

An alumna of the URI Graduate School of Oceanography (Ph.D. '01) and a biological oceanographer for more than 25 years, Dr. Paula Bontempi became Dean of GSO in September 2020. As Dean, Bontempi has executive responsibility for the graduate school and its Narragansett Bay Campus, providing leadership and oversight for its academic, research and public engagement activities. Her scientific interests include studying the Earth as a system, the connection of ocean exploration to economics, ocean sensors and technology, mentorship, and justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) initiatives in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Previous to her current position, Bontempi served as acting deputy director at NASA's Earth Science Division, Science Mission Directorate of NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. She provided leadership, strategic direction, and overall management for the agency's entire Earth science portfolio, from technology development, applied science, and research to mission implementation and operation.

In addition to allocating resources and leading a division of approximately 75 scientists, engineers, and administrative professionals, Bontempi was charged with developing policies and priorities for numerous programs. She also coordinated with the scientific and applications communities throughout NASA, federal advisory committees, and other entities, including the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, U.S. Global Change Research Program, and international partnerships. She also taught Earth science in NASA's astronaut training class.

Prior to her appointment as acting deputy director, Bontempi spent more than 16 years as the physical scientist and program manager for ocean biology and biogeochemistry at NASA Headquarters. She also served as the lead for NASA's carbon cycle and ecosystems focus area and for the agency's carbon cycle science research. This included leading the coordination of relevant research and program collaborations with all U.S. and international partners, and serving as NASA program scientist with oversight responsibility for instrument and mission science integrity on a number of Earth observing satellite..

Before joining NASA, Bontempi was an assistant professor of oceanography in the University of Southern Mississippi's Department of Marine Sciences. She holds a Master of Science degree in Oceanography from Texas A&M University, and a Bachelor of Science degree from Boston College. She grew up in Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.