



UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO IN PONCE



**RESPONSE SUBMITTED TO THE
MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION
RELATED TO COMPLIANCE WITH STANDARDS 4, 5, AND 6**

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I. Introduction

The University of Puerto Rico (UPR) is the only public institution of higher education in Puerto Rico, as well as the most prestigious, thanks to its diverse student body, distinguished faculty, dedicated personnel, and long history of academic and administrative excellence. The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce (UPR-Ponce) is one of the eleven campuses of the UPR system and the only public institution of higher education in the southern part of the island. It is located in the city of Ponce, approximately 67 miles from the capital city of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Established as Ponce Regional College in 1969 and accredited by Middle States since 1970, UPR-Ponce was originally authorized to offer associate degrees and transfer programs, but added a number of baccalaureate degree programs beginning of the 1980's. As of today, the institution offers twelve baccalaureate degrees, four associate degrees, and fifty-four articulated transfer programs to other UPR campuses. The institution is also licensed by the Puerto Rico Council on Education. In response to its balance between the disciplines of Arts, Science, Education, and Business, UPR-Ponce has been recognized by the Carnegie Foundation (2010) as a Baccalaureate College of Diverse Fields.

As of today, the following academic programs of the UPR-Ponce are professionally accredited: Associate Degree Program in Physical Therapy by the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA); the Business Administration Program and the Office Systems Program by the Association of Collegiate and Business Schools Programs (ACBSP) and the Elementary Educational Program by the National Council Association of Teacher Education (NCATE). The Associate Degrees in Engineering by the Accreditation Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET) are in progress of being accredited. In addition, the Adelina Coppin Library was favorably evaluated by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), while the Counseling and Guidance

Department was accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS).

One key factor that contributes to the prestige of our institution is the ongoing and selfless commitment to the University that is characteristic of the members of our different governing structures, among which is the newly formed Governing Board. Recent changes at governance level have not proven adverse to UPR-Ponce's projects or the continuity of its stated mission. With this confident and hopeful outlook, we now respectfully address the issues requested by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education related to Standard 4, Leadership and Governance; Standard 5, Administration; and Standard 6, Integrity, in a letter dated June 10, 2013.

II. Background

On June 10, 2013 the Acting Chancellor of UPR-Ponce received a letter from Middle States Commission on Higher Education, which expressed concerns related to recent changes in governance and administration at the University and request a response which specifically addresses three of the fourteen standards for accreditation: Standard 4, Leadership and Governance; Standard 5, Administration; and Standard 6, Integrity. A second letter dated June 24 requested information regarding "the impact of institutional leadership of the recent changes in governance and administration, and actions planned or taken by the University to ensure ongoing compliance with Standards 4, 5, and 6 of the Characteristics of Excellence standards for accreditation." Our response shall also address the MSCHE policy on "Political Intervention in Education" and "Public Communication in the Accrediting Process."

III. Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

The information related to Standard 4 – *Leadership and Governance* has been prepared in collaboration with the Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs at the central level. The fundamental elements required for this standard relate to the Governing Board, which is the administrative structure that has recently evidenced more change as a result of the amendment of Article 3 of the University of Puerto Rico enabling law. (Act 1 January 20, 1966, 18 L.P.R.A. Sec. 600-614)

The events leading to the 2013 amendment of Article 3 of the University Law, which created a new governing board for the UPR system, are summarized in the UPR Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs' report addressing Standard 4. Nevertheless, it is crucial to establish that UPR-Ponce stands by the principle established in the MSCHE **Political Intervention in Education Policy**: “The academy requires that inquiry and analysis must be guided by evidence and ethics, unfettered by political intervention.” Collegial governance, policies, and governance responsibilities are as rigorous as before. Here, the main concern of MSCHE specifically addresses “Direct intervention by elected or appointed officials, political parties, or pressure groups in the selection of faculty, the determination of curricula, textbooks, course content, or in admission or retention policies...” All these areas are strictly defined and protected by Act 1 of 1966 (Appendix), as amended, and by the internal by-laws of the UPR; UPR-Ponce abides by such regulations. These documents are available to the public at the Governing Board's webpage (<http://sindicatos.upr.edu>).

Campus Governance

The UPR-Ponce system of leadership and governance consists of the Governing Board at the central level, while Administration, faculty, students, and staff

work together at the unit. These entities are inextricably connected in the overall operation of the institution. The Governing Board provides general oversight and policy direction, while the administration of the institution provides the overall implementation of policy and, in many cases, recommends policy directives to the Governing Board and other offices at the Central Administration. Faculty, staff, and students participate in the leadership of the college through various boards and committees.

The administration of UPR-Ponce is represented by the Acting Chancellor, the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board. These governing bodies at UPR-Ponce regulate all the institutional processes and, guided by the Acting Chancellor and regulations provided by the Governing Board, represent a key role in the lines of organization and authority at the institution. UPR-Ponce comprises the Deanship for Academic Affairs, Deanship for Student Affairs and the Deanship of Administration (see organizational chart in Appendix). Under the direction of the Dean of Academic Affairs, the institution oversees 12 academic departments with their respective Personnel Committees. All academic departments, as well as each deanship, have representation in the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board.

The acting Chancellor and Deans are tenured professors at the institution and have devoted years of experience to the UPR-Ponce, which has enabled them to know the institution from within. Each of them has played key roles in the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board.

The campus system of governance remains unchanged, both in terms of university system-wide regulations and campus-specific rules and procedures. All other areas, such as policies, lines of authority, periodic assessment of effectiveness, administrative structures and services, issues related to processes, ethical practices, academic inquiry remain the same and have not been affected.

The student input is very important at UPR-Ponce. Both the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board have student representation, where their voice can be heard. Student recommendations for the candidates to Acting Chancellor at UPR-Ponce were given much importance, a process that took place in May 2013. Also, the faculty and non-faculty constituents are represented in the Administrative Board and the Academic Senate of UPR-Ponce. These facts serve as a profound evidence of collegial and share governance at the institution.

Along with the governance system at the campus level, the Governing Board at the central level continually oversees the administration and leadership at UPR Ponce and undertakes joint decision-making. An excellent example is the Governing Board's appointment on May 13, 2013 of the community's recommendation to assume the position as UPR-Ponce's Acting Chancellor. The Governing Board carefully considered the credentials of each candidate for the positions of Acting Chancellor. The executive director of the President's office received specific recommendations from UPR-Ponce students and other constituents. They met to review the list and share the results with the Board Chair. As a result, Dr. Villamil-Torres was appointed as Acting Chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce (Appendix, Certif. 27, GB, 2012-2013). As part of the administrative process at the institution, this appointment was informed to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the Puerto Rico Council of Education, and the corresponding federal regulatory agencies.

The academic and professional environment at UPR-Ponce is transparent and open. Overall, institutional leadership is extremely inclusive. As mentioned before, all constituents participate in decision-making bodies and are essential parts of all administrative processes. Likewise, the governance process is inclusive and shared by constituents: the President, the Governing Board, campus administration personnel, faculty, students, and staff. Recent changes at our campus mostly pertain to the administrative structure, such as the

Acting Chancellor and Deans. Those changes have positively contributed to moving the institution toward the direction traced by its strategic plan, mission, and vision. It can be clearly stated that UPR and UPR-Ponce are in compliance with the Fundamentals Elements of Standard 4.

IV. Standard 5: Administration

In order to ensure institutional effectiveness and efficiency from an administrative point of view, it is essential that administrative personnel have the academic credentials and professional qualifications that are pertinent to the duties and responsibilities of their positions. The Institution recruits its administrative leadership using the consultation process stipulated in the UPR General By-Laws (Articles 19 and 20, 2002). Clearly established criteria guide the selection processes for the positions of Chancellor and Deans in order to ensure that they have the appropriate skills, degrees, and training to carry out their duties. The selection processes include candidate nominations and evaluations by university constituents. Search committees constituted for consultation purposes draw up a profile with the essential personal and professional characteristics necessary in a candidate. UPR-Ponce's Academic Senate ensures that the consultation process is carried out as mandated.

Administration, leadership, and governance have always been serious and important issues for UPR-Ponce. This was evidenced previously in the last accreditation process by MSCHE (2005) when an evaluating team expressed that:

“The institution at Ponce has a well-defined organizational structure with clear lines of authority that are well understood by the constituents. The duties and responsibilities of university administrators are clearly established. The job descriptions of the administrative positions well document their responsibilities, authority, and accountability helping the decision making process. The academic credentials and professional qualifications of the current chancellor, deans, academic department heads, and other

institutional administrators fulfill the requirements necessary to carry out the duties and responsibilities of their positions and are well documented. It should be noted that the recruiting procedure for the administrative positions, such as the chancellor and the deans, is clearly established and uses a democratic consultation process with the community. A strength of the institution is its clear rules, regulations, and policies for providing appropriate direction and facilitating effective governance functioning of the institution. Governing bodies, by-laws, and policies provide different means of ensuring that the institution keeps itself focused on accomplishing its mission and goals. There is ample evidence that the institution has written policies regarding teaching and non-teaching personnel, and student responsibilities.”

These strengths and successes are still in place at our institution. The Administrative Board and the Academic Senate continue working under the leadership of the Acting Chancellor with their regularly scheduled meetings according to the established agenda. In the past months, the Acting Chancellor has met with the Academic Senate on May 28, 2013 and with the Administrative Board on June 28, 2013. These meetings have been extremely fruitful for continuing academic and administrative processes in the institution. Also, the Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal met on June 24, 2013 to revise and make recommendations to the board in regards to the 2013-2014 operational budget. As a result, the Administrative Board met on June 28, 2013 and approved the 2013-2014 operational budget for the UPR-Ponce.

The Administrative Board and the Academic Senate at UPR-Ponce, chaired by the Acting Chancellor, guide and regulate all institutional processes and, represent a key role in the lines of organization and authority at the institution. These two bodies also have their own guidelines and by-laws, which are observed by Dr. Villamil, Deans, and all the constituents that participate in the Administrative Board and the Academic Senate. In addition, throughout the years, both UPR regulations and UPR-Ponce academic values have unceasingly provided an environment for teaching and learning that encourages the full

exposure to information and ideas, the right to question or dissent, and opportunities to study, research, and debate, free of political pressure. Most academic activities are regulated through the principle of representative democracy where an elected official represents a group of his or her peers.

Changes in Administration at UPR Ponce

On May 13, 2013 Dr. Margarita Villamil Torres was appointed as Acting Chancellor of UPR-Ponce by the Governing Board of the University of Puerto Rico (Certification GB-27-2012-2013). Dr. Villamil's appointment took place after the resignation of the former Chancellor Dr. Fernando Rodriguez (the Governing Board approved his resignation in Certification GB-9-2012-2013).

Dr. Villamil has been part of the administrative staff of UPR-Ponce since February 2013, when she was appointed as acting Dean for Student Affairs. Dr. Villamil's appointment has contributed to keep on track all the process at the institution, since she was part of the previous administration and now, has taken the lead of UPR-Ponce. She is an Associate Professor and a professional counselor with more than fifteen years of experience in the UPR-Ponce. She has a Doctoral Degree in Education, specializing in Counseling and Guidance from the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico. She has the highest degree for the position, as required by the Board of Trustees (Appendix, Cert. No. 99, 2009-10). Dr. Villamil has been Dean of Student Affairs, Director of the Counseling and Guidance Department, Students' Ombudsperson, and Faculty Secretary. Dr. Villamil has also participated in important institutional committees, including Counseling and Guidance Department Accreditation Committee, among others. (Appendix, CV). Dr. Villamil has gained the respect of UPR-Ponce community because of her work and dynamic participation in varied institutional scenarios, all of which adds to her proven commitment to the institution. Our community agrees that the Acting Chancellor is an asset to our

institution because of her integrity and ethical values on behalf of the academic and student services, in particular, on behalf of the students.

Once the new UPR President is appointed by the Governing Board, he or she will recommend the UPR-Ponce Chancellor after consultation with the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate, staff, and student consultation committees, in accordance with the procedures established in Article 19 of the UPR General By-Laws and Law 170 of August 12, 1988 (*Administrative Procedures Law*). Dr. Villamil is committed to lead the institution during this transitional period, until the Governing Board officially appoints UPR-Ponce's Chancellor following the established procedures described before.¹ This plan enables the institution to look forward to an organized change, with the aim of preserving the continuity of its best administrative practices and student services.

The Acting Chancellor has made only a few changes in institutional leadership during this transitional phase. Four staff members have been appointed: Prof. Evelyn González, Esq., as Acting Dean of Academic Affairs; Prof. Hernando Valero as Acting Associate Dean of Academic Affairs; Mrs. Acmin Velázquez as Acting Dean of Student Affairs; and Dr. Drianfel Vázquez as Acting Dean of Administration. Dr. Villamil has been responsible in selecting personnel who have proven commitment in enabling learning and research, promoting quality improvement, and supporting the institution's organization, leadership, and governance. It is important to mention that Dr. Villamil, Prof. González, and Mrs. Velázquez are all alumni of our campus. They know and understand the mission, goals, plans and objectives of UPR-Ponce, as well as its strengths and weaknesses, which will enable them to take better decisions on behalf of the institution. Thus, they are great assets who will continue the rising trend of UPR-Ponce. This also helps

¹ The Governing Board has clearly established that acting chancellors are not eligible candidates for the position (Appendix, Certif. 18, GB, 2012-2013).

the continuity of the processes and supports the teaching and learning process as well as the services provided to all constituents.

Prof. Evelyn González, Esq. is an Assistant Professor who holds a *Juris Doctor*, a terminal degree in Puerto Rico, and a Master Degree in Business Administration, Major in Human Resources. Currently, Prof. González is completing her doctorate in Civil Law, with a concentration in Labor Law, from the University of Valladolid. Furthermore, her doctoral dissertation is related to contract clauses in working agreements, making her the only professor at the Institution with research in this area of specialty. In addition to her outstanding academic background, Prof. González has significantly contributed to the University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus at the intellectual level. She has devoted 18 years to the academy in the Business Administration Department and also has a great deal of experience as Director of the Human Resources Office. Moreover, she has been part of the Academic Senate and different special committees. Prof. González has actively participated in department committees including, but not limited to, the Professional Development Committee and the Library Committee. Her ample gamut of experience in the areas of business administration, human resources, law, and teaching makes her the ideal person to be designated as the Acting Dean of Academic Affairs. (Appendix, CV)

Prof. Hernando Valero is an Associate Professor at the Computer Sciences Department. He has been teaching at UPR-Ponce for the last 18 years. His experience greatly benefits the administration and contributes to the achievement of UPR-Ponce's mission and to further progress of the teaching and learning process. Prof. Valero participated as senator in the Academic Senate. Also, he has served as the Director of the Office of Technology and Information System and has been part of various department committees, such as the Personnel Committee and the Assessment Committee. One of the many advantages of having Prof. Valero as the Acting Associate Dean of Academic

Affairs is his vast experience in accreditation processes. He has been President of the Committee in the Business Administration Department for the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technologies, Member of the Advisory Board for license renewal of the Puerto Rico Council on Higher Education for Associate Degree programs in Information Systems, Faculty Under Secretary, and Member of the Subcommittee for Accreditation of Educational Offerings, General Education and Related Educational Activities in the 2005 self-study for Middle States accreditation. As can be noticed, Prof. Valero possess a deep understanding of academic institutional and accreditation processes related to the UPR-Ponce. These experiences equip Prof. Valero to help the Institution to give a further step in the academic endeavor and make him an indispensable catalyst at the Deanship of Academic Affairs. (Appendix, CV).

Mrs. Acmin Velázquez has served our institution for the last 17 years. Her commitment, experience, and professionalism have been showcased in the diverse administrative positions she has held, such as Payroll Director, Special Assistant to the Dean of Administration, and as Director of Admissions. She has also been part of different institutional committees, both at central and campus levels. Particularly, her previous experience in the Students Organization Committee, coupled with her vast knowledge of campus matters, qualifies her for this interim position and facilitates this transitional process (Appendix, CV).

Dr. Drianfel Vázquez-Torres is a Full Professor at the Department of Engineering and has been teaching at UPR-Ponce since 2002. Dr. Vázquez has been author and project director of various federal grants. He has also been involved in several research projects with UPR-Mayaguez, the United States Corps of Engineers, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, among others. Furthermore, Dr. Vázquez has published different peer reviews and is an active member of many professional boards. Dr. Vázquez is a fully licensed professional engineer and a fully licensed attorney at law and public notary.

Finally, this is the second occasion collaborating as Dean of Administration at UPR-Ponce. (See Appendix, CV).

The attached Curriculum Vitae evidence the credentials and experience which clearly demonstrate the qualifications of the Acting Chancellor and Acting Deans. These distinguished members of the UPR-Ponce community have expressed their commitment to the institution and the stability of all administrative processes to ensure a smooth transition.

After Dr. Villamil's appointment, Dr. Efraín J. Ríos Ruiz was designated as Acting Director of the Counseling and Guidance Department during her interim period as Chancellor. Dr. Rios has been collaborating at our Institution since 2011. He is a Clinical Psychologist with clinical, teaching, and research experience in the field of Psychology, making him an asset for the institution on behalf of all its constituents, especially for student services. Finally, as a result of the appointment of the Director of Admissions as Acting Dean of Student Affairs, Mrs. Emily Matos Cortés, Admissions Assistant, was assigned as Acting Director of Admissions. She is also very committed with the institution's well-being and has great experience in admissions and retention for student services.

Other administrative staff members, including the Director of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research, the Director of Office of Technology and Information Systems, chairs of academic departments, directors of student and administrative services offices, and coordinators of educational related programs have remained in their positions. All Deanships and their offices continue to work with the priorities and responsibilities pertaining to their daily tasks. All administrative and academic services continue to be offered without interruption, including student services and admissions, which are underway and ready to receive the new students in August 2013. Dr. Villamil has expressed to the UPR-Ponce constituents her commitment to ensuring that

activities and initiatives underway will not be affected by administrative changes at the institution and has supported the teaching and learning process as well as the services provided to all constituents.

Communication: a vital role in the administration

During this interim period, there has been constant and direct communication between Central Administration and UPR-Ponce. For example, Dr. Villamil, her assistant, and Prof. Evelyn González, Esq. met with the President on May 23, 2013 to discuss important administrative issues for UPR-Ponce, such as infrastructure, contracts, and articulated transfers, among others. These meetings have provided Dr. Villamil with the necessary information for the decision-making process at the institution. In addition, Dr. Villamil has participated in Chancellors' meetings in these past months. She met with the President and his staff on May 27 and July 13, 2013 to discuss key matters for UPR, such as its finances and the continuity of the services provided to all constituents at all campuses. The Acting Academic Dean has also participated in meetings at central level with the Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Celeste Freytes. These meetings were held on June 25 and July 19, 2013. These meetings were extremely important to discuss issues related to tuition, academic programs, IPEDS, catalogs, among others.

On July 17, 2013, Prof. González met again with Dr. Freytes to discuss issues related to compliance with federal requirements and the process of license renewal for the Puerto Rico Council of Education. At UPR-Ponce, Prof. González has met with the chairs of all academic departments (June 19, 2013) to have the benefit of their input in regards to the enrollment process for August 2013, as well as other instructions related to the academia and student services.

UPR-Ponce also has representation in the University Board and holds meetings between different administrative divisions, such as the budget office, registrars,

and directors of admission, library directors, and others. These groups have continued to meet to discuss specific tasks that need to be addressed in preparation for the new academic semester. All this ample participation of the different sectors at local and central meetings has helped promote the collegial and shared governance. The Acting Chancellor was appointed in May 2013 and, since then, has maintained an open dialogue with university constituents about matters that will affect UPR-Ponce providing adequate information and decision-making systems to support the work at UPR-Ponce. This evidences our compliance with MSCHE **Public Communication in the Accrediting Process Policy**.

The UPR Planning Agenda *Ten for the Decade* and UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan 2006-2016 are the frameworks which guide Dr. Villamil's academic and administrative endeavors. She is committed to continue with the institutional plans in order to guarantee that the institution achieves its mission and goals. Since day one, the new administration has successfully worked toward the fulfillment of UPR-Ponce's mission.

Acting Chancellor Villamil has also evidenced her commitment to preserving the integrity of the 2015-2016 Self-Study process at the UPR-Ponce. The Chair and Co-Chairs remain in their positions. She has also maintained a close communication with the institutional MSCHE liaison to keep her informed about any issue related to the accreditation processes and other issues related to planning at UPR Ponce. Finally, it is imperative to indicate that the changes in administration have not affected the teaching and learning processes, the investigation level of efforts, or the composition of the administrative organizational chart at UPR-Ponce.

The Administration of UPR-Ponce is devoted to keep ensuring that institutional plans and activities are carried out and complying with the goals, objectives,

vision, and mission of the institution and is committed to continue moving forward the Institution according to the path traced in its strategic plan.

V. Standard 6: Integrity

Integrity has always been an important matter to UPR and to our campus, and this is evidenced through different means. For example, the Government Ethics Office (*Oficina de Ética Gubernamental*) requires a report in which the institution ensures that there is no conflict of interest within the Chancellor's position and with other positions inside the university as a system and outside in the community. This report is required by law, and it has to be prepared by the Chancellor and the Dean of Administrative Affairs. Also, the Government Ethics Office requires the active participation of all government employees on issues of ethics (20 credits hours in a two-year period, according to Law 1-2012). Moreover, the professions of the Acting Chancellor, the Acting Dean of Academic Affairs, and the Acting Dean of Administration have their own strict code of ethics that they have to comply with. Another important aspect worth mentioning is that as of 2012, the Comptroller's Office of Puerto Rico has no findings for our institution, meaning that UPR-Ponce has complied with administrative procedures according to internal and external regulations. As a matter of fact, UPR-Ponce has had 100% in its compliance evaluations according to the Puerto Rico's Comptroller Office for four consecutive years (Appendix).

The University of Puerto Rico actively updates all information related to policies approved by the appropriate body at the campus level (such as the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board) and at the system level (such as the University Board and the Governing Board). These groups include representation of different constituents of the university community, and the information is readily available in our webpage (<http://www.uprp.edu>). Policies are all in place and the recent changes in administration have not affected

them. Moreover, the campus regularly reviews and updates the academic offerings included in catalogs, as well as any new policy approved by the Governing Board or the Academic Senate. All these policies are available in the UPR webpage <http://www.vcertifica.upr.edu/certificaciones/External/ExternalSearch500.aspx?s=0&r=1> and <http://www.uprp.edu>. These actions guarantee that the UPR-Ponce shares with the public essential information about standards, procedures, and the status of its constituents.

As a matter of fact, there is a new UPR-Ponce Catalog, available through our webpage [http://www.uprp.edu/images/documents/academico_documents/pdf-2011/CATALOGO%20FINAL-%20\(9%20MARZO%202012\).pdf](http://www.uprp.edu/images/documents/academico_documents/pdf-2011/CATALOGO%20FINAL-%20(9%20MARZO%202012).pdf) as well as in print at all the Deanships. The catalog is organized so that students may find information related to our educational offerings, specifically about required courses for the discipline or program that may be of their interest. Also, information related to graduation and retention rates, as well as other institutional assessment reports, are available to prospective students in our webpage, which is continuously updated. This effort is coordinated with the VP for Academic Affairs, who oversees the database of all the programs and courses offered at the institution and system level.

Students' claims have been treated with normality, as well as the continued support to academic and intellectual freedom. Similarly, the admission and financial aid processes are in place and working properly. All the information required for student actions, such as requests for financial aid, calendars, due dates, and other information, is available in our webpage (http://www.uprp.edu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=419&Itemid=397). There is specific information regarding the admissions process, and students are welcome to print any information that might be of interest. Also, it is worth mentioning that UPR-Ponce has continued its summer agenda with the successful implementation of the following processes or programs: 2013 academic summer session, 2013 student internships for the summer

term; 2013 community summer camp; processes of pre-registration for the first semester of 2013-2014; and the orientation to 2013-2014 new students.

As of today UPR-Ponce has admitted around 930 students for this next semester, a number comparable to last year's number, which is the general trend at our campus in the past years. Our graduation was celebrated on June 21, 2013 and 406 students obtained their diplomas. Outstanding outcomes for the institution is that the graduation rate increased from 38% in the 2011-2012 academic year to 44% in the 2012-2013 academic year, as depicted in the following table.

Table 1
Graduation Rate per Academic Year
Fiscal Years 2011-2012 to 2012-2013

Academic Year	Graduation Rate
2011-2012	38%
2012-2013	44%
Increase	6%

Source: UPR-Ponce Office of Planning and Institutional Research

The retention rate for the 2012-2013 academic year was higher (81%) than the year before (77%). Table 2 presents a comparison between academic year 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 related to retention rate.

Table 2
Retention Rate per Academic Year
Fiscal Years 2011-2012 to 2012-2013

Academic Year	Retention Rate
2011-2012	77%
2012-2013	81%
Increase	4%

Source: UPR-Ponce Office of Planning and Institutional Research

Another important matter is that academic offerings are sufficiently available for our students to graduate within the published program length. To further facilitate student graduation rates, this year, the amount of sections (approximately 800 academic sections) that are programmed for the semester

of August-December 2013 has slightly increased, when compared to the sections UPR-Ponce offered in last August 2012 (793 academic sessions).

Table 3
Academic Sections – Fall Semester
Fiscal Years 2011-2012 to 2012-2013

Academic Year	Academic Sections Offered
2011-2012	793
2012-2013	800
Increase	7 academic sections

Source: Deanship of Academics Affairs

Projects that commenced by previous administrators have continued under Dr. Villamil’s administration, including contracts agreed by the past administration. One of these projects is the agreement between the Mayagüez and Ponce campuses to offer a joint Master’s Degree in Business Administration at Ponce campus. Also, two new articulated transfer programs between Mayagüez and Ponce were agreed last June and will begin in January 2014. These are the Articulated Transfer Program for the Bachelor’s degree in Theoretical Physics and the Articulated Transfer Program for the Bachelor’s degree in Physical Sciences.

UPR-Ponce has always been characterized by establishing clear policies and procedures that guarantee fair and impartial practices in the hiring, evaluation, and dismissal of employees. UPR-Ponce has high ethical standards in academic and non-academic affairs. Additionally, every communication, announcement, recruiting, and admissions materials sent to the community is administered from the Chancellor’s office to validate its integrity.

Furthermore, since Dr. Villamil began as Acting Chancellor, three new Administrative Secretaries have been recruited; three more positions have been authorized, as well as two much needed positions for Assistant Professor.

These processes are transparent, fair, impartial, and monitored by various offices such as Human Resources and Equal Employment Opportunity, among others, which evaluate the candidates and make recommendations to the Chancellor. In terms of faculty promotion, tenure, and compensation, it is important to mention that the Academic Senate approved the payment for the third register of faculty that obtained their promotion in rank on 2010-2011. This action is effective on July 1, 2013.

Recent UPR administrative changes were explained earlier in this report. They were also informed to the MSCHE and to other regulatory bodies as soon as they occurred (May 29, 2013) in order to comply with its **Public Communication in the Accrediting Process Policy**. Also, the Office of External Resources informed all federal agencies of these administrative changes in order to comply with their norms and regulations.

As historically occurs, UPR-Ponce administrators are aware of taking measures toward maintaining an institutional climate of harmony, respect, and unity. Finally, it is important to mention that all efforts during this transitional period have paid off because UPR-Ponce has preserved all matters and processes as programmed, and all the Deanships are functioning as they normally do toward the achievement of our mission, in compliance with MSCHE standards of excellence.

VI. Conclusion

UPR-Ponce is seriously committed to providing for the needs of the students and to continue serving the community and all its constituents. The Acting Chancellor, the deans, department chairs, faculty, students, and staff members are determined to keep the reputation of UPR-Ponce as one of the most prestigious institutions in Puerto Rico.

All the evidence depicted in this report is the reflection of an academic institution dedicated to its faculty, students, staff, and community. As can be seen, transparency, integrity, and commitment are the cornerstones of this experienced Institution that has served to the community for forty-four years.

APPENDICES
