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Legendary Oceanographer to Kick Off Marine Biology's 40th Anniversary

President's Distinguished Speakers Series event on Sept. 25 will feature National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence Sylvia Earle



September 3, 2013 | Brian E. Clark

BRISTOL, R.I. – The ocean is our last true frontier – the least explored realm on Earth – as well as a critical backbone of our entire ecosystem. Yet in the last 50 years alone, nearly half of our coral reefs have been lost, commercially fished species are in serious decline and more than 400 dead zones have appeared in coastal zones globally.

Sylvia Earle, legendary oceanographer and National Geographic explorer-in-residence, has made it her life's work to raise awareness of the challenges facing the blue heart of our planet and to enable swift and meaningful conservation programs that will turn the tides.

On Wednesday, Sept. 25 – as Roger Williams University kicks off the celebration of the 40th anniversary year of its marine biology program – members of the public are invited to spend an evening with Earle as part of the President's Distinguished Speakers Series. Janet Coit, director of the R.I. Department of Environmental Management, will introduce Earle, and then *Time* magazine's first Hero for the Planet will discuss the next era of ocean exploration, which she says will prove vital not only to our marine ecosystems, but to the future of humankind.

"As we celebrate the impact of our own marine biology program – both right here in Narragansett Bay and in waterways across the globe – who better to learn from than legendary oceanographer, explorer and conservationist Sylvia Earle?" says RWU President Donald J. Farish. "Much of what makes Dr. Earle's message so compelling is her optimism – she is forthright about the issues facing our seas, yet she reminds all of us that our actions can improve the biosphere's health, even today."

A lifelong advocate for the world's oceans and the creatures that live within them, Earle is founder of the [Mission Blue Foundation](#) and served as the first female chief scientist of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the early 1990s. She has pioneered research on marine ecosystems and has led more than 100 expeditions totaling more than 7,000 hours underwater.

With a bachelor's degree from Florida State University and a master's degree and doctorate from Duke University, Earle has authored more than 175 scientific and popular publications. They include a *The World Is Blue: How Our Fate and the Ocean's Are One* (2009) and *Ocean: An Illustrated Atlas* (2008). Her research places special emphasis on marine plants and ecosystems, and the development of technology for access and research in the deep sea.

In 2009, Earle won the TED Prize for her work. A fixture on Capitol Hill and at global think-tank conferences, she advises heads of state and industry on critical marine protection issues. Through these efforts, she strives to help people understand the consequences of everything put into – and taken out of – the ocean. With trademark optimism, she reminds those she encounters that continued decline in the health of the world's oceans is preventable, not inevitable.

The Sept. 25 presentation will take place in the Campus Recreation Center on the University's Bristol campus at One Old Ferry Road. Doors open at 7 p.m. and the event will begin at 7:30 p.m. A book signing with the author will immediately follow the presentation. The event is free and open to the public; no tickets are required. For more information, call (401) 254-3201.

Launched in 2011, the President's Distinguished Speakers Series at Roger Williams University invites thought leaders from a wide range of disciplines to share perspectives, inspire conversations and enrich the intellectual lives of students, faculty and staff at Roger Williams as well as members of the local community. As part of the series, each guest is invited to devote much of the daylong visit to direct engagement with students in classroom sessions, offering RWU students unique opportunities for one-on-one interactions with some of the world's leading authors, scholars, artists and public servants.

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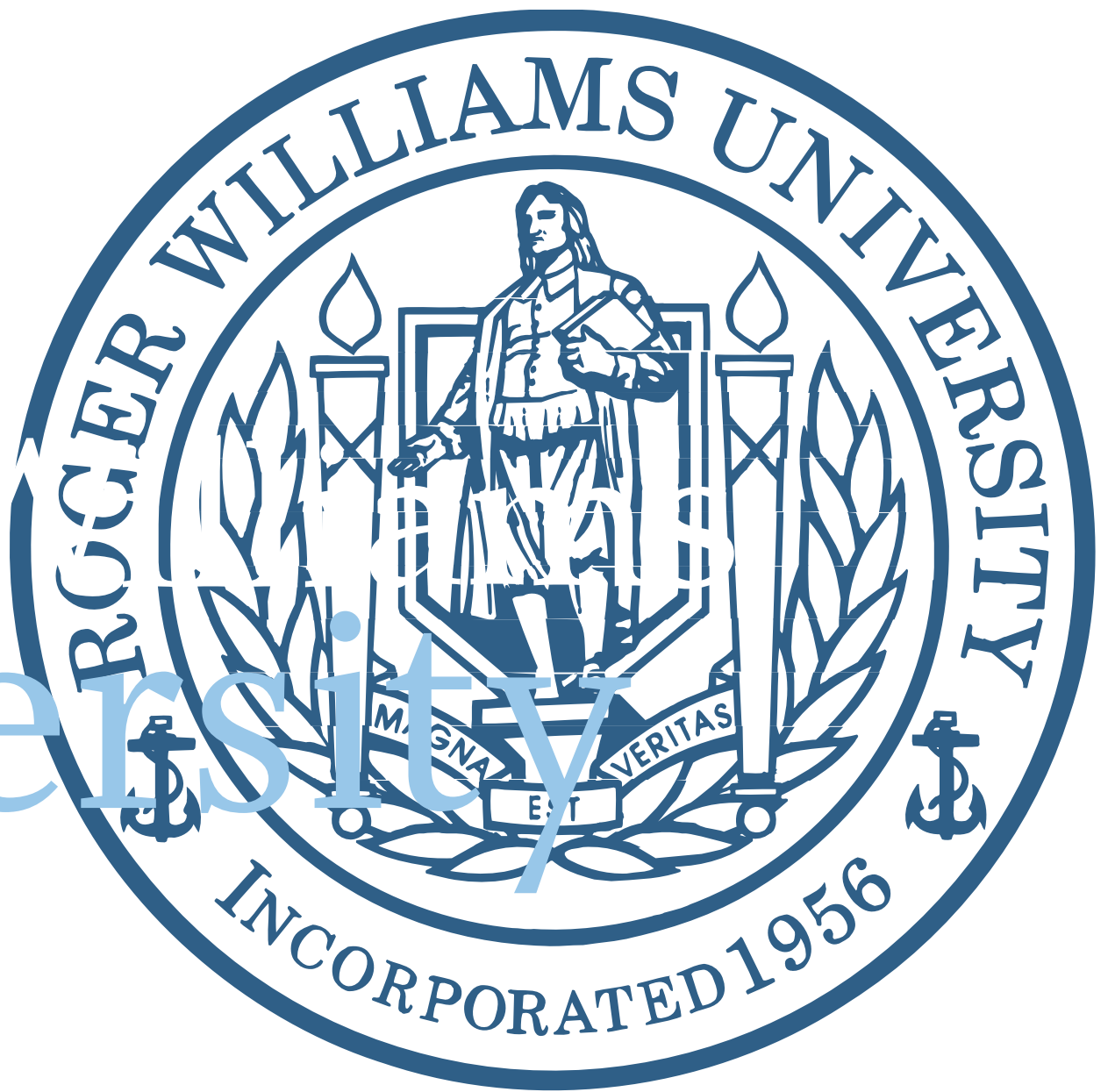
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