jobs, health and wellness ambassadors, resident advisors, orientation leaders, advocates for inclusion in residence, Project Thrive student advisors, and Center for Arts & Language peer tutors. Each of these positions has a selection and training process, as well as supervisory support. Job descriptions are reviewed alongside Human Resources. RISD's student governance model, the Student Alliance, provides additional leadership opportunities. The group is composed of elected and paid student representatives (see Standard 3 for more information on the Student Alliance).

RISD maintains and publishes policies and disclosures pertaining to students, including record retention policies and students' rights and responsibilities under FERPA. A comprehensive record retention policy guides the maintenance of prospective student-, applicant-, and enrolled-student records. Admissions is the first office to generate a record for prospective students at the undergraduate and graduate levels, maintained in Technolutions by Slate. Applicant portfolios are submitted and maintained through a third party, Slideroom. Once an admitted student confirms their enrollment by submitting a deposit, their admissions record is transferred to the Registrar's Office. There, the student record is officially maintained in Workday, incorporating the admissions record as part of the comprehensive academic file.

RISD reviews the Code of Student Conduct and related procedures each year to be in accordance with industry best practices led by the Association of Student Conduct Administrators. The Student Hub articulates the entirety of the process, from allegations of violation to the appeals process. RISD consistently reviews and updates policies related to Title IX, Title XI, and Title XII according to legislative updates, with regular training for staff.

Appraisal

Student Life staff, functions, and functionality have grown significantly in the past few years under new leadership, with notable professionalism, as well as improvements to New Student

Orientation, CARE referral use, and student communications. Several staff members from Student Life undertook training at the Institute for the Curricular Approach in AY 2024–25 and are currently developing the curricular approach to life outside the classroom (see Standard 8). Another example of Student Life staff providing training to college colleagues is Disability Student Services, which has offered four comprehensive sessions since Fall 2023, on topics such as ADA student support and making courses accessible. More sessions are planned for Spring 2026.

Student Life’s wellness resources offer a robust network of support for students. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) has a staff that includes a psychiatrist, counselors, and a psychiatric resident, in addition to director and coordinator. CAPS provided 3,766 appointments with 643 individual clients in academic year 2024 serving 25% of all students; this has increased more than 20% each academic year since 2017. To increase access to resources, in addition to offering appointments in person or virtually, CAPS is able to ensure 24/7 access to mental health support via Public Safety and through a partnership with a company providing crisis management services. Health Services had 4,654 appointments for the academic year 2024 and did campus outreach including campus resource fairs, training for student leaders, and wellness fairs. Health Education and Promotion’s team of student health and wellness ambassadors (HAWAs) participated in 64 events in academic year 2024, in addition to conducting office hours. The HAWAs developed a wellness map to help students locate health resources on campus, local hospitals, fitness centers, places for faith and spiritual practice, relaxing indoor and outdoor spaces, etc. The CARE Network was restructured in 2022 so that one office (Student Support office) is responsible for this resource, as opposed to responsibilities spread across multiple offices. Since then, the Student Support office developed “A Faculty + Staff Guide to Student Safety + Well-Being” to educate employees and conducted about 150 faculty/staff consultations in the academic year 2024. While there has been a referral form for over 10 years, it was integrated into systems more effectively. Such efforts have helped raise awareness across the campus of the services the CARE Network offers, as seen in the number of incoming referrals growing from 1,250 in 2020-21 to 2,402 in 2024-25.

In the past 10 years, RISD has developed essential and successful programming to meet specific and apparent student population needs—with FGC POP and multilingual learning support as key examples. Both fulfill the priority to “build the capacity of our learning support systems to meet existing and emerging needs” identified in the *NEXT* strategic plan two-year progress report. CARE Network growth of use and service, advocacy provided by the Student Success Office, and Teaching & Learning Lab faculty workshops on inclusive pedagogy have also contributed significantly to learning support.

Among Student Life and student support offices, RISD maintains a high number and level of programs and services for students outside of the classroom/studio. However, while each office maintains best practices and plays important roles in student lives and work, the Holistic Student Wellness study recently convened by President Williams noted that the services currently are not effectively scaffolded into the student experience, few are required, and they compete for “airtime” with the curricular and studio model, which leaves little time for students to access the menu of services available and specifically designed to bolster educational success.

Because student interest in the Alliance has waned in recent years, students conducted a year of research on student governance models. The findings suggest that RISD’s practices have focused too exclusively on the classroom/studio experience and not enough on the student experience as a whole (residential, clubs and organizations, services, etc.). The previous

student government positions, which were departmentally organized, have been converted into peer advisor roles, selected, trained and supervised by the Student Success project manager. Work is currently underway to develop next steps for student governance and continued intersections with cabinet, Board, faculty, and staff governance structures. (See projection in Standard 3.)

RISD has addressed student feedback on the lack of structured advising since the last accreditation cycle. Most notable are the additions to first-year advising structures through Experimental and Foundation Studies and the Liberal Arts and more formal processes for noting progression through the first year. The position of Student Success project manager was established in 2022. Student Life and Academic Affairs are currently designing a new tradition to launch in AY 2026 year: a celebratory transition from the first-year Experimental and Foundation Studies advisor to the major faculty advisor. For a thorough appraisal of advising at RISD and the related projection, see Standard 6.

Projections

Units across the college will continue work that was influenced by the Holistic Student Wellness initiative. In 2025, the college switched to a different student wellness survey, ACHA-NCHA. Comparison data for this survey should be available in Summer 2026. Institutional Effectiveness will conduct analysis on the new data and where possible make connections to data gathered in earlier implementations using the Healthy Minds Survey. Analysis will be shared with units across the college, especially Student Life, to be used in decision-making to impact student wellness.

Student Life and other student support offices will review over the next academic year the extent to which student programming and support currently align and integrate with academic studies. If needed, they will examine how to more effectively scaffold their offerings into the student experience.

Standard Six: Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship

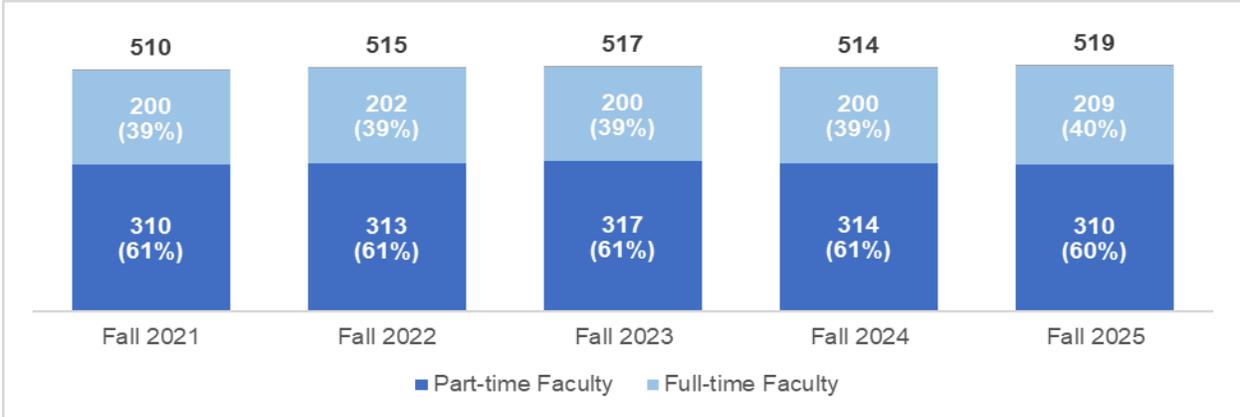
Faculty and Academic Staff

Description

Contemporary art and design education grew out of traditions of craft-based apprenticeship. This evolution is echoed today in RISD’s emphasis on faculty mentorship, which guides student learning through iterative practice, questioning, and critique. RISD’s model of learning is facilitated by small class sizes (average 15 students) and a low student-to-faculty ratio (8:1), as well as by an extensive network of academic support staff. All make up the large division of Academic Affairs, led by the college’s provost, Toubia Ghadessi.

RISD has the privilege of admitting some of the most talented and creative students from around the world, and faculty hiring—of both artists and scholars—is equally selective. Both the newly-hired and those who have been at the college for decades are expected to maintain excellence in their fields, all representing, at an individual level, the institution’s claim to leadership in art and design education, scholarship, and creative practice. In particular, RISD faculty tend to understand their work in a global context, reflecting the college’s mission “to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation.” Faculty fellowships, exhibitions, publications, and conference presentations, and partnerships have had connections to places, off-campus, that range from nearby communities in Rhode Island, to Africa, Asia, Australia, Central America, and Europe. Faculty-led study abroad courses, which occur every Wintersession and summer, demonstrate this reach, including, in Wintersession 2026 alone, faculty building on their professional connections to organize courses in Japan, Taiwan, Mexico, France, Southern Africa, and Ghana. The faculty themselves also come from different areas of the world, with the proportion of full-time faculty who are not US citizens averaging almost 8% for the past five years.

Figure 7.1. RISD Faculty: Fall 2021-Fall 2025



Faculty cultivate and represent the intellectual life of the college. In particular, serving as a member of the faculty involves sustained achievement in three areas: teaching, professional status, and service to the college and/or community.

Teaching at RISD, historically, has been central to a faculty member’s role and takes up the majority of a faculty member’s time. Until 2024–25, RISD faculty had an annual courseload of

six teaching units (one teaching unit roughly equates to one three-credit semester course). A workload rebalance effort, piloted in 2024–25, changed the full-time faculty teaching load to five teaching units per year, with the sixth teaching unit reallocated to advising and other professional endeavors, at the discretion of the faculty. Advising is a key part of a faculty member's educational role and is included in the collective bargaining agreement. Each faculty member is typically engaged each year with a range of instructional formats, from intensive studios, small seminars, and larger lectures, as well as workshops, thesis advising, independent studies, and project-based courses (often as part of partnered or sponsored studios).

Professional status concerns progressive and acknowledged achievement in a discipline or field, through the production and exhibition/publication of original studio work, research, and scholarship, as well as grants, conference attendance, and educational advancement through new training. In practice, RISD studio faculty will be more likely to pursue art and design research or exhibition, while Liberal Arts faculty will be more likely to conduct scholarly research resulting in publication.

Service includes participation on at least one faculty or college committee, in which faculty advise on overall frameworks for student learning and provide a faculty perspective on college-wide practices, policies, finances, and other matters. Some also conduct work in connection to community government, nonprofit, or volunteer organizations. Finally, as part of their intellectual leadership, faculty are active participants in campus life: arranging and participating in departmental and campus events (speakers, forums, etc.); making recommendations about program equipment, enrollment, and space; representing their areas in ad hoc campus-wide initiatives; and participating in the key public rituals of the year, from Convocation to Commencement.

As of Fall 2025, RISD employed 209 full-time faculty. Of these, 88% were critical review or critical review-track, which is RISD's equivalent to tenure track at other institutions. RISD employs faculty in the following categories: full-time, "term" full-time (for sabbatical and other leave replacements or curricular needs), part-time, and graduate student "instructors of record" (mostly in Wintersession). Full-time librarians and archivists (permanent and term appointments, all with a terminal master's degree), are included in the membership of the Full-Time Faculty Association. These faculty types are defined in the annually-updated Faculty Handbook, in the three-year collective bargaining agreement contracts for full-time and part-time faculty, in individual faculty contracts, and in the Graduate Student Instructor of Record Handbook. Their respective responsibilities are defined in the Faculty Handbook, in the collective bargaining agreements for full-time and part-time faculty, and in individual contracts. Overall, RISD employs around twice as many part-time faculty as it does full-time faculty, given the nature of its disciplines and the wish to bring instructors who have a professional practice to share that experience with students.

Collective bargaining has had a significant role in defining the responsibilities and expectations for full-time faculty and librarians, as well as part-time faculty, since the advent of the full-time faculty union in 1980. Both the Rhode Island School of Design Faculty Association and the Rhode Island School of Design Part-Time Faculty Association are affiliates of the National Education Association Rhode Island; their respective contracts are three years, with their timing staggered. Copies of the contracts are made available to the unions' membership (which includes faculty department heads), as well as to college administrators and deans. They include detailed outlines of appointment and reappointment, workload, salaries, benefits, leaves, academic organization, and processes of evaluation, retrenchment, and grievance. Overall,

collective bargaining has usefully clarified expectations for positions and established standard conditions for work at RISD, including not only salary, healthcare, and benefits, but also, especially for faculty, unique terms of service, appointments, and rank. At the same time, a highly-unionized environment can result in meaningful constraints on planning, with changes often requiring memoranda or, if complex, deferments to future agreements. It is worthy to note that 79% of all Academic Affairs employees are unionized.

RISD employs an orderly process for hiring full-time “critical review” track faculty, with the management of the search process falling under the associate provost’s purview and guided by the Critical Review Track Faculty Search Policy, which is reviewed and updated annually. The policy articulates an explicit commitment to the “recruitment, hiring, and retention of highly-qualified faculty who bring different cultural and historical perspectives to their disciplines and to their teaching” as “essential to the fulfillment of RISD’s educational mission” and requires “an external search of national or international scope.” The required and preferred qualifications of candidates, including expected levels of education, experience, and professional achievement, are clearly articulated in each position’s job description and criteria for consideration. The policy also lays out the composition and roles of search committee members, as well as the required steps of the search process. Jobs are posted publicly on RISD’s Human Resources website and advertised on sites such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

For term appointments (full-time faculty “in residence,” with one- or two-year appointments), the recruiting and hiring process is initiated within the department. Department heads are encouraged to post jobs via PeopleAdmin; however in practice, many term faculty are initially recruited via personal networks of the department head or current faculty members or via departmental alum networks. Most term appointments in Liberal Arts require “mini-searches”—a posting and vetting of candidates using a three-person interview panel. All hire requests are reviewed by the relevant divisional dean, the provost, and the Academic Administration Office. Prospective full-time faculty are provided with an offer letter that contains the title and term of their initial appointment, salary, support, and benefits, and information on annual reviews and timeline for their reappointment.

For part-time faculty, the recruiting and hiring process is initiated within the department, following guidelines in the Part-Time Faculty Association contract. Department heads are encouraged to post jobs via the college’s software platform for faculty hiring, PeopleAdmin; however, partly due to time constraints, part-time faculty recruitment is often pursued via personal connections or networks of alums. Upon hiring, prospective part-time faculty receive a contract that provides information on the length of their appointment, their course(s), pay, and other relevant contractual information. The minimum pay per teaching unit for part-time faculty is contractually governed, with department heads having the discretion to offer amounts not unreasonably above the minimum. All hiring requests and salaries are reviewed by the divisional dean and the Academic Administration Office.

Building on the institution’s long-held commitment to supporting diversity, the college announced in 2020 a new, multi-year cluster-hire initiative and a commitment to improve the college’s search and hiring processes, with the goal, articulated by then-President Rosanne Somerson, that “students, faculty and staff of all races, ethnicities and cultures are supported, nourished and honored without the impediments of systemic racism.” President Williams further amplified the values of this initiative in her inaugural address, stating that “art and design spaces, classrooms, and practices [must] reflect the full breadth of human dynamism.” RISD’s full-time critical review track search and hiring policies, as already stated above, support recruitment of

candidates who will bring different perspectives to their disciplines and all search committees receive unconscious bias training.

Appendix A of the Full-Time Faculty Association Collective Bargaining Agreement provides the criteria and process for evaluating the performance for faculty. Review occurs annually or periodically, depending on faculty status, and also for key milestones, including promotion and critical review. In annual and periodic reviews, full-time faculty reflect on their progress and accomplishments in a detailed form (Appendix B), which they then discuss with their department head. In a promotion review or critical review, faculty complete a dossier. Dossiers are considered by the faculty member's department head and dean, followed by the Committee on Faculty Appointments, proportionally composed of faculty from across the divisions of the college. The committee makes a recommendation about the dossier to the provost, who offers their own recommendation to the Board of Trustees, who make a final decision for each case. Each step of this process is independent of the following one.

Review of part-time faculty is focused on renewal or non-renewal of teaching contracts. Renewal is typically based on instructor performance and curricular needs; department heads may consult student teaching evaluations as part of their assessment. Non-renewal or termination of a contract is outlined in the part-time faculty collective bargaining agreement. While the agreement does not specify regular evaluation processes, part-time faculty may meet with their department head for a regular collegial meeting, which provides an opportunity for feedback and continuous communication.

Full- and part-time faculty are afforded a range of opportunities for professional development, with paid time-off from teaching (through sabbaticals and other leave arrangements articulated in the collective bargaining agreements). They are also supported by a designated Professional Development Fund (as are full-time librarians and museum curators), along with other internal funds for specific applications (cross-division course collaboration, Liberal Arts and studio course collaboration, conference attendance, technology training, theatrical and performance design) managed by Academic Affairs. Faculty are also encouraged to apply for outside fellowships and grants, with support from Academic Affairs. Many of these grants offer course releases for full-time faculty and stipends for part-time faculty to allow them to pursue projects and research. In the last three years, internal professional and research funds allocated for faculty have more than doubled.

In addition to full- and part-time faculty, RISD hires and trains both graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants, with the latter used primarily for first-year courses in the Experimental and Foundation Studies Division. Graduate students usually serve as assistants in their given majors; for fall and spring courses, they are encouraged to enroll in the Collegiate Teaching Certificate Program. Graduate students who create and propose courses to teach in the Wintersession are required to go through training offered by the Graduate Studies Office, if they are not already completing the Collegiate Teaching Certificate Program. On the Student Hub, Student Employment provides up-to-date information on hiring and training teaching assistants, including Human Resources and immigration processes and orientation. The Graduate Program Directors & Department Staff Graduate Assistantship Policies and Procedures manual, which is updated annually, provides further guidance.

Academic staff (as defined by NECHE) at RISD includes positions that support not only students, but also faculty. For the most part, students are advised by faculty. To further support advising activities, RISD has increased the professional advising staff from two to four in the

past several years (see details below in the section on advising). A role within Student Life, the Student Success project manager, is a master's level professional focusing on holistic advising, particularly for students who take leaves and/or incompletes. The college also added a full-time permanent instructional designer position in 2021 (more information about this position is in the following subsection). Academic staff participate in Human Resources's annual goal-setting and evaluation cycle in collaboration with their supervisors (see Standard 7). Professional development activities for academic staff are encouraged institutionally and supported by departmental budgets, with short-term paid time-off for professional development activities negotiated with individual supervisors.

The quality of instruction relies not only on the expertise of full- and part-time faculty in their respective fields, but also on the knowledge and experience of other instruction-related and -supporting academic staff. These positions include academic technicians who support student learning in RISD's diverse wood, metal, textiles, and other material-based making workshops, and can be placed in a department or in campus-wide units. The staff of larger academic resource centers on campus, specifically Fleet Library and the Edna W. Lawrence Nature Lab, regularly collaborate with teaching faculty to incorporate the work of those resource centers into student coursework. Academic activities are further supported by units such as RISD Careers, the Center for Arts & Language, Campus Exhibitions, RISD Global, Graduate Studies, and the Teaching & Learning Lab.

Appraisal

In the period between the 2021 interim report and Fall 2025, the number of full-time teaching faculty at RISD increased from 200 to 209; the increase in Fall 2025 can be attributed to the recent reduction of teaching units per faculty. Part-time faculty numbers had increased from 310 to a high of 317 in Fall 2023, before returning to 310 in Fall 2025. The student-to-faculty ratio has been steady for the past five years: 9:1 for FY 2022 and 8:1 since then. By contrast, the average for the Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design-affiliated peer group for 2024 was 11:1, and the national average 15:1 in 2024 (the most recent data available). All RISD faculty have at least a bachelor's degree, with the majority (63%) having a master's degree, which represents a terminal degree in most fields taught at RISD. Over half of the part-time lecturers and senior lecturers (52%) have earned a doctorate, demonstrating RISD's efforts to prioritize this level of education among new faculty. Furthermore, almost all full-time faculty in Liberal Arts hold doctorates (38 out of 40), which is unusual for art and design schools.

RISD continues to rely heavily on part-time faculty to teach approximately 60% of its classes, with just over 40% of classes taught by full-time faculty. Averages hover closer to 45% part-time to 55% full-time faculty overall in the national higher education landscape. Reliance on part-time faculty is a standard at RISD, and while this can have possible disadvantages, it is considered by several measures a strength of our academic program. Part-time faculty in the majors are by-and-large practicing professionals and scholars who bring deep disciplinary and practical experience, as well as connections in the field, to their courses. Hiring part-time faculty also allows department heads to meet emerging needs in their departments, hiring for targeted specialties quickly and nimbly while solutions to long-term coverage are considered.

The change in the faculty workload, from six to five teaching units, involved a lengthy process of deliberation among faculty and deans beginning in 2019 and was piloted in 2024–25 with the provision that, as part of the reduction, college service minimums would increase by five percent, and the remainder of teaching-unit time and effort would be rebalanced by faculty (in

conversation with their department head) to fulfill some combination of professional status, college service, and/or community engagement. The impact of this change will be assessed by the college moving forward.

Overall, RISD's recruitment and hiring of full-time critical review-track faculty follows a regulated and established process, led by the associate provost. However, practices for hiring part-time faculty could be more clear and consistent. With time pressures (often last-minute substitutions) and the small expert-specific labor pool of the Providence area, positions are often not posted and only the person who is recruited is aware of the opening. This leaves the dean as the main check on any selection or pay biases. Due to a reliance on personal/departmental/alum networks, this most often means the resulting hire is of similar demographics to those already in place within the department. While departments are provided with a tool to estimate pay rates for a potential faculty member, not all department heads use it adequately and there can be significant variance in starting pay both department to department or even department head to department head within a department. As a result, some part-time faculty with equal experience were hired at dramatically different wages depending on which department head hired them. In addition, per the Community and Culture Assessment report from 2024, 57% of part-time faculty respondents did not feel that the criteria for contract renewal were clear. If RISD is going to be competitive within this market, as well as internally equitable, increased standardization and greater oversight in regards to part-time faculty hiring will likely be key.

RISD has prioritized addressing educational gaps in social equity and inclusion through faculty recruitment initiatives, resulting in curricular expansion and expertise. Responses to these standards emerged out of 2020 campus-wide discussions that led to the July 2020 commitment to the Social Equity and Inclusion initiative. Some of these principles have also influenced revision of critical review and promotion standards in some divisions. The cluster hire initiative occurred as planned and the faculty recruitment office worked with the head of Social Equity and Inclusion to improve the search process. The success of these initiatives can be assessed to some degree by the current diversity data for full-time faculty members which reflects an increase in demographic diversity: from Fall 2021 to Fall 2024, the percentage of historically underrepresented groups increased from 22.5% to 24.5% of full-time faculty. Both of these initiatives focused on the recruitment and hiring of full-time faculty; the institution still has work to do in this area for part-time faculty and for the continuous work of retention and success associated with hiring at all levels.

The most recent Data Feedback Report (2024) from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System shows that RISD's faculty wages are in line with comparators at the entry rank for full-time faculty and that as rank increases, RISD's wages exceed comparators by greater margins. The Community and Culture Assessment report from 2024 noted that 19% of full-time faculty felt that wages were competitive, 61% felt that health benefits were competitive, and 51% felt that retirement benefits were competitive. There appears to be a disconnect between the perception of RISD's full-time faculty wages versus the data in comparison to other schools. This may stem from the fact that faculty at entry level do not appear to have significantly different wages than the average of our comparators and that those at the highest rank/longest tenure experience the greatest benefit. It may also be related to our proximity to Brown University, which has the pay structure (and the research expectations) of a Research 1/Ivy league institution and of which our faculty are aware.

The 2022–2025 full-time faculty collective bargaining agreement included changes to evaluation processes and materials, including frequency and timing of evaluation processes for post-critical

review faculty and streamlined evaluation forms. While faculty are advised about the materials that should make up their dossiers for promotion and critical review, the members of the Committee on Faculty Appointments rely on submitted recommendations from deans and department heads, who have more immediate knowledge of the candidates and their fields. The Liberal Arts Division has developed standardized guidelines for measuring professional status in its humanities and social science disciplines, which is shared with promotion and critical review candidates; a goal for the future is to develop similar standardized guidance for each of the academic divisions.

In FY 2025, faculty received approximately \$848K in funds for various professional development purposes. For that year, funding from Academic Affairs included: Professional Development Fund awarded \$390K, Full-Time Faculty Materials Fund awarded \$135K, Supplemental Materials fund awarded \$137K.

Table 6.1. Faculty Development Funds from Academic Affairs & Department/Divisions

	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Professional Development Fund (AA)	\$154,804	\$212,912	\$254,418	\$240,728	\$389,730
New Faculty Research & Development (AA)	\$4,500	\$3,000	\$40,000	\$80,000	\$45,000
Materials Fund (AA)	\$125,850	\$132,900	\$134,550	\$134,850	\$135,000
FTFA New Technologies (AA)	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000
Supplemental Materials Fund (AA)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$137,150	\$137,150
Conference Fund (AA)	\$2,191*	\$19,807*	\$73,389	\$74,152	\$94,061
Conference Funds from departments/divisions	\$2,293*	\$5,101*	\$25,847	\$17,681	\$37,406
TOTAL	\$299,638	\$383,720	\$538,204	\$694,561	\$848,347

* Travel impacted by COVID-19

The amount of funds provided to faculty from the above funds increased 183% from FY 2021 to FY 2025. A large increase was due to the New Faculty Research and Professional Development Fund, which now automatically provides \$5K to all new full-time critical review-track faculty, removing the application process. A second reason for the increase was the lingering impact of COVID-19 on travel in FY 2021 and FY 2022, as seen in the Conference Funds. Money from the two Conference Funds facilitates faculty presentations at conferences, artist talks, panels, and lectures. Academic Affairs Conference Fund grew from just over \$2K in FY 2021 to \$94K in FY 2025; faculty were also supported by their departments and divisions for conference-related expenses, which reached a high of \$37K in FY 2025. While RISD provides significant professional development funds and opportunities, traditionally a smaller cohort of faculty take advantage of them, partly due to lack of awareness. The school has been trying to increase visibility, most notably by promoting opportunities at new faculty orientation, and has seen improvement with newer faculty applying.

Support for graduate student teaching was enhanced in 2025 ahead of the 2026 Wintersession. Instead of directly submitting a course proposal to the Wintersession Subcommittee for approval, a graduate student interested in teaching must move through an initial vetting process, including completion of the first part of a syllabus writing workshop (which addresses

writing a course description and learning outcomes) and approval of the draft syllabus by the relevant graduate program director, before the proposal goes to the Wintersession Subcommittee. If approved by the subcommittee, the graduate student must then complete the second part of the syllabus workshop and submit the completed syllabus to Graduate Studies. (Students already completing the Collegiate Teaching Certificate Program are exempt from both parts of the syllabus workshop). A completed course syllabus then goes through the standard institutional course approval process. The introduction of these new steps in the development and approval process provide more consistent guidance, as well as increased support from graduate program directors.

Teaching and Learning

Description

RISD is a place-based, in-person institution. Even when COVID-19 required a shift to online learning from March 2020 to September 2020, the college worked throughout to plan for the safety protocols necessary to shift back to in-person learning in 2020–21. In-person learning is reflected in course learning formats and the techniques that faculty utilize in those courses. Studio courses, for example, emphasize the acquisition of material skills through iterative experimentation, class instruction, demonstrations, projects, site visits, and individual and group critiques. Liberal Arts courses, including lectures, seminars, labs, and workshops, emphasize the building of content knowledge, as well as literacy and analytical skills, through reading, writing, presentation, field trips, projects, and research.

RISD's mission highlights its focus on teaching: "to educate its students ... in the creation and appreciation of works of art and design." With its focus on education, the college places great importance on teaching effectiveness. RISD regularly conducts assessments focused on the effectiveness of instructional methods and the relevance of course content in relation to student learning, from individual faculty review to departmental program reviews to cross-divisional reflection.

Course evaluations completed by students are one means of collecting perceptions about an instructor's teaching effectiveness. Students are asked to fill out course evaluations for every class. Faculty members, department heads, and deans review student course evaluations in order to reflect upon the effectiveness of instruction; this occurs as part of all full-time faculty re-appointment reviews and part-time faculty collegial meetings.

Teaching effectiveness is also examined across the curriculum, at the program level. Many multiple-section courses are based on a shared syllabus that outlines common learning goals and outcomes; faculty are invited to adapt the syllabus to match their expertise and style. Some multi-section required studio courses, such as in Industrial Design, Graphic Design, and Architecture, also share core assignments. In the required first-year Theory and History of Art and Design courses (H101 and H102), faculty meet weekly to discuss shared assignments and curriculum. In Experimental and Foundation Studies, courses that are sequenced are taught by different faculty members in order to expose students to different pedagogical approaches. Faculty regularly meet at the start and end of the academic year to ensure consistency of learning objectives across the sections.

At the program level, the college has developed a framework for regularly assessing student learning outcomes and, as part of the Academic Planning and Review process, programs

document how they analyze their curriculum and assess student learning, looking for trends across courses and students. More information on such assessments and using results for improvements can be found in Standard 8.

Finally, the Social Equity and Inclusion Tagging Initiative is an example of a school-wide effort in reflective evaluation, developed in response to student feedback and peer benchmarking. RISD faculty and administration determined that the school needed to meet this essential academic and professional standard, both in relation to peer institutions and to fulfill its own mission and values. A committee of 10 faculty from across the four academic divisions developed a rubric to determine if a course could be tagged as a Social Equity and Inclusion-course. As of AY 2025–26, all programs have either completed the Social Equity and Inclusion tagging process and have designated at least one course to meet this requirement (14 out of 16 undergraduate programs) or are in the process of finalizing this designation.

Critical thinking and innovation are noted in the college's mission statement; the college provides support to its faculty and staff to help fulfill the mission. The current strategic plan, *Next: RISD 2020-2027*, identifies promoting innovative teaching as a priority and highlights RISD's Teaching & Learning Lab as critical to this effort. The lab, established in 2020 and with social equity and inclusion as a core value, offers a Decolonial Teaching in Action seminar, as well as workshops, one-on-one mentoring and consultation sessions, tools, reference materials, and resources. The Teaching & Learning Lab is open to full- and part-time faculty, librarians, archivists, and curators (and staff when space allows).

In 2021, RISD hired an instructional designer, who is 100% full-time equivalent in the Teaching & Learning Lab, to provide institutional support related to the use of Canvas, RISD's learning management system; this position has since been promoted to senior instructional designer. This staff member offers workshops on technology platforms used by faculty and current topics, including, for example, a regular faculty institute on "Critical Thinking and Making with AI." The Teaching & Learning Lab was awarded a Davis Foundation Grant in 2025 to implement models of inclusive critique across the college and offer new paradigms of pedagogical assessments for art and design institutions.

Otherwise, RISD's Faculty Mentorship Program pairs new faculty with mentors outside of their department. And approximately 20 Liberal Arts faculty have taken part in a four-week Teaching Multilingual Learners training, including instructors of language-intensive sections of courses required in the first year: a Theory and History of Art and Design course (H101) and the literature seminar (E101).

The current strategic plan includes a strategic priority on advising. For undergraduate students, full-time faculty provide a net of comprehensive academic advising from first year through graduation. In the fall of their first year, each student is assigned a faculty advisor who is also one of their professors in Experimental and Foundation Studies. In the spring of the first year, each student is assigned a Liberal Arts faculty advisor, who provides guidance on Liberal Arts-related distribution requirements at a critical time just before and after students enter their majors. The First-Year Liberal Arts Advisor, a new position as of Fall 2024, provides holistic advising support, particularly to first-generation, Pell-eligible, and BIPOC students.

Once in a major department, every student at RISD is assigned an academic advisor from that department, who will remain the student's major advisor until graduation. Faculty advisors meet regularly with the student, guide the student toward successfully completing their program, and

offer mentorship and referrals. If a student is also completing courses for one of the college's concentrations, they have an additional advisor specifically for the concentration. Overall, the college has put an emphasis on advising by creating a new annual program that dedicates two days (during which classes do not meet) specifically for advising.

Graduate advising is conducted between the student and their department's graduate program director, who is a full-time faculty in their respective department. In the thesis stage of their program, students choose a committee chair and advisors who provide guidance specific to the master's thesis project and written component.

New faculty are introduced to advising resources and structures during new faculty orientation and receive further orientation from their department heads and deans. Guidelines for advising are published in the Faculty Handbook. Divisions are currently producing advising guides to reflect changes from the shift to the 120-credit bachelor's degree. These materials include: the Liberal Arts Advising Handbook, Experimental and Foundation Studies Advising Handbook, and, in the Architecture and Design division, a credit calculator to help students keep track of their credits, as well as an advisor script with key steps and reminders organized by advisee's year in the major.

In its mission, the college states that it promotes education, knowledge, and contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation. In addition, *NEXT: RISD 2020–2027* situates faculty research—defined broadly at RISD to include creative practice, scholarship, and sponsored projects—as one of three pillars upon which the institution will focus its growth and development. Academic Affairs provides an umbrella of opportunities for faculty and students to take part in research and progress in their scholarly pursuits, overseen by the assistant provost for Academic Engagement.

Research-related services include funding searches, proposal development and submission, budgeting and financial monitoring, award negotiation and management, regulatory compliance, among others. Faculty use grants and fellowships to engage in interdisciplinary, scholarly inquiry and research, to advance their creative practices, to pilot curricular innovations such as co-teaching and interdepartmental curriculum projects, and for publishing and presenting at conferences. The college maintains an Institutional Review Board registration with the federal government. The assistant provost for Academic Engagement manages the process for human subject research reviews in partnership with the University of Rhode Island's Office of Research Integrity, which provides consultation and training to RISD researchers, in addition to providing Institutional Review Board services.

Research fellowships, a category of employment developed by Academic Affairs and Human Resources, are full-time, term-limited appointments for focused engagement in areas of expertise not represented in current faculty and staff. These fellowships make it possible for RISD to be more nimble and targeted in staffing its academic programs.

Other units supporting research include Academic and Creative Partnerships, which connects RISD to partner organizations across the broader worlds of art, design and scholarship; the Edna W. Lawrence Nature Lab, which supports biological and biodesign research and teaching using its unique collection of living and non-living specimens, as well as microscopy and advanced imaging tools; the RISD Museum, which provides support for research opportunities through faculty research fellowships in specific museum departments (Prints, Drawings, and Photographs; Costume and Textiles; and Decorative Arts and Design); and the Fleet Library

supports faculty research through individual consultation across all operational and collecting areas.

In regard to academic freedom, Article V of the Full-Time Faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement affirms that RISD faculty and librarians are “entitled to full freedom in research and creative work and in the publication and exhibition of the results.” This freedom extends to the classroom, with the exception of introducing controversial subjects that are not relevant to coursework, which is detailed further in RISD’s Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment Policy & Procedures. The college issued a Political Activity Policy in 2024 that outlines how a nonprofit organization may or may not engage in partisan initiatives and how RISD complies by all regulations related to political activity for a 501.c.3 institution.

Appraisal

The Liberal Arts Division has implemented new means to ensure the highest quality of education across its multi-section courses. In 2023, the division developed a new faculty role called “coordinator” for each of its required, multi-section courses: H101, H102, E101, and S101 (shifted to S301 starting with the 2025 cohort). With the development of these coordinator roles, the division now supports a process of regular review that ensures increased consistency among sections, while still providing exposure to different academic strengths and viewpoints. Otherwise, after several years of intermittent and isolated efforts, Liberal Arts as a whole instituted formal assessment of its first-year program, beginning in AY 2024–25 (discussed in Standard 8).

Excerpts from selected departmental self-studies (as part of the Academic Planning and Review process, described in Standard 4), as well as their semesterly reports on student learning outcomes, address program changes that demonstrate responsive growth of both method and content based on evidence from assessments. Many examples of departmental reflections demonstrate the rigor with which departments examine whether their students are achieving or surpassing the outcomes set forth in the department, in addition to the ways in which they shift their courses and/or teaching delivery methods to help students where they are struggling. In Ceramics, faculty discuss installation methods in more depth. In the History, Philosophy and the Social Sciences department, faculty further emphasize citation. In Literary Arts and Studies, adjustments were made to the reading comprehension outcome to put reading comprehension at the forefront. In Printmaking, faculty endeavor to provide more directed prompts in course projects.

With the Social Equity and Inclusion Tagging Initiative, the school has exhibited the ability to both acknowledge and address areas for improvement. The effectiveness of these classes, like all classes, will be regularly reviewed to assure that they are fulfilling their intended focus; these assessments will begin with the class of 2027, the first cohort for which they will be required.

RISD offers a myriad of resources and structures to foster reflection and encourage experimentation to improve instruction. Two of the Teaching & Learning Lab’s offerings have been especially well attended: the Decolonial Teaching in Action seminar, and the three-day workshops on AI and pedagogy. Since the Decolonial Teaching in Action seminar began in Spring 2020, 70 faculty members, each granted a course release, have participated.

The Teaching & Learning Lab works with a broad network of institutional partners to provide support to faculty, develop new resources, and offer training and learning opportunities that address the post-COVID-19 in-person teaching and learning environment; meet the needs and

learning goals of academic departments; and integrate the instructional techniques and materials that are unique to RISD. Resources and initiatives include working with the RISD Museum and the Fleet Library on workshops (e.g., “Teaching with Collections”); asynchronous guides and modules on information literacy, object-based, and place-based learning; partnering with the Center for Community Partnerships on community-based courses and projects; and day-to-day close collaboration with Information Technology Services and Disability Support Services to provide training for faculty to improve the accessibility of course materials and integrate digital tools in the Canvas learning management system in order to facilitate student engagement with course materials and activities in line with Universal Design for Learning principles. Under new leadership (the associate provost) as of summer 2025, the Teaching & Learning Lab is poised to further refine its offerings and make faculty participation more accessible. Examples of these expanded faculty learning opportunities include: the RISD Faculty Summer Institute on Critical Thinking & Making with AI, a multi-part series called Tools for Critique, the three-art workshop Crit for All: Supporting Black Voices in the Studio, Syllabus Swap: Strategies for Inclusive Teaching, and the first issue of a Teaching & Learning Lab newsletter.

In response to student concerns and recommendations from past accreditation reviews, RISD has invested significant resources to assess and improve advising. Data from a 2023 survey points to advising as an ongoing area of concern. As part of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), first-year students and graduating seniors are invited to complete the optional advising module. Regarding the frequency with which students spoke with someone in an advising role (academic advisors, faculty, peer advisors/mentors, student support staff), first-year students at RISD spoke less often than the average for the comparison group. In contrast, RISD seniors reported talking with someone in an advising role more often than respondents in the comparison group (although scores still ranged from 0.4 to 2.1 on a five-point scale). For senior undergraduate respondents, the “quality of interactions with academic advisors” remained one of the areas in which RISD performed lower compared to the Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design peers.

Since the last NSSE survey was conducted in 2023, several initiatives have been implemented to improve academic advising in systemic ways, including an adjusted timeline for Liberal Arts advising to facilitate course selection and fulfillment of distribution requirements, the assignment of a Liberal Arts advisor to transfer students for their entire sophomore year (i.e., their first year as a RISD student), the institution of two advising days to facilitate one-on-one advising between faculty and their advisees, and a college-wide system of accountability in the form of advising holds from major advisors before students can register for classes. The survey feedback from the inaugural advising days in October 2025 was vastly positive from both students and full-time faculty. RISD will assess the other changes in the coming year.

The college has also proactively increased the breadth and depth of training and materials that full-time faculty receive for advising. The Experimental and Foundation Studies Division has implemented an advising script and notes system meant to guide advisors on how to address and record student concerns. In addition to the comprehensive handbook noted in the description, Liberal Arts created at-a-glance advising handouts for students and advisors in Spring 2025 and has since distributed an overview of Liberal Arts requirements for major advisors. Finally, Academic Affairs (in collaboration with the academic departments) is working on updating and expanding a centralized advising website as a place to collect advising resources and materials. The changes being made provide opportunities for faculty development, as well as a chance for a shift in culture where advising is more visible and

credible. This is especially true because the adjustment with faculty teaching one fewer teaching unit was meant specifically to support faculty advising efforts and initiatives.

A growing ecosystem of staff support further augments the work of faculty advisors. Academic Affairs added a new associate provost position in July 2025, who oversees RISD's advising network with the imperative to develop campus-wide advising initiatives. This includes a long-standing network of academic specialists who regularly audit student progress. For example, the senior academic specialist in the Liberal Arts reviews all juniors in the spring and seniors in the fall to alert them to any outstanding Liberal Arts requirements. The Student Success project manager (as part of Student Life) offers pathfinding support for students throughout their time at RISD, especially around processes like academic probation and taking/returning from a leave of absence. Starting in AY 2025, this position is overseeing a new pilot program of peer mentors, who will help direct students to appropriate offices and resources on campus.

Advising for first-generation students continues to grow. The first-year academic advisors in Experimental and Foundation Studies and Liberal Arts, while providing academic support for first-year students, also offer mentorship for all first-generation students throughout their time at RISD.

Beginning in 2023, the college coordinated efforts to annually collect, analyze, and report data related to RISD's college-wide research activity for the NSF Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) Survey for the first time. Based on the two HERD surveys completed so far, RISD has expended \$5.66 million in FY 2023 and \$5.13 million in FY 2024 outside of the operating budget for research activities, which reflects a high level of support for research in its various forms; the FY 2025 survey will be completed in Spring 2026. Faculty, academic staff, and students are successful in obtaining funds from competitive opportunities to undertake research, scholarship, partnerships, and creative activities that reflect the level and nature of the degrees awarded. These successes are especially impressive given the size of RISD's student, faculty, and staff populations and are reflected by RISD's inclusion by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education under its new designation for research activity.

To support internal grants, RISD has onboarded an internal grants management system, InfoReady, to provide faculty, librarians, and museum curators with funding opportunities and application portals. A new grants management software for tracking award activity was implemented in 2025. Overhead distribution policies, approved by the Deans Council and the President's Cabinet in Fall 2018, are now reviewed and updated annually. And in 2021, Human Resources' guide for research fellow positions was developed.

In addition to the above resources and opportunities for faculty to develop research and scholarship, changes to faculty workload are expected to positively impact work in these areas. In the 2016 self-study, the six-course teaching load was specifically identified as restricting faculty time for scholarship, research, and creative practice. Presently, it is too early to determine the impact of these changes. It is also important to note that part-time faculty across the campus are consistently producing research, scholarship, and creative activities, as seen in publications and other professional activities highlighted in the Faculty News newsletter. Additional support mechanisms and provision of time specifically for part-time faculty should go hand-in-hand with any plan to increase support for scholarship, research, and creative activities for faculty through a reduced course load. It is important to note that part-time faculty at RISD are eligible for sabbaticals.

Projections

The associate provost is currently working with representatives of the Part-Time Faculty Association on delineating contract renewal processes and clarity of hiring guidelines. These are to be implemented as we enter the negotiation process for the Collective Bargaining Agreement for the Part-time Faculty Association to be finalized in 2026 to cover 2026–29. This position will also spearhead efforts in exploring how to increase support for scholarship, research, and creative activities among part-time faculty.

Deans and department heads will examine meaningful ways to provide more consistency in the evaluation process across divisions. They will be able to review the work already undertaken by the Liberal Arts division in developing standardized guidelines to determine practices that might be appropriate for their respective division and its disciplines.

The associate provost and the Teaching & Learning Lab will continue to implement methods to increase faculty engagement in professional development opportunities at the college. They have already undertaken changes in adding this topic to new faculty orientation and have seen increased interest. They will further explore additional means to raise the awareness of funding across all faculty.

The Social Equity and Inclusion Faculty Steering Committee will develop the means to assess the effectiveness of courses that have received the Social Equity and Inclusion tag. Fall 2027 is the first cohort to have this new requirement; assessments will begin in Spring 2028.

Academic Affairs and the associate provost will evaluate changes made to advising processes across the college, including peer success mentors; the more formalized transitions during the first year from the Experimental and Foundation Studies faculty advisor to the Liberal Arts faculty advisor; and the addition of two advising days. Evaluation methods will include gathering feedback from students and from faculty, to begin in Fall 2026, and reviewing student success metrics (such as graduation rates) beginning in 2026–27.

Academic Affairs, specifically deans and department heads, are evaluating the impact of workload rebalance, especially in regards to advising responsibilities, research/scholarship, and, more technically, the definitions used across departments to calculate teaching units and credit loads for faculty. The evaluation is being incorporated into processes already described in the Full-Time Faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement, with analysis to be completed over the next three academic years.

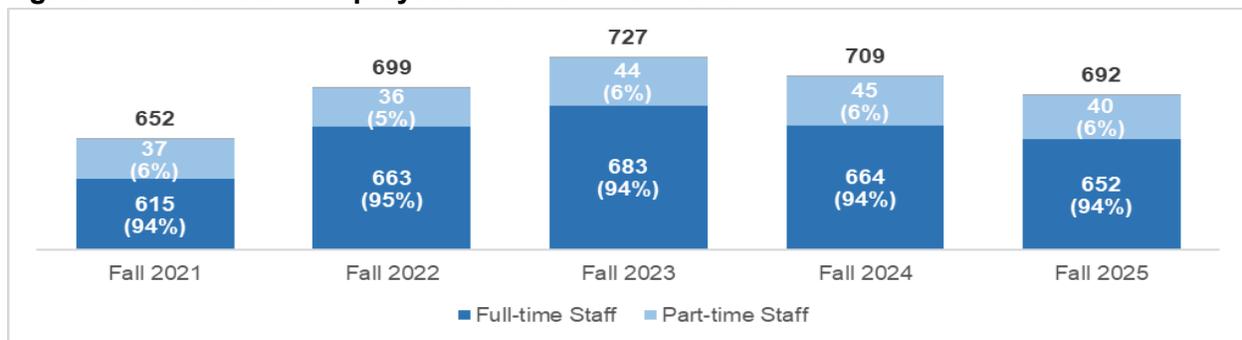
Standard Seven: Institutional Resources

Human Resources

Description

RISD employs a substantial number of full-time and part-time personnel whose contributions are essential to advancing the college's educational and creative mission. In Fall 2025, RISD had 652 (94%) full-time staff employees and 40 (6%) part-time staff (data on faculty are provided in Standard 6).

Figure 7.1. RISD Staff Employees: Fall 2021-Fall 2025



The institution operates within a complex labor environment that includes nine collective bargaining agreements, alongside institutional policies that guide practices for non-union employees. In all, 45% percent of positions across the college are unionized; approximately 79% of union members are in Academic Affairs, mostly faculty. In any given year, the college is negotiating with multiple unions.

Human Resources plays a central role in aligning employment practices with RISD's broader strategic goals by ensuring that policies and processes are equitable, transparent, and supportive of a diverse community. The college has a comprehensive process in place to ensure that positions are filled by qualified people whose work enables the college to fulfill its mission. The long-standing Position Review Committee (PRC), which meets regularly to evaluate new position and modification requests, was reviewed and modified in two major ways in 2023–24. To ensure efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness in line with the college's strategic plans and daily operations, some jobs were designated as critical and thus eligible for a fast-track process (though this option may be suspended as needed when there is a hiring pause), and managers were retrained on the process and new training materials made available.

In the highly competitive job market of New England, the college recognizes the need to attract and retain qualified administrators, faculty, and staff with appropriate compensation and benefits. Human Resources conducts a market analysis on all open positions on an as-needed basis to ensure we offer a competitive hiring range. In 2023, in light of the enactment of the Rhode Island Pay Equity Act, the college engaged a third-party vendor to conduct a pay equity analysis and update its job grade structure, which now provides more transparent pay ranges for employees, in support of social equity and inclusion. In 2023, the college also set an internal minimum hourly rate for permanent personnel (if permitted by their collective bargaining agreement) at \$20/hr, exceeding both Rhode Island and federal minimum wage requirements.

Human Resources introduced a new onboarding program in Fall 2024 designed to smoothly transition new hires in their first 12 months by cultivating a supportive environment that encourages growth and development; this new program enacts President Williams' "Cultivate" theme as related to staff development. At the beginning of onboarding, all employees receive information about the terms of employment in their offer letter (staff) or contract (faculty). Additionally, all employees have additional training on the terms of employment, including harassment prevention training.

Human Resources's policies are available to all employees online. The community is notified of new policies, and in 2024 the college implemented community feedback periods before the policies take effect. Grievance processes for employees are covered by a collective bargaining agreement for each union. The college also has a Staff Problem Resolution policy designed to provide non-bargaining unit employees with a grievance method.

The college has a comprehensive set of procedures to ensure regular evaluation of employees. Staff take part in an annual performance review process, which includes goal setting, a mid-year check-in, and a review at the end of the fiscal year. Resources for both staff and managers are available online for each step of this review process. For faculty and librarians, the evaluation and critical review process is in the collective bargaining agreement and outlines specific processes and timeframes for review (see Standard 6 for more information on faculty review).

To foster professional growth, RISD offers reduced or no tuition for RISD Continuing Education courses and an educational assistance benefit (up to \$2,500 per fiscal year, applicable towards college courses and professional certifications) for faculty and staff after one year of employment. Additionally, the Rhode Island Higher Education Training Consortium provides RISD employees various local professional development opportunities at no cost to the employee. Professional development funds are included in department and unit budgets. (See Standard 6 for details on faculty professional development).

As an Equal Opportunity Employer, RISD includes language in its job postings affirming its commitment to diversity and excellence. RISD emphasizes the importance of creating a diverse workforce, starting with cultivating a diverse and qualified talent pool. Talent acquisition partners work with hiring managers to develop an advertising and sourcing strategy that includes identifying diversity websites and using venues that cater to underrepresented groups, such as professional organizations. A collaborative hiring approach incorporates search committees to ensure multiple perspectives are considered when evaluating candidates. RISD also provides training to hiring managers and search committees on minimizing the influence of bias and assumptions in the recruitment process.

Appraisal

RISD has continued to make improvements in processes for hiring. The Position Review Committee (PRC) has reviewed over 1,000 requests from managers since 2021, with 323 staff hired. Feedback on the effectiveness of the PRC process varies. Some managers have noted that hiring is slow and disrupts both the quality and timeliness of critical services for students and others. Leadership has responded to that feedback with adjustments to better meet the pace of operations. The onboarding program, while new, has received positive feedback from the community.

In the Community and Culture Assessment survey, both staff and faculty noted compensation as an opportunity for improvement. The college was already in the process of making changes to the salary structure when the survey was conducted. Staff also noted that the performance review process and opportunities for development could be improved and evaluation completion

rates for staff have declined in recent years. Human Resources provided new guidance and training materials on effective performance conversations in 2025, but data is not yet available whether the new training yielded higher participation rates. Finally, employees and managers have expressed concern about employees taking on work above and beyond their job descriptions and without compensation. Human Resources will release a new stipend process in 2026 to inform managers about mechanisms for compensating employees for extra work.

New positions have been created to address specific areas of need. A new policy administrator was hired in FY 2025. This person ensures that the Policy Advisory Group meets regularly and that a backlog of policy reviews moves forward. (More information on college policies is provided in Standard 9.) Additionally, in 2023 Human Resources created a position dedicated to raising social equity and inclusion awareness among employees. As of July 2025, this position was elevated as part of the centralized Social Equity and Inclusion division.

Financial Resources

Description

RISD's Finance and Administration Division stewards the institution's financial resources in direct support of its educational mission. The senior vice president for Finance and Administration leads a comprehensive team across two offices: the Financial Planning and Strategy Office, which conducts continuous institutional budget evaluation to align resources and academic priorities, and the Controller's Office, which integrates procurement and treasury functions to manage daily financial operations. This division conducts regular debt capacity assessments, maintains active relationships with credit rating agencies, and thoroughly evaluates the financial implications of all strategic institutional decisions.

Table 7.1. Budget vs. Actual Results: FY 2021 - FY 2026

	FY 2021		FY 2022		FY 2023		FY 2024		FY 2025		FY 2026	
	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual*								
Revenues	\$134.4M	\$128.2M	\$161.0M	\$160.3M	\$173.3M	\$171.9M	\$175.2M	\$171.9M	\$182.4M	\$180.8M	\$189.2M	\$188.0M
Expenses	\$147.7M	\$135.9M	\$161.0M	\$156.4M	\$170.3M	\$175.0M	\$176.7M	\$172.0M	\$182.8M	\$179.9M	\$188.7M	\$189.3M
Margin	-\$13.3M	-\$7.6M	0	\$3.9M	\$3.0M	-\$3.1M	-\$1.6M	-\$0.1M	-\$0.4M	\$0.9M	\$328K	-\$1.3M

* As of January 2026

Finance and Administration maintains multi-year projections and cash planning processes that undergo annual review, by both the President's Cabinet and the Board of Trustees. Financial stability monitoring enables responsive adjustments to market conditions, higher education sector developments, and evolving institutional priorities. In particular, the Treasury Office generates quarterly five-year cash projections that complement annual planning cycles, while Workday delivers comprehensive actual-versus-budget monthly reporting across all institutional units. This integrated approach supports dynamic resource allocation through systematic annual evaluation processes that determine optimal funding retention, elimination, or reallocation for institutional priorities.

Throughout the fiscal year, regular financial performance reviews by the president and senior vice president for Finance and Administration include quarterly budget assessments and financial statement analysis, while the Academic Budgets and Resources Office performs multiple annual departmental reviews to confirm budget performance and program

requirements. The annual budget development process launches each January. The senior vice president collaborates with cabinet leadership on enrollment and all revenue-based financial projections, while department heads, deans, and operational managers work directly with Financial Planning and Strategy staff on detailed departmental (expense) analysis. Additionally, the director of Academic Budgets and Planning conducts comprehensive current-year budget and operations reviews with each academic department to verify performance metrics and assess program needs. Financial Planning and Strategy prepares the initial budget workbooks utilizing Workday's Adaptive Planning software. Following departmental submissions, senior financial leadership, including the senior vice president for Finance and Administration and assistant vice president for Financial Strategy and Planning, conduct thorough review meetings with cabinet members before performing holistic budget analysis to ensure alignment with institutional goals and the expectations of the Board of Trustees. Operational and capital contingency budgets address unforeseen circumstances, with final budget presentation to the Board occurring in the spring for formal approval.

Per its bylaws, the Board ensures the institution is well-managed, fiscally sound, and ethically operated by overseeing the institution's endowment, and reviewing and approving the annual budget, the annual audit and tax returns, institution ethics and conflict of interest policies, salary increases, and tuition, fees, and room-and-board rates. The Board's Stewardship and Sustainability Committee reviews the proposed annual budget, as well as any changes to the endowment spending calculation and capital budget, before the full Board at the May/June meeting. RISD's revenues are highly tuition-dependent; Board budget discussions regularly consider affordability and the amount and rate of financial aid, approving any tuition and fee increases at the February meeting. The president and the senior vice president for Finance and Administration, in coordination with the Budget Office, present to the Stewardship and Sustainability Committee their recommendation for the upcoming academic year's tuition and fee pricing, including various pricing scenarios and competitor tuition analysis. RISD's audited financials are issued annually.

The Board's Audit Committee has the authority to approve the selection of an independent auditing firm or to empower the senior vice president for Finance and Administration to do so. The Controller's Office is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of consolidated financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the US, with verification, by an external auditor, provided to the college's Audit Committee. A separate audit of the pension 403(b) plan is completed and also presented to the Audit Committee annually. Audited financials along with Board-approved budgets, enrollment data, debt covenants, and strategic initiatives are used to support RISD's credit standing with Moody's and with Fitch rating agencies and other financial institutions that provide our line of credit and debt management. Up until FY 2024, RISD's auditors had been Baker Tilley. After sending out an RFP for external auditors, in May 2025 the Board approved CBIZ as RISD's auditors effective for the FY 2025 reporting cycle.

Senior management prioritizes transparency and regular communication surrounding RISD's financial standing. Financial progress and updates are shared with the RISD community at quarterly administrative managers meetings and at presentations (informally called "road shows") given by the senior vice president for Finance and Administration, the vice president for Enrollment Management, and the provost. There were more than 20 of these held in FY 2024 and FY 2025. Email communications are sent to the RISD community from the president and/or senior vice president for Finance and Administration with financial updates, such as tuition rate changes and salary increases, as well as updates on RISD's financial state and strategic

initiatives. The RISD website also includes important financial updates and audited financial statements.

Institutional Advancement

Institutional Advancement cultivates and stewards relationships with RISD’s alums, parents, and students, as well as individuals, foundations, and corporations outside the institution, and encourages them to financially support the college. A new Vice President for Institutional Advancement, hired in February 2024, oversees an annual fundraising plan and a five-year campaign/initiative plan. Fundraising metrics, goals, and targets for both are shared with the Division of Finance and Administration, the Board of Trustees, and the Board subcommittees of Advancement and Reputation and Stewardship and Sustainability.

Appraisal

Since beginning implementation of the seven-year strategic plan in Spring 2019, RISD has made considerable progress toward its goals. A multi-year budget plan was developed in alignment with the *NEXT: RISD 2020–2027* strategic plan to ensure that base budgets were increased or that funds were reallocated or raised to support strategic initiatives. The final document guided decision-making, the prioritization of initiatives, and the allocation of financial and human resources. Additional accomplishments include increased scholarship funding, funding for faculty and program/research development, diversity initiatives, and improvements to information technology infrastructure.

The need to become a more financially sustainable institution has guided the Finance team in developing recent operating budgets. In preparing the FY 2025 budget, cabinet members and their staff had numerous meetings to understand departmental needs and ensure the creation of a more robust and accurate financial plan. Based on a June 2024 resolution, we were able to eliminate 48 staff positions, 43 of which were vacant positions. For FY 2026, several divisions (such as Academic Affairs and Facilities) were restructured, resulting in an additional 10 positions eliminated, including two newly-vacant vice president positions. Additionally, we were able to achieve additional savings through re-examining operating efficiencies, such as instituting stronger adherence to current existing policies and request-for-proposal procedures in the Procurement Office.

For each academic year, Enrollment Management sets enrollment projections for incoming students and for total enrollment. For the past five years, RISD has, with few exceptions, met or exceeded its enrollment targets. If the target for a total was not met, it was within one percentage point of the goal.

Table 7.2. Enrollment Projections, Actuals, and % of Goal Met: Fall 2021-Fall 2025

	Fall 2021			Fall 2022			Fall 2023			Fall 2024			Fall 2025		
	Proj.	Act.	% of Goal												
Incoming															
First-Year	486	496	102%	485	481	99%	500	504	101%	520	518	100%	540	548	102%
Transfer	24	26	108%	14	14	100%	48	41	85%	45	43	96%	40	49	123%
Graduate	260	266	102%	198	193	98%	198	195	99%	210	207	99%	200	207	104%
Total Incoming	770	788	102%	697	688	99%	746	740	99%	775	768	99%	780	804	103%

All Students															
Undergrad.	2,024	2,044	101%	2,119	2,108	100%	2,080	2,090	101%	2,100	2,084	99%	2,150	2,173	101%
Graduate	521	532	102%	512	512	100%	450	448	100%	440	433	98%	435	443	102%
Total Enrollment	2,545	2,576	101%	2,631	2,620	100%	2,530	2,538	100%	2,540	2,517	99%	2,585	2,616	101%

Over the past four enrollment cycles, we have increased first-year enrollment targets by 20 students annually, primarily in response to financial pressures from rising budgetary expenses and our high tuition dependence. RISD's strong market position allows us to grow enrollment while maintaining a competitive acceptance rate (23% for FY 2026) and sustainable discount rate (23% for FY 2026). Importantly, we continue to achieve strong retention (93-94%) and graduation rates (89-92%), demonstrating that enrollment growth has not compromised student success. RISD consistently achieves enrollment goals because it has been conservative in growing the size of the first-year class, something highly dependent on limited available space and options for utilization.

Graduate enrollment presents greater challenges due to higher financial aid expectations. Over the past four years, we have become more strategic about net tuition realization, leading to more modest graduate cohort sizes. We are particularly attentive this year (FY 2026) to evolving federal regulations affecting international students, which may significantly impact graduate enrollment given that international students currently comprise 48% of our graduate programs.

Because of the college's enrollment goals and consistently meeting them, for most years the college has been able to accurately project revenues from tuition and fees. Recent changes in the higher education landscape have necessitated unexpected adjustments. For the current fiscal year (FY 2026), the college's original budget showed a surplus of \$328,000. This expected surplus was partly the result of an additional \$1.2 million in tuition, the result of exceeding our enrollment projection for that year (2,616 enrolled compared to 2,585 goal). After its development, the FY 2026 budget was negatively impacted by the following three changes: funds for financial aid had to be increased because of the unexpected higher acceptance of students with financial need; expenses increased because of tariff changes; and while RISD donors gave at a higher level than expected, more funds than expected were restricted, with less funds therefore available for the operating budget. Although major changes related to government policy could not have been anticipated ahead of the FY 2026 budget, we have recognized that stewarding our finances responsibly must take these adjustments into account when we plan for future fiscal years.

While its revenues are tuition-heavy, RISD has maintained a lower percent of revenues generated by tuition and fees than its IPEDS comparison group (66% compared to 79% for the IPEDS peer institution group in FY 2024, the most recent year for comparison data). The college has developed or continued to enhance several other revenue streams beyond the current tuition and fees paid by degree-seeking students. Two new BFA programs were created, with enrollments starting in 2025: Art and Computation and Sound. The college has projected enrollments across these two programs at 16 students for each of the first three years. These new programs have not required additional funds, as they are drawing from resources that currently exist because of courses and concentrations already in place. Fall 2025 also marks RISD's inaugural year for First Year in Florence, an option for students that is modeled on RISD's Experimental and Foundation Studies curriculum and that allows RISD to expand its

student body while maintaining its current campus footprint. Our enrollment goals for the Florence program were 20 students for fall and a different cohort of 20 students for spring. We successfully met our fall goal with 20 students and are on track to exceed our spring target with 23 students enrolled.

Continuing Education's gross revenues have not only rebounded since the initial impact of COVID-19 but now exceed pre-pandemic levels. Gross revenues had previously reached a peak of \$6.1 million for FY 2019. Since the drop to \$4 million in FY 2021, gross revenues first exceeded pre-pandemic levels in FY 2023, and then continued to increase by 87% from FY 2021 to FY 2025 (\$8.1 million, exceeding the unit's goal for that fiscal year). Net revenues grew from FY 2021 to FY 2025 by 166%: from \$1.1 million to \$3.1 million. A significant portion of this growth is attributable to the expansion of the youth Pre-College summer programs, which increased from \$1.7 million in FY 2022 to \$4.5 million in FY 2025. Continuing Education will further strengthen its contribution to the college's operating budget through new initiatives, including year-round in-person programming, additional adult opportunities through summer intensives, and new custom programs. The ongoing expansion of Continuing Education's offerings offsets the closing of the Executive Education branch of the larger unit in 2024. Based on a thorough review of the investment needed to develop appropriate curricula and the change in demand from corporations, it was determined that it would have been fiscally detrimental in the existing higher education context to continue building the Executive Education unit.

Under the leadership of the senior vice president for Finance and Administration, RISD has built a new, all-funds financial model, which will allow for strengthened cash management and forecasting, assist in the annual budget process, and ensure that departments are accounting for restricted funds that could be used to alleviate the institution's reliance on operating funds. The college has demonstrated its ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances by strategically rethinking the way the institution budgets and prioritizes its resources. For example, in FY 2021, many higher education institutions experienced financial hardship stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, including RISD. To minimize the impact, RISD worked together as a community to reduce a budget deficit of \$22 million to \$13 million through reductions in salaries, support budgets, capital budgets, strategic investment funds, and reserves. RISD refinanced \$55 million of debt and received federal relief funding for institutional operations. The FY 2021 year-end budget deficit was reduced to \$7.6 million. Collective efforts across the institution in FY 2024, including an ongoing examination of institutional policies for travel, procurement and credit card use, reviving oversight committees, and the improved Position Review Committee process led to a budget with a surplus of almost \$1 million for FY 2025.

In FY 2022, RISD completed a private placement fixed-rate restructuring that eliminated all of its outstanding variable rate debt and swap obligations and also recently renegotiated an increase and longer duration for its unsecured line of credit to be prepared in case of crisis. Moody's (A1) and Fitch (A+) credit ratings allow us to assume more debt if necessary. As a result, RISD maintains a less risky debt structure.

Institutional Advancement

After a year of staff transition, new leadership has positioned the Institutional Advancement team to be more effective in the coming years, with renewed focus on expanding the donor pipeline, enhanced engagement and solicitation activities, and restructuring of the annual giving program to grow unrestricted support. Strong annual goals and five-year campaign goals have been set for Institutional Advancement. Additionally, Institutional Advancement analyzed all roles and functions and reassessed staffing needs in the current context. Under the former vice

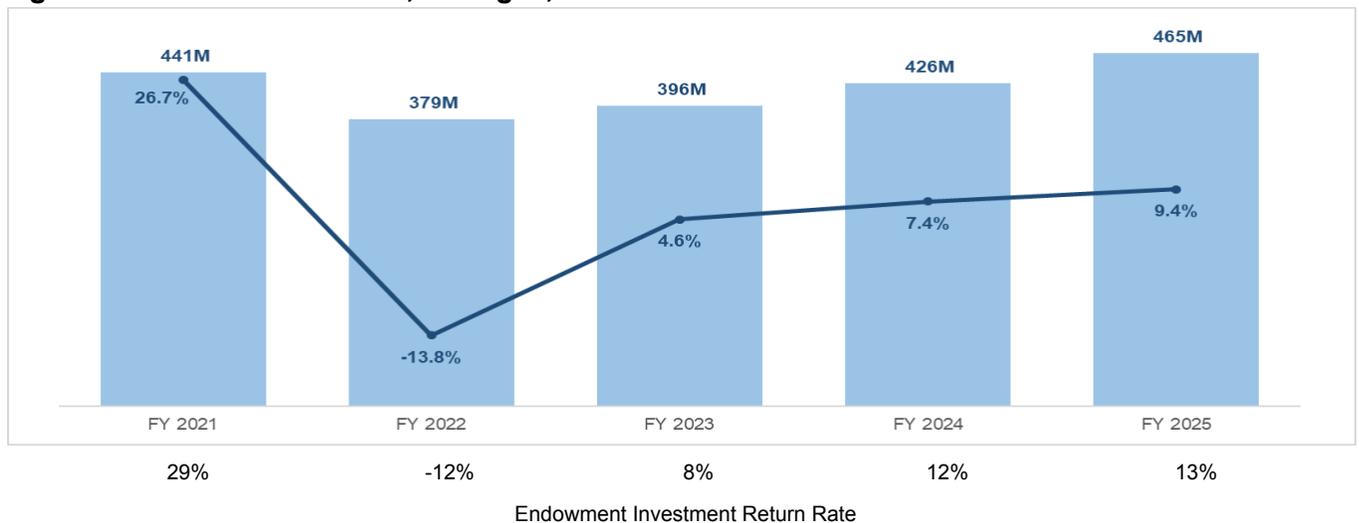
president’s strategy, staffing reached a high of about 70–75 positions. With a current staff of about 45 positions, Institutional Advancement has been effective in streamlining the team while still raising return on investment.

Over the past year, RISD has partnered with CCS Fundraising to analyze giving data and help us develop an appropriate fundraising plan for the next 3–5 years, including a capital campaign, expansion of donor pipeline, and the possibility for greater giving by current donors. We created a Campaign Design Committee, including Board members, alums, and parent donors. This committee has deepened our understanding of potential donor networks.

Institutional Advancement’s campaign goal is to raise \$150 million in the campaign period FY 2025–FY 2030. A “Quiet”/Initiative Phase (FY 2025–FY 2027) will focus on principal and major gifts, emphasizing fundraising for student access and student experience, targeting a goal of \$70–\$100 million by the close of FY 2027. The campaign launch and implementation (FY 2028–FY 2030) will broaden the campaign in alignment with the strategic plan to achieve the full \$150 million target by FY 2030. To increase annual giving, Institutional Advancement will increase alum donor participation to 10% by FY 2030 and increase annual giving to \$6 million+ by year end FY 2030. Institutional Advancement will also grow the connections to faculty, deans, and cabinet members. Recent research identified 158 foundations with potential support of \$28.5 million.

RISD’s endowment has grown over \$130 million the past 10 years (\$326 million FY 2015 to \$465 million FY 2025).

Figure 7.2. Endowment Value, Changes, and Return Rate: FY 2021–FY 2025



Major gift fundraising was healthy for the FY 2025 year with completion at \$14 million. When including bequest intentions of \$3.2 million, the final major gift total is \$19.5 million, well above the \$8.8 million goal. The annual giving program completed at a total of \$5.4 million. Unrestricted funds totaled \$2.2 million. Institutional Advancement is focused on increasing this total significantly in the coming years to support the RISD annual budget more fully.

Financial Aid

Description

RISD prioritizes student financial aid in its budgeting processes, are in alignment with the objectives of the 2020–27 strategic plan and with the college’s mission and enrollment goals. review and evaluate. Regular evaluations of policies, goals, and metrics, by key stakeholders including the vice president for Enrollment Management, assistant vice president for Enrollment Services and the director of Financial Aid, occur throughout the year, examining factors such as awarding policies, student debt loads, admission yields, retention rates, and enrollment objectives. In addition, the Board of Trustees is responsible for determining tuition pricing each year, ensuring that financial aid practices support the institution’s goals to lower student debt and increase access for a diverse student body. In FY 2026, for example, the Board approved a budget that further increased financial aid; the total financial aid budget for FY 2026 was \$43 million.

Table 7.3: Snapshot of Most Recent Financial Aid Data: FY 2025

Financial Aid Budget (FY 2026)	% UG Students Receiving FA (FY 2026)	Ave UG Discount Rate (FY 2026)	% UG Graduating with Debt (FY 2025)	Ave UG Debt (FY 2025)	% GR Students Receiving FA (FY 2026)	Ave GR Discount Rate (FY 2026)	% GR Graduating with Debt (FY 2025)	Ave GR Debt (FY 2025)
\$43M	35%	19.5%	36%	\$29.9K	95%	48.2%	29%	\$55K

In FY 2026, approximately 35% of undergraduate students received financial aid. The discount rate for undergraduate students was 19.5% for FY 2026. For FY 2025 (the most recent year for this data), the percent of undergraduate students graduating RISD with debt was 36%, with the average debt amount at \$29,900.

For graduate students, in FY 2026 95% received financial aid. The discount rate for graduate students was 48.2% for FY 2026. In FY 2025, 29% of graduate students left with debt, which was on average \$55,000.

To address student financial concerns, recent strategic initiatives have provided added support for highest-need students, including increased scholarship funding and Student Success Funds for global travel, internships, and materials. In addition, the Materials Fund provides both automatic funding (for undergraduate students with demonstrated need) and grant support for all students. The amounts of these grants range from \$600–1,000 per student. The number of students who have benefited from the Materials Fund has almost doubled since 2022–23, while the total amount awarded has almost quadrupled since then.

Table 7.4. The Materials Fund Awarded

	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26 (as of Jan. 2026)
Number of Recipients	253	494	546	568
Total Amount Awarded	\$147,000	\$397,750	\$536,498	\$557,605

RISD also maintains a student emergency fund, funded by donors, with the intent to alleviate financial barriers to success upon an emergency. Reasons to apply for this fund include, for

example, food insecurity, housing insecurity, medical treatment, travel expenses, and repair/replacement of accidentally broken equipment.

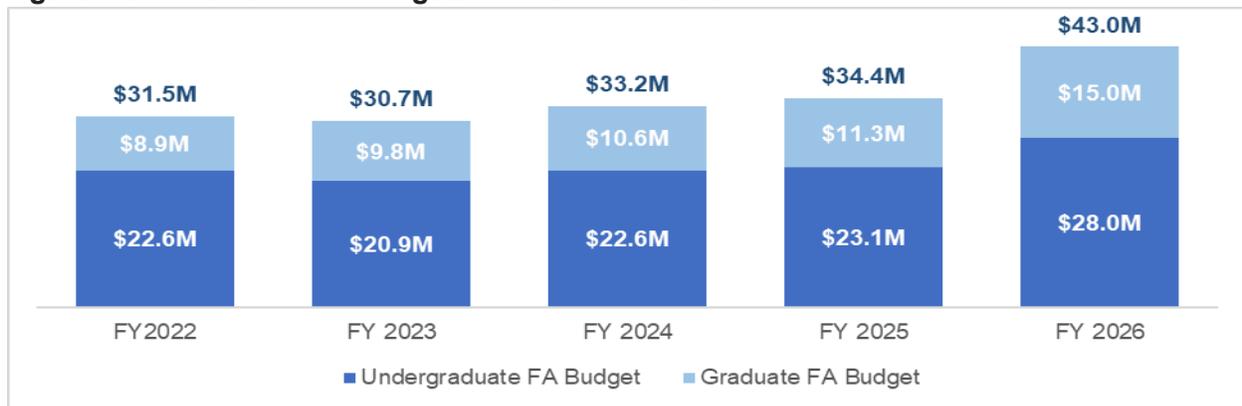
Table 7.5. Emergency Funds Allocations

	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Total Granted	\$58,636.56	\$26,596.84	\$34,449.65
Applications Funded	47	26	26
Average Funding	\$771.53	\$618.53	\$626.36

Appraisal

The college has made great strides in steadily increasing financial funds available in order to decrease debt upon graduation. As part of the 2020–27 strategic plan, the Board of Trustees approved increasing the financial budget by \$1 million annually. In light of COVID-19 disruptions, this budget increase started in FY 2022. Moreover, for FY 2026 the college increased its financial aid funds by an additional \$1 million over the original budgeted amount to support both undergraduate and graduate students, in response to a declining international enrollment. As a result, the total budget for financial aid grew by 37% from FY 2022 to FY 2026: from \$31.4 million to \$43 million.

Figure 7.3. Financial Aid Budgets: FY 2022–FY 2026



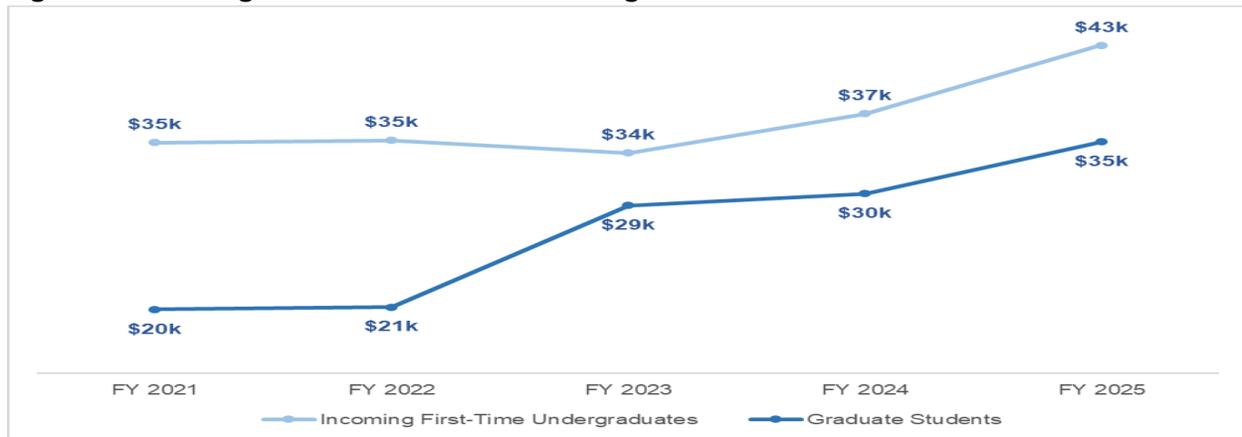
To continue with the college’s focus on need-based financial aid, the percentage of first-time full-time students receiving institutional grant packages decreased steadily from 36% in FY 2021 to 27% in FY 2025. However, the average amount for institutional grant packages awarded to that group increased by 24%. For graduate students overall, almost all received institutional aid in each of the past five years. The amount of money provided to graduate students for this aid increased by 70% from FY 2021 to FY 2025.

Table 7.6. Institutional Aid Trend Data: FY 2021–FY 2025

	FY 2021		FY 2022		FY 2023		FY 2024		FY 2025	
Undergraduate Students										
# of Students in the FTFT Cohort	414		497		481		504		518	
FTFT Students Awarded Institutional Grants	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	151	36%	168	34%	157	33%	151	30%	138	27%

Graduate Students										
# of All Graduate Students	491		532		512		448		433	
GR Students Awarded Institutional Grants	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	478	97%	507	95%	489	96%	425	95%	408	94%

Figure 7.4. Average Institutional Grant Packages: FY 2021–FY 2025



As a result of efforts to further increase access and affordability, RISD has intentionally increased the overall discount rate: from 21.8% in FY 2022 to 23.2% for FY 2026. While the discount rate for undergraduate students remained steady at around 20% in FY 2022 and in FY 2026, the discount rate for graduate students increased by almost 60% during that time period: from 30.2% to 48.2%.

Table 7.7. Discount Rates: FY 2022–FY 2026

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026*
Overall Discount Rate	21.8%	22.2%	22.3%	22.8%	23.2%
Undergraduate Discount Rate	20.0%	17.6%	18.4%	18.0%	19.5%
Graduate Discount Rate	30.2%	33.8%	40.4%	42.3%	48.2%

* As of 9/8/25 for discount rates

Related to the discount rate, RISD has continued to build on the work described in the 2021 interim report specifically in regard to student debt. With the increase in average institutional grant awards for RISD undergraduate students and the increase in the budgeted funds that RISD allocates to financial aid, we have continued to see a decrease in two important metrics.

Table 7.8. Loans and Average Debt at Graduation

	FY 2021		FY 2022		FY 2023		FY 2024		FY 2025	
Undergraduate Students										
# of FTFT Graduated	361		398		477		480		481	
FTFT Students Awarded Any Loans at Graduation	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	150	42%	154	39%	174	36%	161	34%	172	36%

Average FTFT Loan Amounts at Graduation	\$36,120	\$33,027	\$29,430	\$30,617	\$29,883					
Graduate Students										
# of GR students Graduated	211		220		274		217		200	
GR Students Awarded Any Loans at Graduation	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	63	30%	79	36%	73	27%	81	37%	58	29%
Average GR Student Loan Amounts at Graduation	\$69,514		\$64,267		\$40,395		\$39,786		\$55,040	

First, the percentage of undergraduate students who graduate with debt has decreased from 40% in FY 2021 to 34% in FY 2025. For graduate students, this percent has fluctuated from FY 2021 to FY 2025, with the average over that time period at 33%, including a decrease of eight percentage points from FY 2025 to FY 2026.

Second, with the increased and targeted efforts to more effectively support students financially, the average dollar amount of student debt has decreased. Not only has the percentage of undergraduate students who leave with student debt decreased from FY 2021 to FY 2025, the average amount also decreased during that time: by 17% from \$36,120 to \$29,883 for undergraduates. The decrease in student debt was even more notable for graduate students: their average amount of debt declined from \$65,038 in FY 2021 to a low of \$39,786 in FY 2024 to \$55,040 in FY 2025, for an overall decrease of 21% from FY 2021 to FY 2025.

With RISD positively impacting both the percent of graduates leaving with debt and the average debt amount, the college is a more competitive option for applicants who examine such outcomes.

Information, Physical, and Technological Resources

Description

Information Resources

The mission of RISD's Fleet Library emphasizes the library as a place for inquiry, inspiration, and research. Its collections, spaces, and services are curated to complement the particular needs of RISD's curriculum and community. Stemming from the college's mission, collections include items that support art and design education, including artists' books, auction catalogs, pictures, digital images, and exhibition catalogs, and art-related ephemera and materials for making and which document and interpret major participants, events, and movements in art and design. Staff iteratively refine the library's collection development and management plan to ensure collections remain relevant and needed.

The library employs seven full-time librarians, along with 10 full-time and two part-time staff, all hired according to institutional practices outlined by Human Resources and Academic Affairs. All librarians and archivists have appropriate education (e.g., MLIS and/or other relevant degrees), work experience, and professional activity, meeting the outlined requirements of their librarian rating in the Full-Time Faculty Association Contract. Administrative, paraprofessional, and other library staff bring a complementary range of qualifications, advanced degrees, and experience

in the arts and culture sector. The college prioritized creating a permanent Fleet Library director position in 2024 to provide comprehensive leadership to the library's six service areas.

The library's operating hours (64 hours weekly during the academic year) accommodates student schedules and provides different types of spaces including meeting rooms, study carrels, a video viewing room, and open study tables to accommodate a variety of individual and group study practices. In addition to Fleet Library and its physical and digital resources, RISD staff, faculty, and full-time students can access and borrow from the Brown University Library and the Providence Athenæum. Annually the library facilitates over 500 course reserve requests, and the librarians provide 150–200 class instruction sessions across most of RISD's departments, as well as for Continuing Education, the RISD Museum, RISD staff, and outside groups. From Fall 2021 to Summer 2024, the library has supported nearly 1,000 individual research requests, including hundreds of graduate thesis research support sessions. The library is also a hub for community activities. Regular exhibits highlight collections and the work of students, alums, and faculty. The library's annual Student Artists' Book Contest and Unbound Art Book Fair connect the library to campus and RISD to the broader creative community. The library hosts about 10 events each academic year in its facilities and supports 10–20 additional programs and projects such as author talks, Color Lab Faculty Fellowship presentations, and panel discussions each year. The first floor of the library is used by classes, as a group project meeting space, a space for temporary installation of student projects, and for activities organized by faculty and students ranging from game design nights to end-of-semester crits.

Physical Resources

RISD's mostly urban physical campus in Providence comprises 60 buildings totaling approximately 1.85 million gross square footage, with construction and renovation dates from 1773 to the present. Of these buildings, six appear on the National Register of Historic Places, and 18 are located within a local historic district. The college also owns Tillinghast Farm, a 34.5-acre property in Barrington, RI, where many Continuing Education courses and programs are held. RISD provides approximately 1,450 student beds (along with multiple dining spaces) among 16 RISD-owned buildings.

RISD continues to use the 2015 Campus Master Plan (with amendments through 2018) to guide major physical moves to its campus.

Staff from the Planning, Design, and Construction and Facilities Management offices meet weekly to exchange information about the condition of RISD buildings and grounds. Every fall, the same group meets to prioritize deferred maintenance work for the following fiscal year and to update the three-year capital plan. For academic spaces (i.e., utilized by degree programs), Academic Affairs annually conducts focused capital planning reviews with each academic department, including requests regarding academic spaces. In addition to academic buildings, buildings dedicated to student support are also regularly reviewed for necessary modifications. When looking at various projects, the college does consider if revenue generation can increase because of the project. For example, new AC units installed in the Metcalf Building in FY 2022 and in Benson Hall in FY 2025 not only positively affected the programs currently in those buildings but also allowed the college to utilize the spaces for additional purposes, such as continuing education courses during the summer.

Table 7.9. Capital Plan Spending: FY 2021–FY 2025

	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Total Capital Spending	\$37,593,734	\$ 5,872,996	\$ 7,567,562	\$ 8,599,025	\$ 9,695,645

RISD intentionally incorporates capital funds needed for facilities as part of the annual operating budget; this consistency allows the college to ensure some funds are available for deferred maintenance. Except for FY 2021, when two dormitories were fully renovated, funds spent on facilities projects have increased year over year. From FY 2022 to FY 2025, the amount the college has spent on capital projects increased by 65% (from \$5.9 million to \$9.7 million). The majority of these funds are spent on deferred maintenance projects.

Additionally, the college has worked with Gordian Sightline for over a decade to review and benchmark annually, four dimensions of RISD’s facilities: operational efficiency, service, cycle maintenance performance and reduction in any deferred maintenance backlog. In particular, Gordian Sightline works with Facilities and the Planning, Design and Construction office each year to retrieve data for the previous fiscal year and presents findings in its *Return on Physical Assets* report, which is shared with the President’s Cabinet, and with the Board of Trustees, as requested. Gordian’s FY 2025 report indicated that over 61% of our campus facilities are in the “high risk” category (which encompasses buildings over 50 years of age (33%) and those 25–50 years of age (28%). This is very similar to the peer group, which averages 58% as high risk. In addition, RISD’s net asset value, which measures the “good” space on campus, was 77% for FY 2025, compared to the average of 74% for the peer group. However, by 2030, almost 82% of RISD’s building portfolio will be in the high-risk category, where large scale capital investment will be needed.

Life-safety and ventilation needs continue to be a top priority. Facilities operations has worked diligently to maintain and upgrade fire and life safety systems on campus, rigorously implementing timely preventative maintenance, in-house testing, and quarterly testing as required by Rhode Island state code.

Given RISD’s unique topography and portfolio of historic buildings, ADA compliance and standards can be challenging, but major renovations over the last 25 years have included accessibility improvements to meet code. The assistant director of Disability Support Services meets weekly with the Facilities team to advocate for campus accessibility improvements. For access to those buildings that remain problematic, RISD works with persons who are in need of assistance, by relocating course offerings and mail delivery and providing access phones at building entrances, where necessary. An annual amount in the capital plan is apportioned to accessibility improvements throughout the RISD campus: \$25,000 since the interim report through FY 2024 and then \$35,000 in FY 2025 and FY 2026.

Technological Resources

The Information Technology Systems unit at RISD is led by the chief information officer, who reports to the senior vice president for Finance and Administration. Information Technology Services is composed of staff centered around specific areas of expertise, including: Information Technology Service Operations, Network Service, Media Resources, Administrative Computing Services, and the Service Desk. On the Information Technology Services portal, users can

submit tickets for assistance, browse help articles, and see announcements impacting information technology services across the college.

RISD's Information Technology Services establishes clear policies and procedures around the use of information technology systems and data to ensure that RISD meets reliability, integrity, security, and privacy standards are met. The Policy on Responsible Use of College Computing Resources at RISD addresses topics such as compliance with RI laws, abiding by appropriate authorization of use, capacity limits, and copyright issues. From a privacy perspective, RISD is compliant with all privacy laws, such as FERPA, HIPAA and GLBA. The college's RISD's Privacy policy provides information on data RISD can collect and use, and the use and security of personal information, among other topics.

The most significant change to RISD's information technology since 2016 has been to move the majority of its enterprise applications and services to the cloud. As described in the interim report from 2021, RISD shifted from Colleague to Workday for finance and human resources purposes. In addition, in April 2024, RISD went live with its largest information technology initiative ever—Workday Student. The implementation of Workday for finance and Human Resources used a so-called “lift and shift” process, which avoided in-depth reengineering processes and could be done quickly. The implementation of Workday Student was more complex and comprised of several interrelated projects: Workday Student, Workday Extend (custom modules for course materials, instructor rate and instructor workload), Workday Prism Reporting, Parchment (for transcripts), Coursedog (for course and curriculum management), Series 25/25Live (for room and resource scheduling), plus more than >100 integrations to/from Workday and other student applications. These changes also entailed a significant amount of change management and community education, but this final migration to Workday products moved RISD's core Finance, Human Resources, and student information operations out of our local data center, addressing long-standing security, hardware, and maintenance concerns.

Complementing these moves to Workday, RISD adopted new tools to support academic delivery. Just before COVID-19, following extensive research, RISD transitioned from hosting multiple uncoordinated learning management systems (LMS) to one—Canvas. RISD also acquired and implemented tools offered by Panopto, Google, and Zoom, and added numerous LTIs (learning tools interoperability) to Canvas. RISD now centrally licenses various "maker" software applications which, historically, students would be burdened to purchase themselves (i.e., Miro, Rhino, Solidworks, Adobe Creative Cloud, etc.)

For services that are not cloud-based but hosted locally at RISD, the network services team ensures that all systems are backed up both to disc, both on premise and remotely, and to tape, and archived in the event that restoration/recovery is necessary. RISD uses advanced monitoring tools and services to respond more quickly or even in advance of emerging and evolving threats, and to monitor as well for illegal and inappropriate use of systems and services. Such tools include Darktrace (AI/ML based network monitoring), Crowdstrike (endpoint detection and response), DUO (multi-factor authentication) and Abnormal (email threat detection and response). RISD is also engaged with Lumifi, a for 24x7 security operations center (SOC), for monitoring, response and investigation of security events.

Appraisal

Information Resources

With collection development efforts for physical and digital resources that are both proactive and responsive to curricular needs, the library has sought to increase its collections. The total digital

collection (including books, databases, media, and serials) increased from 551,956 to 609,243 (as seen in the 2021 and 2024 IPEDS reports). The physical collection increased during that time from 735,164 to 742,586. In recent years, the library has also incorporated technology platforms (such as Aeon and ArchivesSpace) into its services to improve discovery, access and tracking of collection material. Changes were also made to the late return and lost book fines; billing fees were discontinued in 2021 and the replacement cost for items was capped at \$75 in 2022–23.

The librarians and library staff have fostered strong relationship-based collection development practices to provide direct support to faculty and students. Three new permanent positions were created in recent years (a full-time instruction and outreach librarian for Special Collections, a part-time library assistant for circulation and reserves, and the full-time library director role). The library director has initiated several strategic efforts to improve transparency and collaboration across the library, including a concerted effort to improve documentation of workflows and account for tacit knowledge that is critical to library operations.

In 2024, the library undertook its first survey in 10 years, expanding from including only students to including faculty and staff. While the response rate was low, the survey did provide useful insights. The two most common methods for seeking information are the library website (83%) and asking a library employee (67%). About 93% of respondents indicated they use the library's digital resources. Two of the most important elements of the library and its services are access to the Brown University library (87% indicated *somewhat* or *very important*) and the Providence Athenæum (88%). While 63% of respondents said they were very satisfied with their Fleet Library experience overall, it was also noted that there is a strong desire for clearer and more accessible information about what the library offers.

Physical Resources

Despite the challenges of planning for long-term projects in an uncertain higher education landscape, adjustments to the budget in recent years have allowed RISD to address issues of immediate need that, despite their cost, provided enormous impact. This included, in the past five years, full renovations to two dormitories, replacement of an HVAC system and roof in an academic building, and renovations to the building housing student wellness supports.

RISD also has made consistent progress on various non-capital accessibility projects. In particular, Disability Support Services has worked with Facilities to ensure railings and call buttons are accessible. In FY 2024, the college completed installation of automatic door openers for every campus building. Additional work has been done to increase the visibility of signage and reflective tape, and traction strips have been installed campus-wide to help with mobility. Finally, the college developed an accessibility concern report form in which those in the RISD community can submit campus accessibility concerns.

Addressing ADA compliance has been folded into major facilities projects whenever possible. For example, when the HVAC system was overhauled in Benson Hall in FY 2025, the terrace ramp and accessible entry were included as part of that project. Work on the Design Center's elevators in FY 2025 included upgrading the call system to ADA standards. When masonry work was done in FY 2023 on the Metcalf Building, which houses many academic departments, the ramp was redone. The student fitness center was renovated in FY 2021, including accommodations in the locker rooms. Likewise, when minor renovation work was done to the President's House in FY 2025, RISD renovated a downstairs bathroom to make it ADA compliant.

Factors that limit the pace of facilities improvements include insufficient funding, staffing, and lack of swing space. Moreover, an urban campus with many older buildings and very limited spaces for new structures provides another set of challenges. RISD relies on deferred maintenance in order to ensure it has the necessary space to support students and meet the college's academic mission. Among capital projects, priority is given to addressing deferred maintenance, as well as to opportunities to increase energy savings.

As Table 7.9 (Capital Plan Spending) shows, the college has increased its spending on facilities projects each year. However, that spending has still fallen short of the average amount, of approximately \$12.1 million, budgeted for capital projects from FY 2021 to FY 2025. Even then, the budgeted \$12.1 million lags behind the \$14.6 million capital investment recommended in Gordian Sightline's annual report for FY 2025. This lag has been exacerbated by the fact that, since FY 2023, the college has either run a deficit (FY 2023 at -\$3.1 million, FY 2024 at -\$0.1 million, and FY 2026 currently at -\$1.3 million) or anticipated running a deficit (FY 2025's projected margin was -\$0.4 million). The reality of having or expecting negative margins means that some areas are not getting enough funding; at RISD, this has negatively impacted deferred maintenance. As we continue to recover from the unexpected deficit in FY 2023 and build towards a positive margin, we expect more funds to become available for deferred maintenance. Developing flexible space and addressing deferred maintenance also will be a focus in the new institutional strategic planning process, starting in 2026, and, together with the data on space utilization produced by the Financial Optimization initiative, RISD will be better positioned to serve its mission for the next decade.

Technological Resources

RISD understands the importance of technology as an essential tool to support students and employees. Without appropriate technology, maintaining the college's mission would not be possible. As a testament to this, the college has increased the operating expenses from \$6.43 million (Information Technology Services, Media Resources) to \$8.8 million (adding output centers and institutional information technology). Capital expenses for major items and initiatives grew from \$1.2 million in FY 2020 to \$1.5 million in FY 2025. This history of investment allowed us to quickly pivot to remote learning during the pandemic and, since then, to sustain support for online learning, such as the use of Canvas by degree programs and Continuing Education. Otherwise, Information Technology Services has made significant efforts identifying the status of desktops, printers, classroom a/v, major systems and print centers, and we are now able to accurately forecast and plan the replacement of systems and equipment. This makes the financial investment predictable and budgetable, while providing a consistently modern information technology infrastructure.

Information Technology Services now has a dedicated staff member to assist with education, planning, triage, and policy development around information technology security. We diligently address the integrity, security and privacy of our users and data needed to to renew our insurance policy each year. Thanks to investment in monitoring tools and resources, RISD has not experienced breaches. The privacy policy was recently and regularly reviewed/modified in June 2020, February 2022, and April 2024.

RISD has invested in the reporting tools necessary to efficiently plan, administer, and evaluate its program and services, including Workday Report Writer, Workday Prism and Workday Adaptive Planning. Informer is used by Continuing Education for non-standard Destiny reporting. The data visualization tool Tableau has been used by Institutional Effectiveness since 2019 to publicly publish the institutional factbook, as well as for internal purposes by offices,

such as Institutional Advancement, Human Resources, Student Financial Services, and the RISD Museum.

However, while these advanced reporting resources provide many advantages, some challenges have arisen. With the proliferation of self-service and ease of reporting in Workday, along with the increased use of other software, it has become clear that more coordination across units is needed to truly optimize how the college utilizes technology. As RISD has become a more data-informed institution and more people interact more often with data, inconsistencies that exist across systems have been uncovered. This is exacerbated by the decentralized nature of departmental-based systems which does not allow us to efficiently and consistently report on data. Such issues can impact initiatives such as holistic student wellness; without an agreed-upon, institution-wide set of terms and processes (i.e., a data dictionary), the college cannot easily develop a complete picture of our students. These issues were noted in Moran Consulting's assessment in 2025. They recommend implementing a system of data governance to help address such issues related to analysis and reporting. This recommendation supports strategic objectives and the five guiding themes established by President Williams, with particular emphasis on how RISD can *engage* various communities by leveraging knowledge that is based on a common understanding of terms (such as "student" and "retention") and the data that underpins this.

Projections

With Enrollment Management continuing to set realistic enrollment goals going forward, Finance and Administration will continue to be able to set accurate revenue projections. With upcoming budget cycles, Finance and Administration will continue to work with college leadership to regularly monitor both the budget and actual costs; this practice has allowed the college to be nimble in making necessary adjustments.

Institutional Advancement will continue to move forward with the fundraising plan they have developed. This includes work on the "Quiet"/Initiative Phase (FY 2025–FY 2027) and then broadening the scope of fundraising with the campaign launch and implementation (FY 2028–FY 2030).

The deans and provost will collaborate with Facilities to determine how to establish a space policy that encourages sharing of resources, with a goal for implementing the plan in 2028.

The senior vice president for Finance and Administration will work with college leadership to grow the annual capital budget to align with keeping up the current physical plant and to address ADA compliance issues whenever possible. This work will coincide with an updated campus master plan, which should grow out of and reflect the anticipated strategic plan to be completed in 2027.

The Information Technology Services division will implement data and system governance as recommended by Moran Technology Consultants. This will necessitate formalized system and data governance models as well as determination of necessary business intelligence, data warehousing, and reporting tools to be adopted by RISD. Efforts will begin in Spring 2026.

Standard Eight: Educational Effectiveness

The primacy of critique in art and design education (described in the institutional overview), provides a foundation for the college's pursuit of continuous improvement. At the same time, RISD has recognized a need to better align its tradition of critique with current practices of systematic assessment. As noted in Standard 2, since the 2021 interim report RISD has established a two-person Institutional Effectiveness Office, in order to highlight integrated assessment and planning across the college for both academic and administrative units. In addition, under the provost's leadership, the academic deans have been charged with guiding all department heads to conduct assessment at the program level, making accountability both constructive and explicit.

As detailed in the following sections, RISD employs a wide variety of both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine its effectiveness and assess student learning outcomes and experiences. These include coursework evaluation and departmental/division reviews, as well as a regular schedule of surveys, from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the CIRP Freshman survey to various surveys of alums by RISD Careers and Institutional Advancement. The college also reviews data related to retention rates, graduation rates, student loans (including Pell and Subsidized Stafford information), and outcome measures of undergraduate students (including first-generation students), provided by the factbook and by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

Description

Student Learning in Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Programs

RISD supports assessment of student learning at course, program, and departmental levels. As stated in the faculty handbook and syllabus guidelines, at the course level faculty are required to include clearly defined goals and student learning outcomes, and they are encouraged to align grading and assessment criteria with observable competencies and outcomes. All syllabi outline the course-level learning outcomes that students are to achieve by the end of the course.

In studio courses, grades issued by faculty are based on assessment of completed assignments, as well as faculty-student one-on-one dialogue (known as "desk critiques") and in-class critiques. The collective discussion and reflection of critique may involve enrolled students in a studio class; visiting critics, invited by studio instructors to offer particular kinds of expertise; and, usually at the end of the semester, interested members of the campus community. In seminars and lectures, grades issued by faculty are based on assigned reading, writing, research, presentations, projects, and participation. At mid-semester, all faculty issue reports to students to indicate their progress in meeting course goals; those not meeting class expectations are encouraged to work with the instructor and/or academic advisor toward improvement.

Program-level outcomes and assessment have been formalized mostly in the last ten years, since the last accreditation report. Departments now map their program-level student learning outcomes at least every five years (with updates along the way if needed). Program faculty work together to indicate on the curriculum map in which course, or courses, each student learning outcome is addressed and then also note the extent to which the SLO is addressed—introduction, reinforcement, and mastery. When a department supports both an undergraduate and a graduate program, such indications are differentiated accordingly. Overall,

the process of mapping expected levels of achievement informs faculty where it would be effective to gather information to assess and reflect on a given student learning outcome. Program-level student learning outcomes are published on risd.edu for each program and department, and both student learning outcomes and curriculum tables are published in the online course catalog.

Work is ongoing to improve these assessment processes with more systematic documentation of how each department approaches the assessment of learning in their programs, what trends they see across each program, and how they use this information for continuous improvement. In particular, Institutional Effectiveness sought to expand and improve the framework for documenting program-level reflection in 2023 by developing a website that provides assessment resources to all faculty. These include templates for curriculum maps, for semesterly reflections on student learning at the program-level, and for the E-series form; examples of student learning outcomes and curriculum maps for art and design programs; and links to resources about art and design curricula, including websites for similar institutions and readings.

With this new framework, programs are asked not only to assess at least one student learning outcome per semester, but also to submit a summary of how the program reflected on the student learning outcome(s). Those summary documents describe the student learning outcome(s) and how they were assessed, trends observed across the program regarding areas of achievement and for improvement, and anticipated changes that would continue to improve student learning. Both undergraduate and graduate programs submit a semester summary for each program describing how they reflect on those student learning outcomes. The four deans of the academic divisions in turn have developed repositories for these summaries, along with a timeline for deliverables.

This newly instituted assessment framework complements the Academic Planning and Review process described in detail in Standard 4, which includes an assessment of a program's learning outcomes and of student learning, considered over a longer time period.

Student Learning in Liberal Arts/General Education

All undergraduate programs share a common first-year curriculum encompassing liberal arts, and foundational art and design education, both of which constitute general education for the bachelor's degree. As described in Standard 4, the required courses in Liberal Arts and Experimental and Foundation Studies foreground learning objectives that encompass general education competencies, such as written, oral, and visual communication; scientific and quantitative reasoning; critical thinking; understanding historical and social phenomena; and knowledge of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind. Information literacy, critical thinking, and communication skills are core learning objectives of all Liberal Arts courses, including required courses and electives.

In the Liberal Arts Division, systematic assessment of student learning focuses on required coursework, which includes two courses in Theory and History of Art and Design (Global Modernisms & Critical Introduction to the History of Architecture and Design), one course in Literary Arts and Studies (First-Year Literature Seminar), and one course in History, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences (Topics in HPSS, until 2024–25; Advanced Inquiry Seminar, beginning in 2025–26). Faculty in a required course focus on a small set of learning objectives each year, and each department uses a shared template to record faculty reflections about students' fulfillment of those objectives. Those reflections are discussed at a department faculty meeting,

in order to identify necessary adjustments or focus for future iterations of the course. Beginning in Spring 2026, feedback on required courses will be reviewed altogether by required course coordinators to reflect on how best to integrate student learning across required Liberal Arts courses. The semester reflections on student learning by the Liberal Arts faculty are particularly robust, reflective, and actionable.

Learning objectives in the six required Experimental and Foundation Studies courses also address general education competencies. Faculty teaching sections of the Spatial Dynamics studio expect students to be able to communicate by *articulating ideas about their work and others through critique, writing, and presentation*, as well as to be able to use *research and critical analysis in the creative process*. Actions integral to critical thinking are part of the Design studio course sections, in which students *synthesize diverse art and design methods*, and *analyze the historical, theoretical, and social contexts pertaining to their work and the nuances of conceptual choices, decisions, and results in a given situation*. In Drawing studio sections, students should be able to *employ informed and responsive decision-making in the process of drawing and the constructive verbal critique of peer drawings*.

In addition to directly measuring student learning related to core general education competencies, the college incorporates indirect measures into its educational effectiveness practices. RISD has been taking part in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) since 2008 and currently has the survey on a three-year cycle. NSSE includes a section that asks respondents to indicate how much their experience at the institution contributed to the knowledge, skills, and personal development in several areas that often comprise a liberal arts or general education curriculum. The following table provides the results for the three most recent implementations for both RISD and the AICAD/Special Focus comparison group for the percentages of senior survey respondents who indicated that their experiences at their institutions contributed either “very much” or “quite a bit.”

Table 8.1. NSSE Survey - Very Much/Quite a Bit Contributions by School: 2017, 2020, 2023

Knowledge/Skill/Personal Development	Art and Design/Special Focus Seniors			RISD Seniors			Change in RISD Scores
	2017	2020	2023	2017	2020	2023	
Thinking critically & analytically	83%	78%	77%	88%	90%	84%	-4
Working effectively with others	65%	64%	66%	61%	67%	70%	+9
Understanding people of other backgrounds	68%	67%	68%	64%	78%	69%	+5
Developing/clarifying personal code	67%	61%	59%	65%	65%	68%	+3
Speaking clearly & effectively	67%	63%	62%	61%	73%	67%	+6
Writing clearly & effectively	54%	53%	59%	36%	51%	55%	+19
Solving complex real-world problems	51%	47%	49%	44%	57%	54%	+9
Analyzing numerical & stat. info	21%	25%	30%	18%	13%	20%	+2

Overall, RISD's senior respondents reported higher levels of the school's contributions to general education competencies compared to the art and design/special focus institutions. These instances are in bold font; RISD's scores were higher on six of the eight competencies in both 2020 and 2023. Results for RISD senior respondents also showed increases overall from 2017 to 2023 for nine of the ten items under knowledge, skills, and personal development. While the aggregate senior score for *Thinking critically and analytically* did not increase (-4 points), it was the competency on which RISD scored highest and was higher than the comparison group in each of the implementation years.

The college has made progress in the past two years in utilizing information from past surveys. NSSE results have been shared with academic leadership, including deans. The survey was incorporated into the data analysis done for the Holistic Student Wellness initiative, providing useful insights into how students use their time. With the next implementation of the survey taking place in Spring 2026, the timing is optimal for a more thorough and widespread sharing of the results to be used as part of continuous improvement efforts.

Student Experience and Support

Many co-curricular activities at RISD, including more than 50 student clubs and organizations, fall under the Student Life Division. The division's purpose statement, posted on risd.edu and provided in Standard 5, identifies the values that guide its support for students during their time at RISD, including providing opportunities for students to develop personally, socially, and intellectually by providing active learning environments. The work of Student Life should reflect values of community, inclusiveness, responsibility, leadership and well-being.

Other student and academic support units echo these statements with their own missions or purpose statements, including the Center for Student Involvement, Intercultural Student Engagement, the Center for Arts & Language, and RISD Careers.

RISD has developed a cadence of standardized national assessments to gather information on students' perceptions and experiences. Via the NSSE, the college learns about students' time at RISD related to a variety of topics, including participating in internships, holding leadership roles in student organizations, and their opinions about how the institution emphasizes activities such as using learning support services and attending campus events. Respondents also report how much time they spend not only on preparing for class but also participating in co-curricular activities, working, and volunteering. Students taking part in the survey are also asked to complete the advising module. Results for the last several implementations (2017, 2020, 2023) have been summarized to any longitudinal changes and provided to academic leadership. NSSE data was included in the analysis for the Holistic Student Wellness initiative specifically looking at time spent preparing for class and spent on freetime activities. NSSE will next be implemented in Spring 2026.

Even preceding the increased focus on student well-being, RISD has taken part in student wellness surveys: Healthy Minds in 2018 and 2022 and National College Health Assessment (from the American College Health Association) in 2025. The results from the Healthy Minds surveys were part of the Holistic Student Wellness initiative and provided important information about the well-being of RISD students while also providing additional context with comparisons to a peer group and the national sample.

Graduation and Post-Graduation Outcomes

RISD utilizes multiple means of tracking outcomes for students and alums, measuring success in relation to the college's mission. The college regularly tracks and analyzes retention rates, graduation rates, indebtedness data, and post-graduation employment data. The institution also examines differences in the retention and graduation rates of various campus populations, such as international students, first-generation students, and Pell-eligible students.

Retention and graduation rates are included in packets for Board of Trustees meetings. Student success data is available in various places on the RISD website, including the main "About" page for the college, the online factbook overseen by Institutional Effectiveness, and annual reports provided by RISD Careers. With the online factbook available to the public via Tableau dashboards, one can filter data based on multiple variables.

In line with the current strategic plan's objective to *strengthen financial support for both undergraduate and graduate students by increasing financial aid and scholarships*, data on student debt is regularly analyzed by the college. See Standards 5 and 7 for more information on how the college monitors student debt.

Data on employment and further education are gathered via multiple means. RISD Careers conducts a first-destination survey one year after graduation, with questions pertaining to employment and further studies, civic engagement via volunteering, and their satisfaction with the office itself. While survey responses provide updates on further education, a source for more complete information is the National Student Clearinghouse, which provides information on students at 99% of American institutions. For even more complete information on their lives after RISD, RISD utilizes a third party to "scrape" LinkedIn pages of alums. In addition, RISD participates in the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP), a national, multi-institution attitude survey that analyzes alums' perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and opinions of their alma mater. With over 300 schools participating, the survey provides useful comparison data. These surveys are done on a five-year cycle (with the next implementation expected in 2027) and provide information not just on recent alums (as the RISD Careers survey does), but also on alums going back many years (results from the 2022 survey include the cohort of "1987 and before"). SNAAP provides aggregate comparison data for art and design institutions overall, in addition to results for the national sample (which includes arts programs at R1 schools, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, etc.). On the 2022 SNAAP survey, RISD alums ranked the college highest in the areas of:

- value/respect for degree
- a diverse and inclusive environment
- accomplishments of alums
- availability of scholarships
- school rankings and respect in art and design communities

The Institutional Advancement Division also conducts a survey every 2–3 years of all RISD graduates. In addition to information about employment and education, the survey focuses on subjects such as their experiences at RISD and their engagement as alums. Based on the results, Institutional Advancement can steer efforts towards increasing networking opportunities and possible fundraising options. With its broad base of connecting RISD alums, the college also looks to RISD alum groups and affinity groups to gather information on all years of alums both electronically and in person.

Grants and awards earned by RISD students and alums offer another measure of institutional effectiveness as well as postgraduate success. RISD graduates consistently receive very competitive grants such as the Fulbright, as well as residencies such as Skowhegan and Ox-Bow. Eleven RISD graduates have received MacArthur “Genius Grants” since that award’s inception. There have been 109 Fulbright scholars among RISD students, and 12 students have served as Kleiner Perkins Fellows. Founded in 2011, the *Forbes 30 under 30* list has recognized 58 RISD alums (as of 2025). Such accomplishments are catalogued on a webpage devoted to alum outcomes.

Two RISD programs are meant to prepare students for licensure exams: the Architecture program and the Master of Arts in Teaching. Such tests provide a standardized measure that can attest to the educational effectiveness of a program. From 2020–24 (the most recent results available), RISD Architecture graduates have scored above the national average on over half of the metrics. Graduates of the Master of Arts in Teaching program who want to teach in PK-12 must take any required teacher certification test(s) based on the individual state in which they want to work. As such, it is challenging to track the results of such a wide range of tests across the country.

Appraisal

Student Learning in Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Programs

The college has a long history of assessment at the program level through the Academic Planning and Review (APR) process (described in Standard 4). Although the completion of APR reports was slowed by the effects of the pandemic and by changes in academic leadership, many programs have completed APR reports as scheduled in the last several years and we will soon be back on track for the regular cycle of every six to seven years.

The Provost’s Office regularly reviews the APR process to make it more efficient and meaningful for faculty. One example of recent change, described in Standard 2, is the addition of a final departmental strategic plan, informed by the visiting panel’s report. Two additional changes will improve the effectiveness of the process for the purposes of program assessment: 1) ensuring that visiting committees solicit feedback from students about their experiences in the program, during their review of programs; and 2) ensuring greater consistency in departments’ use of student feedback and visiting panel recommendations to engage in academic planning.

In addition to the APR process, the college has taken concrete steps to build a culture of assessment across the academic programs during the past decade—and increasingly in the past few years. With the support of academic leadership, Institutional Effectiveness now meets annually with program department heads across the divisions to review their student learning outcomes, focusing particularly on unique aspects of each program, observable criteria, and the use of results for continuous improvement. Programs have also mapped their student learning outcomes to their respective courses for both undergraduate and graduate programs.

These changes have informed program-level curricular decisions. Examples include:

- The Illustration program, in order to address the limited amount of analog material exploration and student dissatisfaction with the availability of elective technique classes, increased the number of in-class technical demonstrations and provided a kit of limited

art materials and allotted experimental time in ILLUS 501G-01 Studio I. The program saw a marked improvement in the range and quality of student studio output.

- Landscape Architecture faculty responded to assessment findings by increasing structured iterative reviews and emphasizing design process clarity in studio courses, while Interior Architecture adjusted studio prompts and critique structures after identifying weak student performance in diagramming and iterative thinking.
- In response to a lower student internship rate than expected, the Architecture Department created licensing advisor and internship coordinator positions to work with the local professional network and build relationships with key partnership offices. It also plans to develop a multi-year strategy with RISD Careers to offer focused development workshops (such as portfolio development and professional alum engagement/networking opportunities) for students.

Assessment of student learning outcomes at the program level is evolving. As semester reporting on student outcomes becomes more habitual, with the support of the Institutional Effectiveness Office and the Teaching & Learning Lab, we will be able to make assessments more effective. Furthermore, as we establish a baseline of student learning, we will be able to measure more precisely where changes in student learning are taking place.

Student Learning in Liberal Arts/General Education

Recognizing the importance of assessing general education competencies, the college sent faculty and staff to AAC&U's annual Conference on General Education, Pedagogy, and Assessment in Spring 2024. Attendees included the current dean of Liberal Arts, the first-year Liberal Arts academic advisor, the then-department head of History, Philosophy and the Social Sciences (who had previously served as the college's accreditation liaison officer), the then-dean of faculty, the current assistant provost for Academic Engagement (who provides leadership for areas such as the Fleet Library and the Center for Arts & Language), and the executive director of Institutional Effectiveness. The timing was fortuitous, with the reinvention of assessment processes at the college underway.

Liberal Arts faculty have been particularly diligent in reviewing student learning in their curriculum. For example, during the History, Philosophy and the Social Sciences academic planning and review process in January 2024, the visiting panel suggested that the faculty commit collectively to thinking about how to become more effective at delivering on a particular outcome over a limited period of time. In response, the department narrowed their assessment focus in the first-year "Topics in History, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences" course to three key learning objectives (from a total of eight) for Spring 2024, centered on information literacy, written communication, and oral communication.

Different types of assignments were suggested for each, and faculty assessed learning based on their perception of students' fulfillment of those objectives across all sections. Faculty reflection indicated that students demonstrated particular difficulty in "demonstrating an understanding of the tenets of information literacy," as well as "being able to synthesize material read and analyzed," especially with regard to vetting and citing appropriate sources. After sharing their pedagogical approaches to teaching citation and synthesis, faculty used the next iteration of the course in Spring 2025 to add new assignments about identifying and vetting sources, as well as to create more variation in assignments addressing communication (in both presentations and papers). The follow-up assessment of those efforts, again based on faculty reflection about student work, indicated general success, especially with the identification and vetting of sources, while AI emerged as a new topic. In particular, while some faculty reported

students still having difficulty with information literacy, other faculty who repeatedly addressed it, in assignments and discussion, found that students' made significant advances in meeting this outcome by the end of the semester. In general, for both iterations of the course, in Spring 2024 and Spring 2025, faculty indicated that information literacy and source synthesis required further attention and coordination, while students' achievement of the course's third learning outcome, on communication (especially oral presentation), had improved; this analysis was described in the HPSS semester reflection on student learning. Faculty in History, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences have taken these insights about student strengths and weaknesses in first-year learning into account in preparing for their new required course, Advanced Inquiry Seminar.

Qualitative analysis also has been undertaken in the Liberal Arts Division as a whole. Faculty from across its three undergraduate departments have had extensive conversations regarding topics such as framing research papers in terms of information literacy; using a shared text for all first-year students; or relating courses and scaffolding learning in the first-year liberal arts curriculum. Since those discussions took place in 2022, several of the recommended steps that came out of this division-wide discussion were implemented, including creating a course coordinator for each of the first-year courses and sustaining ongoing conversations with Experimental and Foundational Studies, the other division at RISD involved in first-year learning.

Student Experience and Support

Assessment of RISD's co-curricular learning is currently being developed. In 2024 the college supported sending several staff members to the Institute on the Curricular Approach hosted by the American College Personnel Association-College Student Educators International. At that event, staff learned about the essential elements of a developmentally sequenced set of student engagement strategies, assessed according to goals primarily defined by an institution's mission and purpose. Based on the information gathered at the Institute, Student Life has identified several broad learning goal categories that align with RISD's mission (Creative Curiosity, Critical Consciousness, and Enlightened Engagement) and articulated the knowledge, skills, and attitude students should gain from their co-curricular experiences at RISD. Feedback has been solicited from various campus partners, such as the Center for Community Partnerships and the Social Equity and Inclusion Division. This approach could be applied not only to Student Life but also to Social Equity and Inclusion, academic support offices, and auxiliary units such as Dining and Catering. Student Life staff involved in this project presented on the topic at the 2025 Student Success conference of the Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design and received positive feedback from attendees. Anticipating a launch in 2026–27, the division is focusing this current year on creating assessment rubrics for the learning outcomes and developing facilitation guides of learning strategies.

Student Life and other academic support offices maintain usage data, document characteristics and participation, assess needs and satisfaction, and adapt services and programming, but they do so largely individually. There is little aggregation and sharing of data for the purposes of holistic assessment and planning.

Otherwise, RISD students have completed the NSSE advising module for the past several implementations. Results were provided to the leadership of Academic Affairs and Student Life. While specific items have changed slightly and made direct comparisons challenging, a holistic review of the results revealed areas for improvement, including availability. The college was able to increase capacity for meeting with students with several innovations instituted after recent surveys (see Standard 6 for details). In Student Life, specifically, the role of Student Success

Project Manager was created after the 2020 implementation. NSSE will be implemented again in Spring 2026 and the new results will be compared to those from before these improvements.

Retention, Graduation and Post-Graduation Outcomes

RISD students excel at a very high rate in terms of retention and graduation rates.

Figure 8.1. Overall Retention Rates for Undergraduates: FY 2021–FY 2025

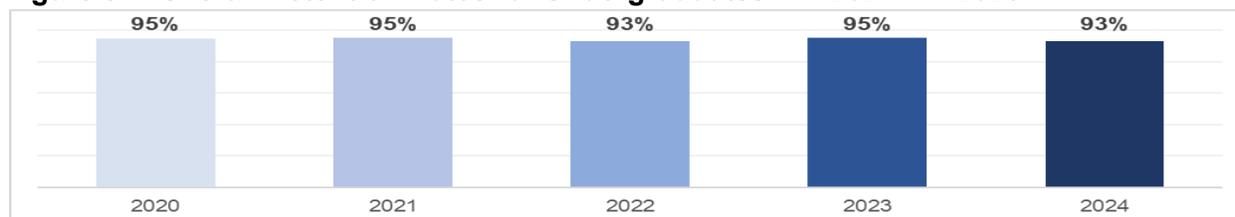


Table 8.2. Full-time First-time Undergraduate Retention: FY 2021 - FY 2025

	Fall 2020 Cohort Retained in Fall 2021		Fall 2021 Cohort Retained in Fall 2022		Fall 2022 Cohort Retained in Fall 2023		Fall 2023 Cohort Retained in Fall 2024		Fall 2024 Cohort Retained in Fall 2025	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Starting Cohort ¹	414	--	495	--	480	--	503	--	517	--
Female	263	96%	324	97%	313	97%	350	98%	360	94%
Male	129	93%	149	93%	133	85%	129	88%	120	90%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%
Asian	115	95%	96	97%	114	97%	122	95%	144	93%
Black/African American	9	82%	28	100%	22	96%	28	100%	24	100%
Hispanic/Latino	39	98%	41	98%	38	88%	49	100%	1	100%
White	98	93%	109	97%	95	94%	97	97%	105	95%
Two+ Races	24	100%	35	97%	22	100%	36	97%	14	93%
U.S. Nonresident	104	95%	155	93%	148	89%	142	90%	171	91%
Race/Ethnicity Unknown	3	100%	9	90%	7	100%	4	100%	20	87%
Domestic	288	94%	318	97%	298	95%	337	97%	309	94%
International	104	95%	155	93%	148	89%	142	90%	171	91%
First Generation	58	97%	55	93%	75	95%	72	96%	62	93%
Multigenerational	334	95%	417	96%	371	93%	407	95%	418	93%

Pell Recipient	57	91%	65	97%	74	93%	52	96%	82	91%
Non-Pell	335	95%	408	95%	372	93%	427	95%	398	93%

¹ For the above and following tables, the starting cohort size is minus exclusions.

First-year retention rates for first-time full-time undergraduate students have been at least 93% since the Fall 2020 cohort. Furthermore, the first-year retention rate has been at least about 93% going back to the 2014 cohort, excepting the Fall 2019 cohort (85% retention) mostly impacted by COVID-19. Female students were retained at a higher rate than male students, with the five-year average difference at almost seven percentage points. With few exceptions, retention rates across racial/ethnicity groups varied little, although US Non-Residents have had lower retention rates. Except for one of the five years, first-generation students have been retained at the same or a higher rate than multigenerational students. There has been no consistent pattern in the small differences between Pell recipients and non-Pell recipients, with differences always four points or less.

RISD also examines retention rates among its graduate students.

Table 8.3: Graduate Student Retention: FY 2021–FY 2025

	Fall 2020 Cohort Retained in Fall 2021		Fall 2021 Cohort Retained in Fall 2022		Fall 2022 Cohort Retained in Fall 2023		Fall 2023 Cohort Retained in Fall 2024		Fall 2024 Cohort Retained in Fall 2025	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Starting Cohort	219	--	274	--	202	--	204	--	217	--
Overall 1st to 2nd Year Retention	198	90%	266	97%	195	97%	194	95%	202	93%
Female	137	90%	177	97%	145	96%	143	94%	154	93%
Male	61	92%	89	98%	50	98%	51	98%	48	92%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	NA	1	100%	0	NA	0	NA	0	NA
Asian	13	100%	19	100%	13	87%	11	100%	15	100%
Black/African American	11	92%	8	100%	8	100%	5	83%	7	88%
Hispanic/Latino	15	94%	22	100%	15	100%	10	100%	1	100%
White	64	97%	85	97%	54	100%	50	94%	61	90%
Two+ Races	9	100%	3	100%	5	100%	1	100%	11	100%
U.S. Nonresident	78	82%	126	97%	94	95%	113	95%	106	94%
Race/Ethnicity Unknown	8	100%	2	67%	6	100%	4	100%	1	100%
Domestic	120	97%	140	97%	101	98%	81	95%	96	92%

International	78	82%	126	97%	94	95%	113	95%	106	94%
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The average first-year to second-year retention rate for graduate students has averaged 93% from FY 2021 to FY 2025. Differences between male and female students have been minimal, with males retained at the same rate or slightly higher than female graduate students. Drawing conclusions about any gaps between racial/ethnicity groups is challenging because of the small size of several of the subgroups; for subgroups with on average more than 10 students, differences have been minimal. While international students had a lower retention rate after the year most impacted by COVID-19, differences otherwise have been smaller than three points.

The college has excellent six-year graduation rates, ranging from about 89% to 92% going back to the incoming 2015 cohort (graduating in 2021).

Figure 8.2. Overall 150% Graduation Rates for Undergraduates: FY 2021–FY 2025

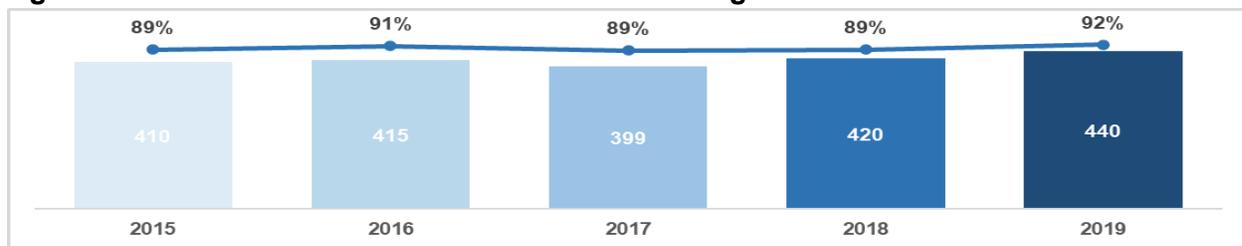


Table 8.4. 150% Graduation Rates for Undergraduate Students: FY 2021–FY 2025

	Fall 2015 Cohort Graduated in 2021		Fall 2016 Cohort Graduated in 2022		Fall 2017 Cohort Graduated in 2023		Fall 2018 Cohort Graduated in 2024		Fall 2019 Cohort Graduated in 2025	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Starting Cohort	463	--	456	--	451	--	472	--	480	--
Female	289	90%	298	93%	267	91%	271	89%	308	95%
Male	121	85%	117	87%	132	84%	149	89%	132	86%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	100%	1	100%	0	NA	2	100%	0	NA
Asian	93	95%	74	96%	71	86%	87	92%	105	97%
Black/African American	10	77%	11	79%	17	90%	20	74%	18	78%
Hispanic/Latino	33	83%	37	88%	29	81%	45	87%	33	83%
White	120	85%	151	90%	124	91%	103	87%	89	89%
Two+ Races	19	83%	17	100%	31	94%	22	82%	29	100%
U.S. Nonresident	111	92%	119	91%	118	88%	130	94%	158	92%
Race/Ethnicity Unknown	23	89%	5	83%	9	90%	11	92%	8	89%

Domestic	299	87%	296	91%	281	89%	290	87%	282	91%
International	111	92%	119	91%	118	88%	130	94%	158	92%
First Generation	43	90%	50	86%	68	82%	55	81%	54	86%
Multigenerational	0	NA	0	NA	325	90%	360	90%	386	93%
Unknown FG Status	367	88%	365	92%	6	86%	5	100%	0	NA
Pell Recipient	55	89%	53	87%	88	87%	66	78%	65	87%
Non-Pell	355	89%	362	92%	311	89%	354	92%	375	93%

The graduation rate for first-time full-time students increased overall from 89% in 2021 to 92% in 2025. Asian and US Nonresident students have consistently had the highest graduation rates. Rates for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students did not follow a clear trend beyond being lower than graduation rates for White students. Graduation rates for Pell recipients were lower than those for non-Pell recipients for the past four graduating cohorts. In contrast to their retention rates, first-generation students have lagged behind their multigenerational peers, except for the 2021 cohort.

It is notable that the three subgroups with lower graduation rates (Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Pell recipients) are all over-represented in the first-generation group. RISD has developed a comprehensive first-generation student support network through its First-Generation College Student Pre-Orientation Program (FGC POP) and Project Thrive initiative. These programs have been shown to improve measures of retention for students enrolled in these programs, as well as expanding how teaching and learning occur within academic departments. However, with FGC POP initially piloted only in Summer 2021 and Project Thrive expanding its offerings in the past three years, the students in the table above for graduation rates were not impacted by those efforts. Students impacted by current first-generation support programs will be captured in graduation rates starting in 2027. Similarly, advising has been shown to be particularly impactful for first-generation students. The college has made enhancements to its advising options within the past two years; students going through the current advising module will be captured in graduation rates starting in 2030.

While such a high six-year graduation rate would be aspirational for many institutions, RISD is still determined to continuously improve how it can more effectively serve its students. For example, the college has looked not only at the commonly-used 150% graduation rate (the IPEDS graduation rate), but has done further internal analysis, including examining four- and five-year graduation rates. Such analysis has aided in decision-making for several recent significant changes, including making the Wintersession program more flexible and reducing the number of credit hours required for most undergraduate degree programs from 126 to 120. Assessment will be needed to understand the impacts of these program modifications on future graduation rates.

The 150% graduation rates for graduate students at RISD is even higher than that of their undergraduates.

Table 8.5: 150% Graduation Rates for Graduate Students: FY 2021–FY 2025

	Fall 2020 Cohort Graduated in 2021		Fall 2021 Cohort Graduated in 2022		Fall 2022 Cohort Graduated in 2023		Fall 2023 Cohort Graduated in 2024		Fall 2024 Cohort Graduated in 2025	
Starting Cohort Size	223	--	241	--	459	--	228	--	271	--
Overall 150% Graduation Rate	208	93%	226	94%	435	95%	213	93%	261	96%
Female	147	94%	140	92%	299	95%	149	94%	175	96%
Male	61	93%	86	97%	136	94%	64	93%	86	98%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	NA	0	NA	0	NA	0	NA	1	100%
Asian	15	88%	11	85%	20	95%	13	93%	19	100%
Black/African American	7	100%	2	67%	7	78%	10	91%	8	89%
Hispanic/Latino	10	83%	12	100%	14	88%	15	88%	21	100%
White	60	97%	68	99%	112	95%	61	92%	80	95%
Two+ Races	2	100%	9	100%	9	100%	11	100%	3	100%
U.S. Nonresident	109	92%	114	91%	258	96%	94	94%	127	97%
Race/Ethnicity Unknown	5	100%	10	100%	15	88%	9	100%	2	67%
Domestic	99	94%	112	97%	177	93%	119	93%	134	96%
International	109	92%	114	91%	258	96%	94	94%	127	97%

The graduation rate has increased overall by three percentage points over the past five cohorts. In regards to subgroups, there is no clear pattern of differences: for several subgroups, their graduation rate exceeds the RISD average for some years and is below it for other years, with no clear upward or downward trend.

Reducing college debt is a priority in the current strategic plan, and the college has been able to make demonstrated improvements. As data in Standard 7 show, RISD has made progress from FY 2021 to FY 2025 in reducing both the percentage of undergraduates leaving with student debt at graduation (from 42% to 36%) and their average loan balances upon graduation (\$36,120 to \$29,883). While the percentage of graduate student loan takers has fluctuated (with an average of 32% for FY 2021 through FY 2025), their average loan amount upon graduation has decreased markedly. The pattern showed a decrease each year, from a high of \$69,514 in FY 2021 to a low of \$39,786 in FY 2024 before increasing to \$55,040 in FY 2025.

The college has recently expanded its sources for collecting information and data about its alums. RISD Careers has conducted an annual first-destination survey for over 25 years. Alums

from both undergraduate and graduate programs are invited to complete the survey one year after they complete their degrees. For the past five years, the response rate has been approximately 20%. As described elsewhere (Standards 2 and 4), in 2024 RISD completed a strategic study on Preparedness for Life After RISD. With the task force’s review in mind, the Institutional Effectiveness Office undertook efforts to increase the percentage of graduates for whom RISD has information about their post-graduation activities (i.e., the knowledge rate) per best practices promoted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. Institutional Effectiveness now brings together information from not just the RISD Careers first-destination alum survey, but also from LinkedIn, the National Student Clearinghouse, and RISD’s own employment/student records, capturing career and educational outcomes approximately one year out from graduation. Using these expanded sources, the knowledge rate for the graduating class of 2024 increased from approximately 20% with the RISD Careers first-destination survey as the sole source of data to 54% using the multiple sources. Since expanding the sources of data initially with the graduating class of 2023, the college was able to update its knowledge rates for career and educational outcomes for previous years. For further information such as the relation of the career to the RISD degree and salaries, the RISD Careers survey continues to be the source.

Table 8.6. Alumni Outcomes Knowledge Rates: FY 2020–FY 2024

	Graduated 2020	Graduated 2021	Graduated 2022	Graduated 2023	Graduated 2024
Total # of Graduates	652	613	641	807	730
# of Survey Respondents	153	124	135	134	149
Survey Response Rate	23.5%	20.2%	21.1%	16.6%	20.4%
# of Alumni with Known Outcomes Across All Sources	300	281	297	365	396
Expanded Knowledge Rate	46.0%	45.8%	46.3%	45.2%	54.2%

Table 8.7. Alumni Career and Educational Outcomes: FY 2020–FY 2024

	Graduated 2020		Graduated 2021		Graduated 2022		Graduated 2023		Graduated 2024	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Career/Education Outcome¹										
Continuing Education	17	11%	10	8%	14	10%	19	14%	10	7%
Full-Time Employment	97	63%	79	64%	82	61%	69	51%	80	54%
Part-Time Employment	6	4%	9	7%	8	6%	16	12%	20	13%
Freelance/Entrepreneurship	14	9%	11	9%	14	10%	13	10%	27	18%
Post-Grad Internship/Fellowship	12	8%	12	10%	5	4%	3	2%	6	4%

Volunteer Service	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%
Not Seeking Employment	0	0%	1	1%	2	1%	0	0%	0	0%
Seeking Employment	6	4%	2	2%	10	7%	13	10%	6	4%
Relationship of Career Outcome to RISD Major²										
Directly related	100	74%	74	66%	62	69%	64	76%	47	75%
Indirectly related	26	19%	33	29%	23	26%	15	18%	12	19%
Not related at all	9	7%	5	4%	5	6%	5	6%	4	6%
Total answers to question	135		112		90		84		63	
Salaries²										
Less than \$10,000	24	17%	6	5%	13	11%	21	19%	28	22%
\$10,000-\$29,999	29	20%	35	31%	30	25%	29	26%	26	20%
\$30,000-\$49,999	38	27%	27	24%	18	15%	20	18%	20	16%
\$50,000 or higher ³	51	36%	45	40%	57	48%	40	36%	55	43%
Total answers to question	142		113		118		110		129	

¹ Data compiled from RISD Careers Alumni Survey, LinkedIn, National Student Clearinghouse, and RISD records.

² Data from RISD Careers Alumni Survey

³ Starting with the graduating class of 2020, the highest salary ranges were revised from *\$50,000 or higher* to *\$50,000 to \$79,999, \$80,000 to \$99,999, or \$100,000 or More*

For graduates of the classes of 2020 through 2024, approximately 95% each year have indicated they were employed and/or continuing their education. A small sampling of employers for recent graduates show the various fields in which alumni work: Apple, Nike, Fidelity Investments, Hasbro, and NASA. Most respondents of the most recent graduating class (59%) indicated they were employed full time, with the next largest group being for those who chose entrepreneurship or freelancing (18%). While the percent of respondents indicating they had a full-time career decreased by nine points, that was offset by the increase in entrepreneurship/freelance work (+9 points). In regard to how their work relates to their RISD degree, the percentage of respondents who answered the question and indicated that their work was directly related to their RISD major increased from 66% in 2021 to 75% in 2025, with an additional respondents indicating the career is indirectly related. Looking at salaries, the largest percentage of respondents from the past five years indicated they were earning \$50,000 or higher; overall this has increased from 36% to 43%.

To learn more about its alums and to celebrate their accomplishments, the college constituted an Alumni Outcomes work group. This group is composed of staff from RISD Careers, Center for Community Partnerships, Institutional Advancement, the President's Office, and Institutional Effectiveness. After receiving its charge and holding initial meetings in Summer 2025, this group met biweekly throughout the Fall 2025 semester. It looked at the purposes of gathering data on graduates and additional sources for this information and is preparing a full report of its recommendations, to be completed in Spring 2026. Recommendations will include establishing one comprehensive webpage addressing important student success measures.

Projections

Under the supervision of the academic deans and with support from Institutional Effectiveness, faculty will continue to enhance and strengthen a) assessing student learning outcomes at the program level on an annual basis, and b) documenting how programs use results from assessments for continuous improvement. In addition, triennial NSSE results for general education will be reviewed by the dean and department heads in Liberal Arts each cycle and incorporated into departmental assessments regarding student achievement of general education competencies.

The provost and Deans Council will amend the implementation of the Academic Planning and Review process in 2026–27 so that: 1) all visiting committees solicit feedback from students about their experiences in any program under review, and 2) that the appropriate dean and the Instruction Committee provide continued oversight of a department's academic planning, as a result of the review process. These steps will ensure greater consistency in how departments use the results of the Academic Planning and Review process for improving program-level student learning.

Where equity gaps in undergraduate graduation rates exist, Institutional Effectiveness will conduct detailed analysis for retention beyond first to second year. Analysis will examine retention for each subsequent year of study to determine if there are any patterns where differences may first occur. Institutional Effectiveness will begin this analysis in Summer 2026 and share with Academic Affairs and other offices in Fall 2026 to consider where interventions might be possible to implement in the coming academic years.

Academic Affairs and Institutional Effectiveness will conduct analysis to evaluate the impact of changes to BFA programs' credits and the introduction of Wintersession optional. Metrics will include graduation rates, time to completion, and number of credits at graduation. With the Fall 2025 cohort being the first under these modifications, evaluations will be able to start after their four-year graduation rate can be calculated in 2029.

Student Life will continue to implement the curricular approach framework currently in development, including assessments of student learning and success, in addition to a more compassing analysis of usage data. The curricular approach will be launched in 2026-27.

Several offices will work together to further establish a more robust collection program for post-graduation career data and information with regular reporting, beginning with recommendations from the Preparedness for Life After RISD initiative and the Alumni Outcomes work group; these offices will include RISD Careers, Institutional Advancement, Marketing and Communications, and Institutional Effectiveness. The work will include creating a more detailed website containing RISD student outcomes data in one place. The website will also include stories about alumni that amplify success for all students in bespoke and thoughtful ways.

Standard Nine: Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure

RISD's mission positions the institution among the diverse contexts and activities of art and design: educating students *and* the public, discovering *and* transmitting knowledge, relying on a college *and* a museum, making contributions to global society. This orientation requires particular attention to shared standards, policies, and messaging to ensure a breadth of access, ethical decision-making, and clarity of understanding.

Integrity

Description

The RISD Policy Library centralizes the college's policies, many of which address integrity and ethical standards. These include the Standards of Conduct policy for employees, which begins with a statement that affirms "RISD is committed to operating lawfully, ethically, and professionally in everything it does," and the Respect in the Workplace policy, which outlines standards for employees, including a commitment to "promoting an environment where employees demonstrate respect toward each other regardless of their roles, seniority or positional authority." Integrity is further codified in RISD's Policy on Administrative Policies, which "ensures compliance with applicable laws and regulations, enhances RISD's mission, promotes operational efficiencies, and reduces institutional risk."

The Code of Student Conduct guides students in fulfilling their responsibility to the values and standards of the academic community. It clearly outlines prohibited behaviors such as harm to others and academic dishonesty and generally states that RISD expects that all students will treat others with "empathetic consideration." Student codes are reviewed annually in conjunction with the Registrar, Student Life, and General Counsel to ensure fairness and institutional integrity, with updates emailed to students annually. The code is translated into Mandarin, Korean, and Spanish, and published in an accessible font that supports screen readers. Student conduct is also addressed in the Student Employee Rights & Responsibilities document.

The Policy on Conflicts of Interest for Trustees and Senior Administrators states the expectation that all will "act solely in RISD's best interests when we make decisions or otherwise act on its behalf." Trustees and senior administrative officers annually disclose actual, potential, or apparent conflicts of interest. Similarly, the employee Standards of Conduct specify that employees will act in RISD's best interests and avoid conflicts of interest. The Interim Conflict of Interest Policy for RISD researchers provides guidance on maintaining objectivity in research activities.

RISD's Whistleblower Policy "encourages community members to report suspected violations so that it can ensure that the appropriateness and integrity of its activities are maintained." RISD subscribes to an anonymous reporting hotline service (provided by EthicsPoint) for students, faculty, and staff to anonymously report financial irregularities, noncompliance with policies and regulations, and safety issues.

RISD's Nondiscrimination Policy, reviewed annually, applies to all employees, students, and other individuals or groups participating in, or attempting to participate in, RISD's programs and/or activities, and ensures an "employment and educational environment that is free of discrimination, discriminatory harassment, and retaliation." It is available on the Equity & Compliance Office's Policies and Procedures page at the online RISD Student Hub, and the

onboarding webpage for new employees; accessible via the course catalog; and included in collective bargaining contracts. Employees, including student employees, are trained in person by Equity & Compliance regarding nondiscrimination definitions, RISD's policies and procedures, and supportive measures and resources.

In addition to the Nondiscrimination Policy and Procedures, additional college policies may apply for the resolution of complaints for faculty, staff, and students. For faculty, their grievance procedure is articulated in their collective bargaining agreement, which is negotiated every three years, while for staff the college's Corrective Action Policy provides the means for addressing grievances. The Code of Student Conduct includes guidance on pursuing grievances and reasonable and fair resolution of alleged violations. Additionally, students and employees can use the anonymous reporting form provided by EthicsPoint to report grievances.

RISD recognizes the importance of promoting and protecting academic freedom. In the faculty collective bargaining agreement, academic freedom is included under rights of individuals in both their work and in the classroom. The Academic Code of Conduct notes that the college "seeks to help its students realize their fullest intellectual, artistic, and personal potential [...and] values the creative process and freedom of expression."

RISD's policy on intellectual property rights (last updated in 2003) covers students, faculty, and staff, and highlights RISD's "spirit of innovation and artistic freedom." In general, scholarly, artistic, and sponsored work rights are granted to the "author," subject to college use rights, while college-commissioned and administrative work rights remain with the college. We are continuously working to improve our policy.

The college promotes research integrity among faculty, staff, and students via the Interim Policy on Responsible Conduct in Research, which requires "appropriate training and oversight in the responsible and ethical conduct of research to students participating in the proposed research project." Research projects are reviewed by the Academic Engagement Office to determine when the project must go through the Institutional Research Board approval process, for which the college partners with the University of Rhode Island.

RISD upholds privacy rights through compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which outlines student rights concerning education records. Additionally, the RISD Privacy Policy aligns with multiple privacy laws, including FERPA, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA), ensuring data protection for students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders.

RISD is governed by its Board of Trustees and operates within the parameters of its own governing documents, including the RISD Bylaws and Charter. As a nonprofit institution, RISD maintains its status by filing its annual report within the State of Rhode Island. In accordance with R.I.G.L. 7-6-94, RISD files a Non-Profit Corporation Annual Report. Pursuant to this annual report, RISD was enacted by the General Assembly during the January Session of 1877, effective March 22, 1877 as an Educational Facility. RISD's last annual report was filed April 24, 2025. Responsible for all activities sponsored by the institution or carrying its name, RISD ensures that contracts are properly delegated and executed. Every contract is reviewed by either Procurement and/or General Counsel to ensure compatibility with RISD's missions and activities.

Appraisal

RISD's commitment to integrity is demonstrated through extensive, clearly defined policies, standards, and procedures that promote responsible and ethical behavior at all institutional levels. The RISD Policy Library was introduced in 2020 to consolidate the college's policies, providing comprehensive guidance and accessibility in one place. The college also has a clear process to develop, review, and approve policies. In 2019, RISD hired a policy coordinator who oversees the implementation and amendments to RISD policies and established a Policy Advisory Group, composed of both staff and faculty, that meets quarterly to assess and provide cabinet with recommendations on policy revisions, new policies, and publication of policies. All policies are regularly reviewed, with two years as the default when not specified. When a policy is due for review, the policy coordinator reaches out to the responsible officer (policy owner/cabinet member) to begin the review process. General Counsel also reviews policies as needed.

The creation of the Equity & Compliance Office in 2019 has ensured a systematic approach to nondiscrimination, aligning policies with federal regulations and best practices. Annual compliance training is part of RISD's ongoing commitment to ensuring that all employees and student employees are well-informed about nondiscrimination policies and their reporting responsibilities. Since the implementation of annual compliance training in the 2024-2025 academic year, 430 employees, including student employees, have been trained in person by Equity & Compliance regarding prohibited conduct at RISD, reporting options, and resolution processes for reports of discrimination, discriminatory harassment, and/or retaliation upon reasonable notification to Equity & Compliance. Employees and student employees who are designated as mandatory reporters receive additional training on mandatory reporting requirements. In the 2023-2024 academic year, Equity & Compliance and Intercultural Student Engagement (ISE) began offering a variety of community-wide trainings related to inclusion and non-discrimination. Notable among these are LGBTQIA+ Safe Zone trainings, in which more than 100 employees have participated, furthering the goal of creating a more inclusive, respectful, and supportive environment for all members of the RISD community. And in 2024, Human Resources implemented an "Onboarding for Success" program for staff, designed to inform and support new hires.

Human Resources actively ensures that recruitment and hiring processes among staff are free from bias. In 2019, Human Resources centralized its talent acquisition staff to ensure sound recruitment management practices, a balanced commitment to diversity and inclusion, and adherence to employment laws and regulations. Both Human Resources and Social Equity and Inclusion hold inclusive search workshops and developed resources on how to create a fair and equitable interview process, including steps to mitigate bias and review of RISD's Nondiscrimination Notice and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Those who are serving on an interview panel for the first time receive training on best practices, as do those who have not participated in the training in over one year.

RISD conducts training for faculty search committees at the start of the fall search season and during the process with a focus on interviewing best practices including Equal Employment Opportunity requirements and how to respond to requests for accommodation. More information on the faculty search process is available in Standard 6.

Transparency

Description

Our primary institutional website, risd.edu, redesigned in 2022, provides extensive information for internal and external stakeholders. The Admissions webpage provides clear instructions for first-year, transfer, and graduate student applicants. Each type of applicant can find information on the application process, deadlines, eligibility, informational sessions and campus tours, portfolio reviews, and financing options. RISD also makes available digital versions of the viewbook for prospective students on the digital publication platform Issuu.

RISD's institutional website also includes a page for each academic program, accessible from the central Academics page, which includes links to the program's curriculum or curricula, student learning outcomes, workspaces and tools, faculty and staff information (including contact information and often links to faculty CVs and/or their external webpages), news (about the program, faculty, and staff), and general contact information.

Key institutional websites such as risd.edu and the Student Hub (students.risd.edu) are maintained by Marketing and Communications, which collaborates with subject-matter experts to keep content current. As part of a larger web communications initiative, several smaller sites run by various offices were integrated into the Student Hub, a larger, student-focused institutional website. The Student Hub includes the college's Title IX policies and procedures, Code of Student Conduct information, health and safety resources, and information about student employment, among many other helpful student support resources. The Student Hub also links to the college's course catalog, which includes all of RISD's courses in addition to general campus information (academic calendars, academic administration, and accreditation), as well as information about academic departments and programs (and their student learning outcomes), registration; academic policies, tuition and financial aid; and admissions. The academic policies easily available via the course catalog cover the grading system, student records, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, absence policy and leaves of absence, and intellectual property policy. Archived course catalogs/announcements are available through the Registrar's Office, both in print and online, as well as at the Fleet Library.

The Code of Student Conduct (RISD's student handbook described above) is available online via the RISD Student Hub, the college's online policies library, and the college catalog page on academic conduct.

Offices across the college regularly update the college community with newsletters. The President's Office sends its monthly News & Notes. Regular newsletters are sent out from the Fleet Library and the Social Equity and Inclusion division. When there is new information to share, the President's Office and other departments, divisions, and offices, such as the Provost, Information Technology Services, Facilities, Human Resources, and Procurement Services, send out campus-wide communications.

The president holds in-person meetings each semester, with the college community invited to send questions ahead of the event and ask questions at the event itself. Beginning in Summer 2025, a new forum for dialogues between staff and leadership began with the Brown Bag Lunch with Cabinet. The provost, vice president for Enrollment Management, and senior vice president for Finance and Administration have also presented updates on enrollments, finances, and academic areas to the college community throughout the 2024-25 and 2025-26 academic years, with multiple gatherings to fit people's schedules.

The college posts the most recent seven years' consolidated financial statements on [risd.edu's policies and disclosures page](#) and the [Controller's Office page](#).

The Institutional Effectiveness Office has developed a set of dashboards for key performance indicators, available to the public via the college's online factbook. These dashboards cover a variety of important metrics, including admissions data, faculty and staff diversity, financial information (academic year student costs, endowment), student data (student diversity, geographic diversity, enrollments), and student outcomes (retention and graduation rates, degrees conferred). Data related to alumni outcomes are available at the [RISD Careers site](#), with information reviewed from recent alum surveys related to employment status and salary. The page also features a breakdown of grants, awards, residencies, etc., earned by RISD graduates.

RISD's job postings are visible to the public. All contain a statement about RISD's commitment to diversity and its role as an equal opportunity employer; the listings also include salary grade information.

In accordance with the Clery Act, Public Safety publishes a report on security and fire safety on campus. These reports inform the RISD community about security policies, important safety initiatives and relevant statistics. Links to the annual report are posted in multiple locations, including the [Policies and Disclosures page](#) on [risd.edu](#) and the [Student Safety page](#) on the Student Hub, ensuring faculty, staff, and students have access to this information.

Appraisal

In September 2022 the college introduced a new brand identity and redesign of the [risd.edu](#) website to create a digital ecosystem that prioritizes cohesion and user experience and better articulates RISD's values and mission. Migrating smaller websites into the larger site provides more visibility and improves efficiency and accuracy in content updates. The search function of [risd.edu](#) has been improved so that all RISD websites on the centralized Drupal platform are connected by a single internal search experience, and thus are inter-searchable.

The launch of the online course bulletin at [risd.coursedog.com](#) in 2023-24, replacing an annually-published hard copy, has allowed for [risd.edu](#) to link to catalog information maintained by the Registrar's Office, rather than manual copying. This provides for efficiency, accessibility, a single source of accurate information for stakeholders, and real-time updates if course info or academic policy change at any point in the academic year. It also enables integration with Workday Student.

Public Disclosure

Description

RISD's institutional mission statement appears on [risd.edu](#) and in other publications, including the college catalog, and is linked to from the [Policy Library's governance policies webpage](#). The strategic plan is also publicly available on [risd.edu](#).

The course catalog, published annually, includes curricula and courses, grading, academic honesty, accreditation and related policies. Academic departments delineate their programs of study, including learning outcomes, both on [risd.edu](#) and in the course catalog. Information about the president, the cabinet, and Board of Trustees are available online via the [About page](#) of [risd.edu](#). RISD publishes admissions requirements and eligibility for first-year, transfer, and

graduate students, including transfer credit policies. Information related to student conduct is available in the Student Conduct and Community Standards section of the Student Hub, as well as at the online Policy Library.

At risd.edu's Policies and Disclosures webpage, one can find links to the Policy Library and to academic policies as well as to non-discrimination and Title IX notice, contract information for the Equity & Compliance Office, accommodations for people with disabilities, commitment to equal opportunities, the campus security and fire safety report (updated annually), governance documents (including bylaws, charter and conflict of interest policy), financial statements for the previous seven years, and accreditation status (for both the institution and programs with specialized accreditations).

Information on various student outcomes and metrics is available at multiple publicly available sites. The About page on risd.edu provides first-year retention and graduation rates, the student-to-faculty ratio, average class size, enrollments of both undergraduate and graduate students, and the percentage of students of color and of international students. The About page links to the college's online factbook, which provides data for retention and graduation rates for the previous ten years and filters for many variables. RISD Careers provides updates for recent graduating cohorts, including information such as employment status and salary.

RISD provides information about the cost of education and related topics on the Student Financial Services' website. Estimated costs are published annually and provide a breakdown for undergraduate and graduate expenses. Instructions on applying for aid and aid availability are found on the site for both undergraduate and graduate students. Additional information required by the Higher Education Opportunity Act—including financial aid disclosures and net price calculator—are also included on that website.

General Counsel oversees contracts at the institution. RISD maintains a Delegation of Authority for Executing and Approving Contracts Policy and a Contract Signature Delegation Matrix. The policy and matrix indicates who has the authority to enter into contracts for the institution and the parameters of such authority. A template is used for independent contracts and all contracts are reviewed by General Counsel.

Information about accreditation is accessible online. The Policies and Disclosures page on risd.edu lists and links to the college's various accrediting bodies, including institution-level accreditations (such as NECHE and the National Council on State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA)) and program-level accreditations for Landscape Architecture, Architecture, and the Masters of Teaching degree. The course catalog provides more specific information about these accreditations. Past comprehensive evaluations, interim reports, and NECHE responses are available on the Institutional Effectiveness webpage. The programs with specialized accreditation provide information on this and certifications and their accreditation status at their respective webpages.

Appraisal

The introduction of an online, searchable course catalog has allowed for easier updates and annual reviews of relevant sections. (The catalog may also be downloaded as a PDF.) The Registrar's website provides catalogs from the last decade while the Fleet Library offers a more extensive archive both in print and online, providing a thorough record of RISD's curricula.

The student viewbook, a resource for prospective students updated annually, acknowledges

Student Right-to-Know and and the Clery Act and contains easy to access information on non-discrimination policy, information for people with disabilities, and the annual safety report. The annual safety report is made available in multiple locations, including the Policies and Disclosures page, the Student Hub, and Public Safety's website, safety.risd.edu, which was launched in December 2025.

As described above, essential and extensive information is available at risd.edu, in the course catalog, and on sites that are part of the institution's core Drupal platform. Having information at multiple locations assures accessibility, though it can make our information ecosystem feel sprawling and perhaps confusing in its cross-linking capacities. The recent implementation of an improved internal search engine (Spring 2025) alleviates detriments to findability.

High-level retention and graduation rate data is updated consistently and easy to find on risd.edu. More detailed information is accessible via the online fact book. RISD's provision of information to external stakeholders amply facilitates informed decisions.

Projection

The Policy Advisory Group and General Counsel will review the current Intellectual Property policy, which was last updated in 2003. The current policy does not reflect contemporary intellectual property concerns such as AI and ownership allocation, especially when working with strategic partners. The Policy Advisory Group is researching policy updates and will establish a timeline to develop, implement, and monitor the effectiveness of the new policy by 2026-27.