UPRP
University of Puerto Rico in Ponce

University of Puerto Rico in Ponce

SELF-STUDY REPORT

Submitted to
Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)

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MSA

February 2016

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO IN PONCE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In light of significant academic, financial, and administrative changes undergone by the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce (UPR-Ponce) since its last Middle States Association evaluation visit, the institution undertook a comprehensive self-study framed by the accreditation standards set out in *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*. This decennial self-study has provided the UPR-Ponce with the opportunity to reflect on its many accomplishments, assess its effectiveness, and set the agenda for its new strategic plan.

Early in 2013, the university established a 17-member Self-Study Steering Committee and seven sub-committees with broad constituent participation. The goal of these sub-committees was to examine the extent to which UPR-Ponce is meeting the accreditation standards, within the context of the institutional mission and goals. The following is a brief summary of some of the major findings of the report, organized by the fourteen standards listed in *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*.

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

UPR-Ponce has been consistent in using its institutional mission and goals to guide departmental and program missions and goals and in ensuring that its institutional policies and procedures are consistent with them. UPR-Ponce's mission and vision are in accordance to the systemic mission and vision of the University of Puerto Rico and with its institutional goals. The institution offers a wide range of options to provide access to the mission, vision, goals, and values to all the institution's constituents. There is evidence that the UPR-Ponce conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and uses the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

UPR-Ponce continuously establishes priorities and pathways to sustain and improve institutional resources, academic quality, and the fulfillment of its mission. The institution's annual budgeting cycle links the mission, planning, budgeting, and allocation resource processes. Assessment results are used to determine policies and strategic allocations that ensure both the fulfillment of the institutional mission and continuous improvement of academic and administrative operations. Curricular, technological, and infrastructural improvements have been attained through strategic planning based on assessment results and environmental scanning. All accredited programs have successfully completed their reaccreditation or periodic review processes maintaining the good standing status from their respective accrediting agencies.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

UPR-Ponce has been strengthening efforts to identify alternative revenue sources to ensure its ongoing financial stability. In spite of budget reductions, by implementing sound management and cost control policies, the institution has been able to fulfill its mission and goals offering quality services to its constituents as evidenced through the scores obtained in the *Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory and the National Survey of Student Engagement*. During the last five years, the institution has redoubled its efforts to increase the external resources. Many internal and external audits are performed periodically at the institution. They have served to assess how effectively and efficiently the UPR-Ponce is

using its resources. Also, audits have represented a sound instrument to continuously improve academic and administrative excellence.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

UPR University Law (Law 1 of January 20, 1966 as amended) clearly outlines the university's governing structure, including the composition, duties, and responsibilities of each university constituent in the development of policies and in the decision-making process. Each entity that constitutes the UPR System shares responsibility in elaborating, planning, and executing policies. These policies are expounded at each level and bounded by the parameters that govern their responsibilities and duties within the vision, mission, and goals of the Institution and the UPR System.

Standard 5: Administration

UPR-Ponce has a well-defined organizational structure with clear lines of organization and authority to facilitate its efficiency and effectiveness. Duties and responsibilities of institutional administrators and academic leaders are established in UPR General By-Laws. The administrative structure of the university offers stability, even when changes in administration at higher levels have occurred. The UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan provides the necessary guidelines to permit the continuation of the ongoing processes.

Standard 6: Integrity

As stated in its By-Laws, UPR-Ponce promotes sound ethical practices and respect for individuals through its teaching, research, service, use of technology, administrative practices, and labor relations. Evidence indicates that the UPR-Ponce is honest and truthful in its public relation announcements, advertisements, recruiting, and admissions materials. The administration of the UPR-Ponce provides mechanisms to deal fairly with students' academic assessment, their conduct, and any alleged disciplinary violations in a prompt, appropriate, and equitable manner. The institution is committed to practicing fairness in dealing with its individual members and to ensuring that their rights are protected.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The UPR-Ponce relies on a continuous and systematic institutional assessment process. The institution has an assessment framework designed to create effective channels of communication to share and discuss the assessment results at all levels, thus facilitating decision making for institutional renewal, planning, and budget allocation. The Institutional Assessment Plan guides the assessment activities in all departments, programs, and offices toward improving institutional effectiveness. In order to create and maintain a sustained assessment culture in the institution, an Institutional Assessment Coordinator organizes professional development activities for the benefit of all stakeholders at least twice a year as well as Assessment Forums to share results of the different academic departments and offices. Institutional assessment is performed in each major area through multiple, direct and indirect, qualitative, and quantitative methods.

Standard 8: Student Admissions

UPR-Ponce admissions policies, procedures, and practices are clearly stated, fully understood, widely communicated, consistently implemented, and periodically reviewed. They are consistent with, and contribute to, the fulfillment of the institution's mission and goals. The careful selection of students

whose goals and aspirations can be achieved at the institution have resulted in first to second year retention rates that are similar to those reported nationally for institutions within the same Carnegie classification as UPR-Ponce. Graduation rates at the institutional level are similar to those reported nationally and compare favorably to other UPR units.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

One of the major goals in UPR-Ponce's mission statement is "to provide students with appropriate and timely services complementary to academic life." To this end, the institution provides support services to help students achieve their academic and personal goals. UPR-Ponce has a variety of services that complement students' academic life. These services are provided by staff with the appropriate credentials and experience. The Institution also promotes student participation in student organizations, Student Council, and different fine arts groups. Assessment results of student satisfaction of support services are used for their continued improvement.

Standard 10: Faculty

UPR-Ponce has a faculty that is well-qualified and experienced. Its roles and responsibilities are clearly defined in institutional rules and regulations. The standards and procedures for its appointment, promotion, and tenure are clearly articulated, and the institution provides multiple means for the advancement and development of its faculty. They actively participate in teaching, research, and service in order to help the institution comply with its mission. The fact that UPR-Ponce faculty members are excellent teachers is evidenced by institutional assessment measures.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The educational offerings of UPR-Ponce reflect and promote its mission and goals, and are of sufficient content, breadth, length, and academic rigor for college level programs. The curricular sequences of the academic programs foster coherent learning experiences, enhance development of research and independent thinking, and promote a synthesis of learning. UPR-Ponce offers a wide variety of programs to satisfy the needs of the southern region in the areas of arts and sciences. All instructional programs at UPR-Ponce are offered in fields of study consistent with the institution's mission.   UPR-Ponce undergraduate curricula are organized to enable students to develop their intellectual abilities and obtain professional training. An increasing number of academic programs have complied with their accreditation procedures. In 2005, the institution had only 1 academic program professionally accredited. At the present time, UPR-Ponce has seven.

Standard 12: General Education

UPR-Ponce has a clear definition of its General Education Component (GEC). The General Education Competencies are consistent with the institutional mission as they promote the development of critical thinking, scientific skills, and ethical values, among others. These competencies are integrated across the curriculum. There is evidence indicating that the GEC is in place, proficiency levels are attained, and integrated throughout the different programs. The Institutional Assessment Committee has within its diagram a General Education Assessment Committee under the Institutional Student Assessment Committee. The semester assessment results are presented in the Assessment Forums.

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

The institution provides support services to help students be successful in their educational goals. The Division of Continuing Education and Professional Studies provides citizens of the southern region with educational opportunities that contribute to their continuing professional and intellectual development. The UPR-Ponce promotes student's participation in extracurricular experiences to enrich their academic experience.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

Academic programs develop their student learning assessment plans following the guidelines and timelines established at the institutional level for their development and implementation. The assessment of student learning at the institutional level includes methods for qualitative and quantitative data gathering, with the objective of documenting students' educational experiences from the time that they are admitted to the UPR-Ponce until they graduate. The institution has intensified its efforts towards student learning assessment and has created greater awareness in the faculty about the need to establish explicit learning goals for all courses and to ensure their achievement. UPR-Ponce has made an effort to ensure the use of student learning assessment results to improve the teaching and learning process.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

THE UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO SYSTEM

The University of Puerto Rico (UPR) was founded in 1903 and incorporated as a public enterprise in 1924. The University Law of 1966, as amended, reorganized the institution to facilitate its continuous growth. It is a coeducational higher education university system consisting of eleven institutional units distributed throughout the island; three campuses, Río Piedras, Mayagüez, and Medical Sciences, and eight colleges in Arecibo, Cayey, Humacao, Ponce, Bayamón, Aguadilla, Carolina, and Utuado. The UPR community consists of approximately 60,000 students, 5,008 professors, and 7,064 non-faculty staff. UPR offers some 451 academic programs at the doctoral, master, first-level professional, baccalaureate, and associate degree levels. All the system units are accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and have the Puerto Rico Council on Education (PRCE) license. Two hundred and twenty-one programs have professional accreditation.

The organizational structure of the UPR is described in Article 12 of the UPR General By-Laws (Exhibit 1). This structure underwent an important change in 1999 with the authorization of the dissolution of the Regional Colleges Administration (RCA) by the Board of Trustees (Certification 1999-2000-09). Cayey campus was declared autonomous in 1982. The Arecibo, Bayamón, and Ponce Colleges were declared autonomous units in 1998 (Certification 1997-1998-102), while the Aguadilla, Carolina, and Utuado colleges became autonomous in 1999 (Certification 1998-1999-77). The highest governing body of the University of Puerto Rico was known as the Board of Trustees up to March 2013. On April 30, 2013, under Law Number 13 (PC 927) (Exhibit 2), the Government of Puerto Rico created the Governing Board.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce (UPR-Ponce) is located in the city of Ponce along the southern coast of Puerto Rico, approximately 67 miles from the capital city of San Juan. It was originally established as Ponce Regional College on June 27, 1969, and commenced its operations in August 1970. At that time, it began offering a various associate degrees and transfer programs. In 1981, it received authorization from the Puerto Rico Council on Higher Education (PRCHE) to offer baccalaureate degrees in Secretarial Sciences (later Office Systems) and Business Administration. Thereafter, Certification 1981-1982-170 of the PRCHE changed the name of the institution to Ponce Technological University College. In 1984, four-year degrees in Computer Information Systems and in Arts in Elementary Education were also authorized by the PRCHE. Additional baccalaureate programs in Athletic Training and Arts in Social Sciences with majors in Forensic Psychology, and Psychology and Mental Health were also approved by the PRCHE in 1995 and 1998, respectively. In 2002, the Council also authorized UPR-Ponce to offer a baccalaureate degree in Natural Sciences with majors in Biology and Biomedical Science.

In 1998, the Board of Trustees granted the institution its autonomy from the Regional Colleges Administration and changed the institution's name to Ponce University College. In April 2000, the Board's Certifications 1999-2000-103 and 103A dictated that the College be known as the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) accredited the UPR-Ponce in 1970, reaccredited it in 1985 and 1995, and reaffirmed accreditation in 1980, 1990, 2000, 2005, and 2011.

As part of the UPR system, and the only public institution of higher education in the southern part of the island, UPR-Ponce is committed by law to serve Puerto Rico and the southern region by transmitting

knowledge of sciences and arts to the community, by contributing to the development of ethical and aesthetic values with special emphasis on Puerto Rican and Western cultures, and by stimulating creative dialogue in the search for truth. The emphasis of the academic programs is on undergraduate education in baccalaureate, associate, and transfer programs to satisfy the needs of the community.

UPR-PONCE AT A GLANCE

UPR-Ponce offers 12 bachelor's degrees and 4 associate degrees. It also offers fifty-three articulated transfer programs to other UPR campuses. Courses are offered on a 15-week semester basis, and several courses are also offered during the summer term.   The institution's total headcount enrollment for academic year 2014-2015 was 3,229. Ninety-four percent of the student population studied full-time, approximately 77% received some form of financial aid, and 56% was female. Seventy-eight percent of the student body was enrolled in bachelor degree programs, 8% in associate degree programs, and 10% in transfer programs. The remainder was classified into other categories. The four-year programs with the highest enrollment were Biomedical (18%), Mental Health (11%), Elementary Education (11%), and Forensic Psychology (10%).   As for the associate degree programs, Physical Therapy had 30% of the enrollment, Industrial Engineering Technology had 28%, and Civil Engineering Technology in Drafting had 24%. The transfer programs with the highest enrollment were Land Surveying and Topography (14%), Humanities (13%), and Education (11%).

During the academic year of 2014-2015, the student body was served by 229 non-faculty staff and 203 faculty members. Fifty-nine percent of the faculty members are full-time employees of the institution, 48% of whom are tenured. Full-time faculty distribution by rank is as follows: 21% are full professors, 11% associate professors, 33% assistant professors, and 35% instructors. Forty percent of full-time faculty members have a doctoral degree.

ABOUT THE SELF-STUDY

During the academic year of 2012-2013 and in preparation for the reaccreditation process, training workshops for administrators, faculty, and non-faculty staff were provided by the former Chairperson of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research. The following list presents the titles of the workshops and the amount of participants per workshop:

Workshops	Participants
• The Accreditation Process by the MSCHE	46
• Accreditation Standards in the Institutional Context: Analysis of strengths, challenges, and opportunities (Part 1)	35
• Accreditation Standards in the Institutional Context: Analysis of strengths, challenges, and opportunities (Part 2)	36
• Planning and Assessment: What the Commission expects from standards 2, 7, and 14	31
• Self-Study: Planning and organization	31
• Information Sources: How and where to find data	27
• Implementing the Design: Writing the Self-Study Report	22

In September 2013, the former Chancellor appointed a Chair and two Co-Chairs to lead the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee Chair and one of the Co-Chairs participated in the MSCHE Self-Study

Institute held in November 2013. Also, the Self-Study Steering Committee was appointed. At present, the Committee is comprised as follows:

> ➢ Jennifer Alicea, Ed. D., Associate Professor, English Department and Chairperson of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research, *Chair*
> ➢ Carmen C. Morales, Ed. D., Professor, English Department, *Co-Chair*
> ➢ Lizzette Roig, M. S., Professor, Chemistry and Physics Department, *Co-Chair*
> ➢ Jose V. Madera, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Spanish Department and Dean of Academic Affairs, Ex-officio
> ➢ Acmin Velázquez, M. B. A., Dean of Student Affairs, Ex-officio
> ➢ Enrico Encarnación, M. S. A. T., Instructor, Allied Health Studies Department and Dean of Administrative Affairs, Ex-officio
> ➢ Frances Torres, M. Ed., Assistant Professor, English Department
> ➢ Ismael San Miguel, M.B.A., Instructor, Business Administration Department Chairperson
> ➢ Regino Megill, M. A., Assistant Professor, English Department Chairperson
> ➢ Doris Torres, Ed. D., Professor, Office Systems Department Chairperson
> ➢ Carmen A. Bracero, M. A., Professor, Office Systems Department
> ➢ Luis R. Sánchez, Ph. D., Associate Professor, Social Sciences Department
> ➢ Sheila Barrios, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Spanish Department and Student Learning Assessment Coordinator
> ➢ Eunice Mercado, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Chemistry and Physics Department and Institutional Assessment Coordinator
> ➢ Michael Campbell, Ph. D., Associate Professor, Humanities Department, *Editor*
> ➢ Pier A. Le Compte, M. A., Assistant Professor, English Department, *Editor*
> ➢ Anayarí Batista, M. Ed., Administrative Assistant IV, Office of Planning and Institutional Research
> ➢ Kermit Covas, Biology student

Following a training session, they set to work on the Self-Study Design which was completed in April 2014. In the meantime, an Internet page was updated, http://www.uprp.edu/opei/acreditation/index.php, along with a newsletter, *Reacreditación 2016*, to inform and promote community participation in the self-study. Once the self-study subcommittees were named, different meetings were held to provide guidance and clarify doubts. On April 25, 2014, Dr. Tito Guerrero III, MSCHE liaison, visited UPR-Ponce. He met with different university groups and commended the Steering Committee for the Self-Study Design.

During the self-study process, additional meetings were held as needed. On November 24, 2015, Dr. Patricia Mosto, Chair of the MSCHE Evaluation Team, visited the UPR-Ponce. She met with different university groups in anticipation of the Self-Study visit.

The Vice Presidency of Academic Affairs has collaborated with UPR-Ponce through monthly meetings with the Dean of Academic Affairs. Central Administration has monitored accreditation compliance on a regular basis. The Vice President has collaborated and provided support during the Self-Study process.

Self-Study Organization

Given the diverse changes that have taken place at the institution during the last ten years, UPR-Ponce chose to undertake a comprehensive self-study. Its goal was to carry out an integrated review of the institution's standing in relation to the fourteen standards of excellence that guide the MSCHE community and to set the agenda for the revision of the strategic plan. The data collected was to be used judiciously

to enhance the teaching-learning process and to make the institution more committed to being both efficient and effective in the services it provides. To that end, the following objectives were established:

1. Identify strengths and weaknesses in reference to Middle States higher education accreditation standards and to use findings to engage in a proactive strategic planning process.
2. Document the scope and effectiveness of assessment efforts currently used.
3. Produce an accurate self-study report that will provide Middle States the information and analysis needed to make a decision about our institution's reaccreditation.
4. Formulate recommendations that will set the agenda for institutional improvement in the next five years.
5. Strengthen the use of qualitative and quantitative data to support the analysis of the institution's educational effectiveness.
6. Make all constituents more knowledgeable about the institution in order to encourage their ongoing commitment to its mission and goals.

An Executive Committee (EC) was appointed during the 2013-2014 academic year. This committee was in charge of scheduling meetings, giving follow up to subcommittee chairs, reviewing chapters' drafts, among other duties. The EC was constituted by the following members:

➢ Jennifer Alicea, Ed. D., Associate Professor, English Department and Office of Planning and Institutional Research Chairperson, *Chair*
➢ Carmen C. Morales, Ed. D., Professor, English Department, *Co-Chair*
➢ Lizzette Roig, M. S., Professor, Chemistry and Physics Department, *Co-Chair*
➢ Anayarí Batista, M. Ed., Administrative Assistant IV, Office of Planning and Institutional Research

Seven subcommittees, based on the fourteen standards of *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education,* were appointed to address the charges set for them. Sixty-four members representing UPR-Ponce's faculty, student, and non-faculty staff constituted these working groups. Each one was chaired by a Steering Committee member chosen for his/her proven expertise or interests. A roster of members of each of the subcommittees follows.

Subcommittee 1: Mission and Goals (Standard 1) and Integrity (Standard 6)

Frances Torres, (Chair), M. Ed., Assistant Professor, English Department
Edda Arzola, M.A., Professor, Spanish Department Chairperson
Sonia Bailón, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Chemistry and Physics Department
Waldemar García, B.A., Lab Technician I, Biology Department
Diana Sánchez, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Chemistry and Physics Department
Joycette Santos, Ph. D., Associate Professor, Chemistry and Physics Department and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs
Alexander Durán, Social Sciences student

Subcommittee 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal (Standard 2) and Institutional Resources (Standard 3)

Ismael San Miguel, (Chair), M.B.A.**,** Instructor**,** Business Administration Department Chairperson
Marta Bahamonde, M.A., Assistant Professor, Education Department

Isaac Colón, M.B.A., Budget Office Chairperson
Alberto García, B.A., Physical Resources Office Chairperson
Pedro I. Martínez, M.B.A., Finance Office Sub-Chairperson
Ericka Rodríguez, M.Ed., Human Resources Analyst V, Human Resources Office
Arelis Torres, Psy. D., Associate Professor, Social Sciences Department
Grisobelle Virella, MS. Ed., Chancellor's Assistant in External Resources and Development, Chancellor's Office
Stephanie Cotto, Business Administration student

Subcommittee 3: Leadership and Governance (Standard 4), and Administration (Standard 5)

Regino Megill, (Chair) M. A., Assistant Professor, English Department Chairperson
Dalmid Correa, M.B.A., Assistant Professor, Business Administration Department
Reina González, M.B.A., Executive Officer, Chancellor's Office
Jesús Rivera, D. Ed., Associate Professor, Education Department
Lizzette Roig, M.S., Professor, Chemistry and Physics Department
Ginny Vélez, JD, Accountant II, Chairperson of the Finance Office
Anayarí Batista, MA. Ed., Administrative Assistant IV, Office of Planning and Institutional Research
Katherina Aquino, Social Sciences student

Subcommittee 4: Admissions (Standard 8) and Student Support Services (Standard 9)

Doris Torres, (Chair) Ed. D., Professor, Office Systems Department Chairperson
Wilfredo Ayala, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Biology Department
Emily Matos, M.A., Admissions Chairperson
Michelle Méndez, Ed. D., Assistant Professor, English Department
Ivonne Rodríguez, M.S., Assistant Professor, Chemistry and Physics Department
Marya Santiago, M. Ed., Registrar
Ileana Torres, MA. Ed., Administrative Secretary IV, English Department
Zulymer Irizarry, Business Administration student

Subcommittee 5: Faculty (Standard 10)

Carmen A. Bracero, (Chair), M. A., Professor, Office Systems Department
Ileana Latorre, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Education Department
Jaime Martínez, Ed. D., Professor, Mathematics Department
Pedro J. Ramirez, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Engineering Department
Edda Rodríguez, Ed. D., Assistant Professor, English Department
Marisel Sepúlveda, Ph. D., Associate Professor, Social Sciences Department
Jaylene Torres, Office Systems student

Subcommittee 6: Educational Offerings (Standard 11), General Education (Standard 12), and Related Educational Activities (Standard 13)

Luis R. Sánchez, (Chair), Ph.D., Associate Professor, Social Sciences Department
Brett Diaz, M. A., Librarian I, Library Chairperson
José López, Ed. D., Lab Technician II, Mathematics Department
Mayra Montero, Psy. D., Assistant Professor, Social Sciences Department Chairperson

Carmen C. Morales, Ed. D., Professor, English Department
Mariel Nazario, B. A., Coordinator, Technological Assistance Office
Wilfredo Ortiz, Ph. D., Professor, Mathematics Department
Milton Rivera, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Chemistry and Physics, Department and Continuing Education and Professional Studies Division Chairperson
Heidy Reyes, M. S., Assistant Professor, Biology Department Chairperson
Carmen Soto, D. PT., Associate Professor, Allied Health Sciences Department Chairperson
Rosa Torres, M. A., Research Assistant III, Office of Planning and Institutional Research
Juliette Hernández, Biology student

Subcommittee 7: Institutional Assessment (Standard 7) and Assessment of Student Learning (Standard 14)

Eunice Mercado, (Chair), Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Chemistry and Physics Department, Institutional Assessment Coordinator
Jennifer Alicea, Ed. D., Associate Professor, English Department and Office of Planning and Institutional Research Chairperson
Sheila Barrios, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Spanish Department
María Zayas, Ed. D., Assistant Professor, Education Department and Mathematics Department Chairperson
Alma Ortiz, D. PT., Assistant Professor, Allied Health Sciences Department
Lourdes Ortiz, Ed. D., Lab Technician of Language and Instructor, English Department
Vianca Gastón, Office Systems student

There were two faculty members that served as editors and together with the Executive Committee were in charge of editing the final Self-Study Report, which was approved by the Self-Study Steering Committee. The two editors were:

➢ Michael Campbell, Ph. D., Associate Professor, Humanities Department
➢ Pier A. Le Compte, M. A., Assistant Professor, English Department

Methodology

In carrying out their charges, all subcommittees analyzed and evaluated available documents and consulted studies and statistical data provided by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR). They also determined what additional information was needed, and they used various strategies to obtain more data. These involved elite interviews, data grids, and additional questionnaires to meet the specific needs of each subcommittee. For benchmarking purposes, data on retention and graduation rates available from *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System* (IPEDS) were used.

The institution has highly benefited from its participation in the 2014 *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE) (Exhibit 3), which is a study designed to obtain information about student participation in programs and activities that the institution provides for their learning and personal development. Five-hundred and ten (38%) of UPR-Ponce students participated of which 359 (41%) were freshmen and 151 (33%) seniors. Also, the subcommittees used results presented on the 2013-2014 *Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory* (Exhibit 4). Three hundred and seventy-six (14%) of UPR-Ponce students participated from all class levels. UPR-Ponce results were compared with National Four-Year Public institutions. The satisfaction inventory was based on a 7.0 scale. Both surveys were used for benchmarking purposes.

In order to optimize the acquisition of information through surveys, three instruments to assess constituents' opinions on academic, administrative, and student life aspects of the institution were designed. These instruments were reviewed and approved by the Steering Committee. During the first semester of 2013-2014, the OPIR validated and administered the questionnaires to faculty, non-faculty staff, and to random samples of students. Participation among constituents varied: 154 out of 200 faculty members (77% response rate); 181 out of 236 non-faculty staff (77% response rate); and a sample of 362 students, distributed as follows: freshman-23%; sophomores-28%; juniors-28%; seniors-18%; and others-4%. This study is referred to as the *2014 Self-Study Perception Survey* (Exhibit 5) throughout the report and reflects the perceptions of those who answered the questionnaires. The satisfaction survey was based on a 5.0 scale. A list of supporting documents (exhibits) used in the Self-Study Report is included in Appendix 1.1.

Subcommittee reports were submitted to the Executive Committee and then revised in light of recommendations made. After the Executive Committee examined the first draft of the Self-Study Report, the revised edition was analyzed and reviewed by the Steering Committee. Recommendations were given and incorporated into the document. Then, the final draft was posted on the webpage and printed copies were also made available. All constituents were encouraged to respond with suggestions, corrections, and more information. The Executive Committee presented a summary of major findings and recommendations to various groups: faculty, students, non-faculty staff, and the Academic Senate. An open forum was also held to provide an additional opportunity for participation. Many of the recommendations received as a result of these important disclosure activities were analyzed and incorporated by the Steering Committee into the final version.

CHAPTER 2: MISSION AND GOALS (STANDARD 1) AND INTEGRITY (STANDARD 6)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the institution's mission and goals in terms of the following: clarity, distinctiveness, congruence, relevance, adequacy, and utilization. It also studied the consistency of the mission statement with the aspirations and expectations of higher education. Finally, the chapter analyzed the degree to which the Institution adheres to ethical standards and its stated policies in conducting programs and activities.

MISSION AND GOALS

The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce's (UPR-Ponce) mission and vision are in accordance to the mission and vision of the University of Puerto Rico as a system. UPR-Ponce's mission has been revised twice during the past ten years: in 2008 and 2013. The last time, the Academic Senate of the UPR-Ponce appointed a committee (Certification 2012-2013-09) to revise the mission of the institution according to the recommendations made in the *Periodic Review Report* submitted by the Middle States Commission of Higher Education in August 2010. This Senate Committee began its task organizing public hearings in order to promote the participation of all sectors of the institution. Then the committee drafted a mission statement, based on its findings, and aligned it with the institutional goals (Certification 2008-2009-59). Various drafts were widely circulated to all its constituents to request input and final recommendations. After examining and evaluating feedback from the community, UPR-Ponce Academic Senate approved Certification 2013-2014-49 with the revised version of the mission. Its English translation reads (Certification 2013-2014-60):

> The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce is a teaching institution dedicated to the intellectual, humanistic, scientific, cultural, and ethical growth of its students. It is devoted to the integral development of citizens and professionals capable of contributing to a global society as critical, creative, and honest leaders committed to continuous learning and community service. It fosters equal access, academic rigor, enriching educational activities, and quality support services which contribute to the formation of graduates with a profile of academic excellence.
>
> In all its undertakings, the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce promotes a democratic environment supportive of academic freedom, excellence, integrity, respect, tolerance, creativity, and research.

The institution's mission is aligned with the institutional goals, and the UPR-Ponce's governing bodies use them as guidelines to develop and update their programs and practices, and to evaluate institutional effectiveness. This is evidenced through the Annual Institutional Effectiveness Report which is used to evaluate the unit's effectiveness each year (Exhibit 6).

In order to achieve its mission, UPR-Ponce has set the following goals indicated on Table 2.1.

Table 2.1
UPR-Ponce institutional goals

Focus	Institutional Goals
Student Learning	1. To develop professionals who possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to contribute responsibly to their social, cultural, and environmental surroundings. 2. To offer and develop baccalaureate, associate, and transfer programs and other enriching educational experiences in response to the needs of society. 3. To cultivate knowledge through creative activities, research, and dissemination. 4. To strengthen support services in order to create an optimal environment for teaching and learning.
Institutional Improvement	5. To provide professional development opportunities to faculty and administrative personnel so that they may contribute to the enhancement of institutional quality. 6. To offer student support services that facilitate their adjustment to university life, enrich the educational experience, and contribute to their academic success. 7. To sustain effective articulation of university endeavors among the administration, students, faculty, administrative personnel, and the external community for the optimal development of its academic offerings. 8. To promote an effective planning process and resource allocations based on institutional mission and goals and use the results of institutional assessment for continuous improvement.

Source: Academic Senate Certification 2008-2009-59

Institutional goals are focused on student learning and institutional improvement. These goals are assessed by means of various reports such as the Annual Institutional Effectiveness Report and the Institutional Assessment Report. For such purposes both are aligned with the mission and the institutional goals.

The institutional goals are consistent with the institutional mission. Table 2.2 shows how the mission and goals are aligned and how they respond to the internal and external constituents.

Table 2.2
Mission, goals, and response to context and constituencies

Mission	Alignment with Institutional Goals	Response to the external and internal context and constituencies
The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce is a teaching institution dedicated to the intellectual, humanistic, scientific, cultural, and ethical growth of its students.	1. To develop professionals who possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to contribute responsibly to their social, cultural, and environmental surroundings.	Courses provide transformative learning experiences that engage students in a broad range of programs, services, and opportunities.
It is devoted to the integral development of citizens and professionals capable of	2. To offer and develop baccalaureate, associate, and transfer programs and other enriching educational experiences	Professors have integrated in their courses activities where students do research and apply classroom

Mission	Alignment with Institutional Goals	Response to the external and internal context and constituencies
contributing to a global society as critical, creative, and honest leaders committed to continuous learning and community service.	in response to the needs of society. 3. To cultivate knowledge through creative activities, research, and dissemination. 4. To provide professional development opportunities to faculty and administrative personnel so that they may contribute to the enhancement of institutional quality.	learning to real life situations in the community and in-service learning. The institution offers seminars and workshops for the professional development of its personnel.
It fosters equal access, academic rigor, enriching educational activities, and quality support services which contribute to the formation of graduates with a profile of academic excellence.	5. To strengthen support services in order to create an optimal environment for teaching and learning. 6. To offer student support services that facilitate their adjustment to university life, enrich the educational experience, and contribute to their academic success.	UPR-Ponce has activated 78 courses to expand the academic offerings. UPR-Ponce has implemented new transfer programs such as the Nursing Transfer Program with the UPR-Mayaguez (See Table 7.3). The Office Systems Department revised its course sequence in August 2014. UPR-Ponce has dedicated efforts to increase the number of research programs and internships.
In all its undertakings, the UPR-Ponce promotes a democratic environment supportive of academic freedom, excellence, integrity, respect, tolerance, creativity, and research.	7. To sustain effective articulation of university endeavors among the administration, students, faculty, administrative personnel, and the external community for the optimal development of its academic offerings. 8. To promote an effective planning process and resource allocations based on institutional mission and goals and use the results of institutional assessment for continual improvement.	The university's policies on academic freedom support an open student/faculty learning environment and allow for honest dialogues both in and out of the classroom, thus enhancing student learning. UPR-Ponce has increased the number of academic programs that are professionally accredited (See Table 7.4). The Institutional Assessment Committee plays a key role in the next plan in the monitoring of the student learning outcomes articulated in the new mission

Mission	Alignment with Institutional Goals	Response to the external and internal context and constituencies
		statement in a formal institution-wide assessment plan. The relationship between institutional planning and the allocation of resources, with the university's mission and strategic plan, will be fully documented, analyzed and evaluated in Chapter 3.

Source: Academic Senate Certification 2013-2014-49 and 2008-2009-59

Students are exposed to the mission statement as early as the recruitment process. During the first semester of study, the institutional mission is discussed in the course EDFU 3005: Personal Development and College Success Orientation Seminar, which is a requisite for all students.

A wide range of modalities provides access to the mission, vision, goals, and values to all the institution's constituents. These include: the UPR-Ponce website, the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) link, and other electronic materials. In addition, the Catalog and all institutional syllabi include the institution's mission, vision, and institutional goals. During the academic year 2014-2015, academic departments reviewed and revised their mission and goals to ensure their alignment with the institution's revised mission statement and current goals.   Updated institutional brochures, including these fundamental documents, were electronically distributed to the university community. Also, posters have been placed on campus so that constituents are reminded and remain well-informed of these important documents.

The Annual Institutional Effectiveness Reports indicate that the UPR-Ponce conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and uses the results of its assessment activities for continual institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategic plan and resource allocation support initiatives necessary to maintain institutional quality. Examples of these initiatives are further stated throughout the document.

In October 2014, the OPIR surveyed a representative sample of the UPR-Ponce community; including students, faculty, and staff which rendered a report entitled 2014 *Self-Study Perception Surve*y (Exhibit 5). This study found that 90% of the participants agreed that the institution's constituents collaborate to fulfill its mission and goals*,* that 88% agreed UPR-Ponce is effective in fulfilling them, and that 87% concurred that the functions of the departments and offices are clearly defined.

INTEGRITY

The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce is a public institution, and for this reason it has to conform to the Puerto Rico Commonwealth's Law of Government Ethics (Law 12 July 24, 1985) (Exhibit 7), which was established to preserve and promote the integrity of public employees and government institutions. According to the Office of Government Ethics, all public employees must complete a minimum of twenty hours of continuing education in ethics topics every two years. During the 2010-2012 cycle, 257 employees completed the required hours of continuing education in ethics. During the 2012-2014 cycle, 332 employees completed the required hours related to ethical conduct activities.

Policies, regulations, and mechanisms

Circular Letter 2014-04 of the Office of Government Ethics (Exhibit 8) establishes the public policy to be followed when offering continuing education on ethics and the responsibilities that the Institutional Ethics Committee of each government agency has to comply with. This body is in charge of continuously sponsoring a variety of activities to encourage ethical practices. A list of these activities is presented on Appendix 2.1. These are some of the activities carried out every year by the UPR-Ponce Ethics Committee to encourage ethical practices:

- Offering of courses, seminars, and workshops to the institution's employees and students.
- Promoting the analysis of *Ethos Magazine* and the *Conética Newsletter* as additional education on ethics.
- Distribution of golden bows during *Ethics Week* as a reminder of the commitment with ethical standards.

The 2011 revised version of the UPR Student General By-Laws (Article 2) (Exhibit 9) indicates the rights, as well as moral and ethical liabilities of the students. Chapter II, Sections A, B, C; Chapter IV, Article 4.8; and Chapter VI, Parts A-E address topics like student discipline, student's rights to freedom of expression, grievance procedures, student's evaluations, sexual harassment, drugs and alcohol use, plagiarism, academic integrity violations and property damages. The Vice Presidency of Student Affairs of the UPR Central Administration has published the pamphlet *Compilation of Institutional Policies*, which addresses the aforementioned issues and others such as Non-smoking policies, Patent and Inventions, Security and Copyright Law.

The *2014 Self-Study Perception Survey* showed that 76% of students believe that the UPR-Ponce provides them opportunities to express their opinions and concerns freely. The student population represents a random sample, with a reliability level of 95%. Also, the *Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory* of 2013-2014, which surveyed 376 UPR-Ponce students, shows a 5.26 level of satisfaction (on a 7.0 scale) in relation to the campus climate. The item "Freedom of expression is protected on campus" had a 5.63 level of satisfaction.

The UPR-Ponce follows the established policies and regulations about integrity, as addressed in the UPR General By-Laws, and supports the implementation of policies such as the following:

- Article 11 of the UPR General By-Laws indicates that academic freedom is the right of faculty members to teach their courses with objectivity and integrity, without other restrictions than those imposed by the moral and intellectual responsibilities to cover all the indispensable elements of the course subject, as approved by the corresponding authorities. This article also states that there will be respect for different opinions and educational methods. The *2014 Self-Study Perception Survey* revealed that 96% of the faculty assures that they have academic freedom in their corresponding courses.

- Article 32 states the right to freely express, formulate petitions, and sponsor and organize activities that comply with the institution's laws. The 2014 *Self-Study Perception Survey* evidenced that 83% of the faculty and 58% of non-faculty staff think that the UPR-Ponce provides them adequate opportunities to express their opinions and concerns. In addition, 78% of the faculty

and 49% of non-faculty staff indicated that they have proper access to information that allows them to make recommendations about important issues pertaining to the Institution.

- Article 35 of the UPR General By-Laws encourages administrators to adopt measures that support an environment of harmony, respect and unity in the Institution. To this purpose, two institutional labor unions, the Brotherhood of Exempt Non Faculty Employees and the Workers Union, represent the non-faculty staff in the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce. The Puerto Rican College Professors Association represents the faculty members.

UPR-Ponce promotes sound ethical practices and respect for its constituents as evidenced by the institutional values approved by the Academic Senate (Certification 2007-2008-50). These values are: academic freedom, excellence, respect, integrity, communication and participation, commitment, and fairness.

The administration of the UPR-Ponce provides mechanisms to deal fairly with students' academic assessment, their conduct, and any alleged disciplinary violations in a prompt, appropriate, and equitable manner. If the students need any academic or psychological help, they can trust the professionals at the Counseling and Psychological Services Department. These providers abide by the guidelines of their respective ethical codes: the American Counseling Association, American Psychological Association, Association of Puerto Rican Psychologists, and the Puerto Rican Association of Professional Counseling. Furthermore, there is a strict research protocol that the professionals at this office have to follow while interviewing students to help them address personal or emotional problems (Appendix 2.2).

The UPR-Ponce is committed to practicing fairness in dealing with its individual members and to ensuring that their rights are protected. In support of this commitment, the Board of Trustees issued Certification 2005-2006-32 which established the University Student Ombudsperson (USO) Office. Also, the Governing Board recently issued Certification 2014-2015-119 on this matter. During academic year 2014-2015, members of the General Student Council participated in the nomination process of the USO. The Ombudsperson fosters the development of solutions to matters related to the students' college experience and strives to empower them through assertive counseling in situations which may hinder their learning process. The USO independently reviews student grievances which have not been resolved by the faculty or the department. This person ensures that students receive a fair treatment in their dealings with college staff and educates the college community about their rights and responsibilities. The USO may also recommend changes in university practices to prevent recurrences of similar complaints and grievances.   From August 2005 until May 2014, the Ombudsperson attended an average of 18 cases and 29 grievances annually. Most cases dealt with complaints about grades and make up dates scheduled by professors.

Another important mechanism used by the UPR-Ponce to promote fairness and impartiality is Article 2 of the UPR Student General By-Laws passed in 1997. This article establishes the rights and responsibilities of faculty-student relationships, including aspects such as the students' right to freedom of expression in a climate of harmony and respect. Article 14 describes student behavior as subject to disciplinary norms and procedures. Some of these behaviors are related to academic integrity violations, plagiarism, use of drugs and weapons, theft, personal and/or property damage, obscene conduct, and others. The July 2011 revision of the UPR Student General By-Laws added in various chapters the sanctions to be taken in case students breach institutional policies about sexual harassment, drugs and alcohol, security, copyright law, non-smoking policy, patents and inventions, among others.

UPR-Ponce also provides several mechanisms to warrant fair treatment in decisions regarding alleged disciplinary violations. The Internal Regulations of the Academic Senate named a permanent committee on student affairs to oversee initiatives and make recommendations to the Senate on matters concerning students' affairs, college services, and student by-laws. This committee acts as a liaison between students and student organizations, so as to be informed about students' problems, aspirations, and needs.

The Disciplinary Board (DB) is established by Chapter VI Article 6.8: "Disciplinary Norms and Procedures" of the UPR Student By-Laws. The DB is a body composed by 2 faculty members appointed by the Academic Senate, 2 students appointed by the General Student Council, and a member of the university community appointed by the Chancellor. In academic years 2004-2005 to 2013-2014, the Disciplinary Board at UPR-Ponce dealt with 12 grievances. There were no referrals during 2010 or 2011. Out of the 12 referrals, 67% were dealt within a 20-day period, 7% were dealt within a month, and 7% took three months in making a final decision. It is important to mention that all cases were dealt with within the time stipulated by the regulations.

Student organizations at UPR-Ponce are a means to promote harmony and to provide a welcoming and inclusive community for all students. UPR-Ponce supports students and their desire to engage in educational activities, social justice, and activism about issues affecting the community as evidenced in Annual Institutional Effectiveness Reports from the last ten years. Appendix 2.3 shows examples of the courses that integrate community service and of the activities that have been done. There are 33 accredited organizations for the academic year 2014-2015 which help to promote the institutional mission throughout their activities.

The *Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory* (2013-2014) indicates that on a 7.0 scale, students expressed a 5.62 level of satisfaction in the item "Students are made to feel welcome in this campus." The 2014 *Self-Study Perception Survey*, which inquired about the way harmony is perceived at UPR-Ponce, found that 89% of the community members of UPR-Ponce perceived the institutional climate as respectful among its constituents.

Not only is promoting an environment of harmony a priority for the UPR-Ponce, so is helping its students reach their academic goals by taking special measures like the following ones. Between 2010 and 2015, 160 sections of courses with low student enrollment were offered. So is the offering during the last five years of 68 courses through independent studies taught by faculty members mostly on an *ad honorem* basis; and, whenever the requirements of the courses allow it, giving the students the opportunity to challenge courses for credit.

Institutional information availability

The UPR-Ponce has practiced honesty, transparency, and truthfulness in its public relations announcements, advertisements, institutional information, and admissions materials since its founding in 1969. The Governmental *Ethics Law* (Law 1-2012) establishes that employees have to be constantly oriented towards following a code of ethics and standards of professional conduct. Concerning the issues of honesty and truthfulness, the institution has never been accused of publishing misleading ads or information in its catalog or any other announcements of its academic offerings. The 2014 *Self-Study Perception Survey* reveals that around 81% of the university community (professors, students and non-faculty staff) believed that the information divulged externally and internally from the UPR-Ponce is truthful. Also, the 2013-2014 *Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory* revealed that our students gave

a 5.93 satisfaction level (on a 7.0 scale) on the item "The institution has a good reputation within the community".

Another factor that shows honesty and truthfulness is that the admissions material information, the catalog, and important dates are widely available through the internet. Other institutional materials are widely accessible in the university and in the outside community.

Information sources include: printed and electronic brochures, catalog, and admission brochures. These sources are available at the UPR and UPR-Ponce websites, institutional e-mail, the Academic Affairs Deanship, the Library, and in the academic department offices. The UPR-Ponce continuously disseminates information to students and general community in various ways such as the webpage: www.uprp.edu, the institutional e-mail account (*@upr.edu*), and the *Students Right to Know* link (SRTK). The institution also uses traditional media, like bulletin boards and flyers to disseminate institutional documents. In addition to the electronic media, meetings with different constituents also serve as a means of disseminating information which affects the institution such as faculty, departmental and personnel meetings, among others. Official documents, such as catalogs, statistical data, and policies, are available in virtual format and in hardcopy. Printed versions are available at the Adelina Coppin Library and different administrative offices, such as the Chancellor's, the Academic Dean's and the Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR).

The UPR-Ponce asserts fair and impartial practices in hiring, evaluating, and dismissing employees or faculty. The Institution announces the employment opportunities via institutional e-mail, through the Human Resources Office and, in the case of faculty, in newspapers of general circulation. The published statement of the selection criteria clearly describes the qualifications, knowledge, skills, abilities and experience required to occupy the position, so the applicant is well-informed. Article 31 of the UPR General By-Laws (UPRGBL) states that the UPR is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate for reason of race, color, sex, age, mental or physical impediments, social condition, politics, or religion. Non-faculty staff recruitment criteria are detailed in their labor collective bargaining agreements which are renewed every three years in conjunction with the UPRGBL.

Faculty performance is vital for obtaining and maintaining academic excellence in the institution. Therefore, one component in the college assessment process is performance evaluations of the professors. Article 45 of the UPRGBL specifies that such evaluations should be performed by the Personnel Committee of each department (Academic Senate Certifications 1999-2000-27; 2000-2001-54, 55, 61). The process that this entails will be discussed in the Faculty Chapter.

Personnel recruitment and evaluation practices are revised as needed by the Central Administration of the University of Puerto Rico, which has the authority to do so. The steps toward hiring, evaluating, and dismissing employees are well-defined in Chapter V of the UPR General By-Laws. The UPR-Ponce has consistently abided by those norms. As evidenced by the 2014 *Self-Study Perception Survey*, 88% of the faculty and 74% of the non-faculty staff think that the UPR-Ponce promotes an environment of justice and respect. Some faculty members are grouped under the Puerto Rican College Professors Association.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the analysis of the findings, the following can be concluded:

1. Evidence supports that UPR-Ponce has a clearly defined mission and goals that guide faculty, administration, non-faculty, and governing bodies in making decisions related to planning, resource allocation, program and curriculum development, and definition of program outcomes.
2. The UPR-Ponce's institutional goals are consistent with its mission and vision.
3. The community's involvement in the development of the mission provides a positive model for engaging the stakeholders in the planning process.
4. UPR-Ponce's mission and goals respond to external and internal contexts and constituencies.
5. The institution has policies, regulations, and mechanisms that foster institutional integrity.
6. UPR-Ponce promotes the dissemination of information relevant to students, faculty, and non-faculty as well as to community, alumni, and prospective students in a manner that is varied, transparent, and easily accessible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations derive from findings and conclusions:

1. Continue fostering the participation of its different constituents in maintaining a well-informed community through consultations, creation of committees, among others.
2. Keep monitoring and updating information about policies, practices, and procedures for students, faculty, and non-faculty.

CHAPTER 3: PLANNING, RESOURCE ALLOCATION, AND INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL (STANDARD 2), AND INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES (STANDARD 3)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the nature of the planning processes at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR-Ponce) including resource allocation, institutional renewal, and institutional resources. The Institution has been able to provide services to all its constituents, even though there have been times over the past few years when financial resources have been constrained. Through strategic planning, continuous assessment processes and fiscal discipline, UPR-Ponce has worked to achieve its goals and mission.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS (2006-2016)

UPR-Ponce is continuously establishing priorities and directions to sustain and improve use of institutional resources, academic quality, and the fulfillment of its mission. The systemic Strategic Plan *Ten for the Decade* (2006-2016) (Exhibit 10) serves as a framework to align all planning processes from the top management (Governing Board) down to the units departments.

In February 2005, under the leadership of the former president of the University of Puerto Rico, Antonio Garcia Padilla, the systemic strategic plan *Ten for the Decade* (2006-2016) was presented to the university community undertaking an extensive dialogue process that led to its final approval by the Board of Trustees in May 2006 under Certification 2005-2006-123. *Ten for the Decade* outlined the main goals for the university's strategic development:

- Sustained ties to the student body
- An academic culture of currency, experimentation, and renewal
- Competitive research, investigation, and creative work
- A culture of institutional assessment and evaluation
- Technological currency
- Leadership in community investment and cultural initiatives
- Dedication to the integration of the university into the world at large
- Efficiency and beauty in both natural and built spaces
- Administrative and managerial optimization
- A strengthened institutional identity

The implementation of *Ten for the Decade* began in August 2006. Accordingly, the former Chancellor of UPR-Ponce, Prof. Jaime Marrero, appointed a special committee to design and draft the UPR-Ponce 2006-2016 Strategic Plan. The committee was integrated by key representatives from the faculty, staff administrators, deans, and students. During the pre-planning phase, input was requested from all major constituencies comprising the community of UPR-Ponce; students, alumni, faculty, employers, and non-faculty among many others. UPR-Ponce vision, mission, goals, and values guided the committee in designing the strategic plan. Among the different documents and data sources used as reference to perform an environmental analysis, that considers the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), were previous self-studies and reports submitted to MSCHE, the *Ten for the Decade* Plan, professional accreditation standards, and the operational plans and assessment reports of all unit departments and offices. The Strategic Plan outlined seven key goals for the development of UPR-Ponce.

These are: student performance and institutional identity, faculty development, academic offerings, planning and assessment culture, administrative optimization, infrastructure and technology, and community outreach.

The UPR-Ponce Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) provided guidance and support during the planning process and its further implementation. OPIR gathered, organized, and provided all necessary data, including statistics, operational plans, and performance and assessment reports to design the strategic plan which was coordinated by the chairperson of this department. Also, OPIR continuously tracks institutional effectiveness indicators as outlined in the strategic plan and annually reports these results to the Chancellor and the university community. The UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan 2006-2016 was designed to be completely aligned with *Ten for the Decade* 2006-2016. Appendix 3.1 shows how all goals and objectives of UPR-Ponce are aligned with those of *Ten for the Decade*.

UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan 2006-2016 (Exhibit 11) was approved by the Administrative Board under Certification 2006-2007-69. Also, the mission statement of UPR-Ponce has been revised by the Academic Senate to reflect the role of the institution in the academic, social, and economic world. Accordingly, the strategic planning of UPR-Ponce is directed towards the fulfillment of the revised mission statement as explained in the previous chapter. The UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan 2006-2016 was widely disclosed to all UPR-Ponce constituents through staff meetings, electronic means as the institutional webpage (www.uprp.edu), e-mails, and periodic reports prepared by the OPIR.

A set of key indicators, as shown in Appendix 3.2, has been established by the administration in order to measure the effectiveness of the Strategic Plan. Based on the goals established in the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan, other institutional plans were created to ensure the attainment of institutional goals. These included a plan for integrating technology, a faculty development plan, an assessment plan, a master plan for the future development of the institution, and the integration of the operational plans for all unit departments.

Over the past five years the plan for integrating technology has resulted in the acquisition of hardware, fiber optic connectivity, Wi-Fi access, and educational platforms among other projects. The Institutional Renewal section provides further information on technological advances. Under the leadership of the Academic Affairs Deanship, the faculty development program facilitates financial assistance to faculty members pursuing professional development, academic degrees, or engaging in research activities. Over the last five years about $135,000 were disbursed for these purposes. Workshops and conferences are also held periodically within the campus to develop faculty skills in teaching, assessment, research, and technical knowledge among other areas. An alliance with New York University (NYU) through the Faculty Resource Network allows the faculty to participate in one week academic workshops or one month research internships held at the NYU campus. Over 50 participants have benefited from this alliance since 2010.

The Institutional Assessment Plan (Academic Senate Certification 2012-2013-34)(Exhibit 12), coordinated through OPIR, has resulted in the re-affirmation of a "culture of assessment" in the institution where all academic departments and administrative offices develop, implement, and divulge their assessment plans in a continual manner. Since academic year 2005-2006, assessment forums have been held with the participation of faculty from all academic departments. The objective of these forums is to share and discuss the assessment outcomes of academic courses and programs.

The Physical Resources Office plans the future development of the institution, lays out maintenance, and improves areas identified as vital to ensure the mission focused goals of UPR-Ponce. Further information of such future development plans are detailed in the institutional renewal section.

UPR is currently working on the development of its 2016-2021 Strategic Plan. An Executive Committee for Strategic Planning was appointed by the President with representation of all sectors of the academic community (Governing Board, faculty, non-faculty members, administrative staff, and students). The Committee has been meeting on a monthly basis and has examined the impact of the UPR's external and internal environment on its development. The impact of the island's financial crisis has been one of the factors considered. The Committee has also examined the success indicators of the current strategic plan and has identified critical issues that must be considered in the new plan. A draft of the new plan will be distributed among the eleven campuses of the University for their input prior to final approval by the Governing Board.

Foreseeing the cycle ending of the UPR-Ponce 2006-2016 Strategic Plan, the Chancellor of the institution, Dr. Leonardo Morales, has already appointed a strategic plan committee constituted by faculty members, deans, staff administrators, non-faculty, and student representatives. A survey was distributed in September 2014 and two public hearings were held during October 2014 to gather the input of all sectors of the university community in preparation of the new UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan 2016-2021. To better cope with rapid social and economic changes, the institution has shortened the lifespan of its strategic plans from ten to five years. The preliminary work of the strategic plan committee has already identified four strategic themes (Academia, Engagement, Innovation, and Sustainability) and measurable strategic objectives are being drafted to guide the institution until 2021.

UPR-Ponce has worked in order to develop a culture of planning with the collaboration of all sectors of the university community. The university community clearly understands that the institution has accomplished its mission through strategic planning and a defined collaborative process. The *Self-Study Perception Survey* conducted by OPIR in October 2014, revealed that 90% of the university community either agrees or totally agrees that UPR-Ponce is effective in compliance with its mission and strategic goals. Eighty-eight percent either agrees or totally agrees that the functions of the academic departments and administrative offices are clearly defined to comply with the mission of UPR-Ponce.

PLANNING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION DECISIONS

UPR-Ponce's budgeting process is driven by planning and assessment results through an ongoing process funneled by its institutional mission. The institution's annual budgeting cycle links the mission, planning, budgeting, and allocation resource processes together. Three times a year, the budget Chairperson assesses institutional resources and submits reports, including current expenditures and account balances, to Central Administration. Assessment results are used by the UPR-Ponce administration and the Executive Committee of Institutional Renewal (ECIR) in charge of budget allocations to determine policies and strategic allocations that ensure both the fulfillment of the institutional mission and continuous improvement of academic and administrative operations.

The budgeting process starts with setting annual strategic priorities and new prioritized budget initiatives derived from the assessment of institutional effectiveness during the previous year. Then, all academic departments and administrative offices submit to the Budget Office their fiscal needs for the following year.

In order to justify allocation of funds, department chairpersons must align their requests to operational plans, assessment results, and the strategic plans of UPR-Ponce and *Ten for the Decade*. The units' plans include selected and prioritized new budget initiatives plus continuous improvement initiatives supported by the use and/or reallocation of existing resources. Changes and program improvements driven by the assessment process which require additional resources are documented in the units' annual report to the Deans and in the annual budget request. This process requires that department and office chairpersons plan for the upcoming year's activities and request the necessary funds providing the following information:

- Number of students enrolled in courses (current and projected).
- Substantial changes in number of employees, students, assigned budget, and volume of services provided for the current fiscal year and for the next fiscal year.
- Justified budget petition, by item, for office and laboratory materials and equipment.
- Budget for additional personnel (based on expected increase in volume of services to be provided for the next fiscal year).
- Work plans for new projects (goals, objectives, activities, estimated budget, and justification).

The allocation of technology resources to improve teaching and learning processes is a priority in UPR-Ponce. Every year the institution receives approximately $150,000 from a technological fee charged to students. The Chancellor appoints a Technology Committee in charge of the evaluation of the needs submitted by the chairpersons of academic departments. Initially, the Dean of Academic Affairs requests the department chairpersons to evaluate their needs for academic technology including equipment and software. These petitions are submitted to the Dean who presents them for the consideration of the Technology Committee, which evaluates and distributes the funds. After the technology funds are distributed, the budget chairperson evaluates the operational budget to identify additional funds to satisfy any pending requests. Other equipment needs for academic departments and support offices are included in the budget petitions submitted each year as well as any special requirements to each Dean. Some departments also submit proposals to obtain external funds for specific technological projects.

Once the fiscal needs are revised, the Budget Office prepares the Budget Distribution and Funds Request. This document outlines all budget items of the institution including operational and capital expenses, salaries, equipment, materials, and services among others. The Budget Distribution and Funds Request is first submitted to the Institutional Renewal Executive Committee (IREC) which is composed of the Chancellor, the OPIR chairperson, deans, the Finance and Budget chairpersons and the Institutional Assessment Coordinator who evaluate the alignment of the budget with operational plans and assessment reports. This committee further ensures that the allocation of funds and resources for institutional renewal respond to the mission of UPR-Ponce. After this process, the Budget Distribution and Funds Request is submitted to the Administrative Board for its final approval. Finally, the Governing Board issues the budget certification for the upcoming year. Figure 3.1 depicts the UPR-Ponce budget, planning, and resource allocation process.

Figure 3.1
UPR-Ponce budget, planning, and resource allocation process

```
                    Identify changes
                        needed


  Scan and assess                    Identify strategic
     results          UPR-Ponce        objectives and
                       mission          initiatives


     Implement                        Allocation of
     activities                      budget to support
                                    atrategic objectives
```
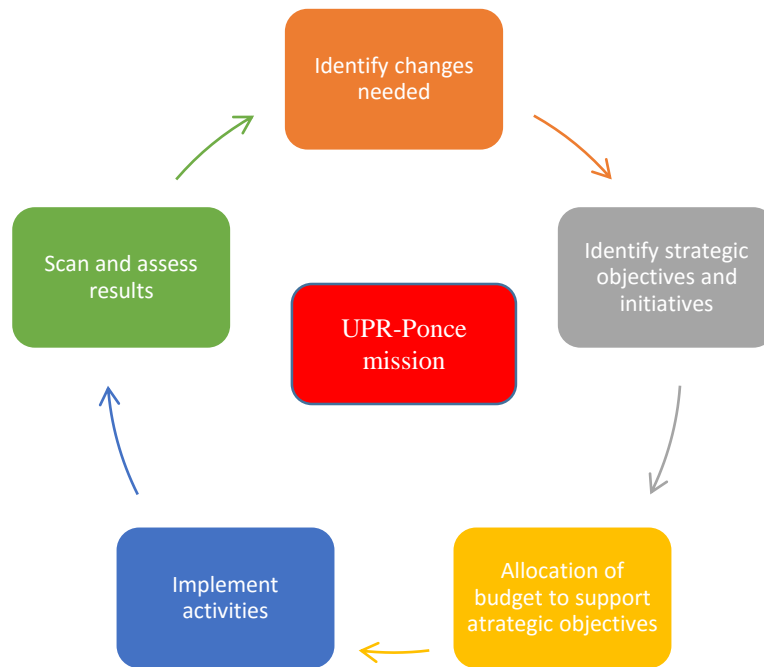
The Government of Puerto Rico is currently in the process of identifying the details of budget distribution for the next fiscal year. Therefore, UPR does not yet have the details of how its budget will be affected. Nonetheless, the President has been meeting with his Chancellors and Vice Presidents to identify specific issues that may contribute to adjusting to potential budget constraints. It was highlighted in this analysis that UPR focuses on preserving academic excellence by continuously meeting accreditation standards, not only those of the MSCHE, but those of the more than 100 professional accreditation agencies that the UPR responds to.

The budget supports UPR-Ponce's mission and goals considering the following categories shown on table 3.1.

Table 3.1
Budget categories that support UPR-Ponce's mission and goals

Category	Services supported
Administrative areas	Administrative, operational, maintenance expenses, institutional expenses, and fringe benefits
Academic programs	Transfer, baccalaureate, and technical programs, summer sessions, continuing education, Honor's Program, and strengthening research
Student services	Registrar's office, social and cultural activities, the athletic program, Technological Assistance, and special leave programs
Institutional research	Institutional studies, research, and academic activities
Academic support programs	Library, audiovisual, Academic Support Center for Students and Faculty, and the Academic Affairs Deanship

Operational plans and budget requests are supplemented with assessment data which is compared against previous results and performance indicators to set continuous improvement practices. The Institutional Assessment Committee, under the direction of OPIR, coordinates and foresees the assessment processes of all institutional units.

INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL

Renewal is defined as the improvement of educational quality, the enhancement of effective teaching and learning, and the improvement of quality and efficiency of educational and administrative support services. All implemented institutional renewal programs are based on assessment results. UPR-Ponce has consistently pursued the improvement in all processes that affect the quality of their academic offerings, particularly the accreditation of its programs and the continuous improvement of the curricula and teaching methodology. Institutional improvements have been attained through strategic planning based on assessment results and environmental scanning. Further information on assessment processes is presented in Chapter 8.

Program Accreditation Achievements

As Board of Trustees Certification 2003-2004-138 states, the UPR should pursue, obtain, and maintain professional accreditations in all applicable academic programs. UPR-Ponce has successfully implemented a plan to achieve professional accreditations that enhance the recognition of its programs, teaching methods, student performance and strive for continuous improvement. The institution has devoted human and financial resources to attain this goal. As a result, new processes of accountability, faculty hiring procedures, stakeholder responsive operations, and enhanced teaching methods have been implemented.

Accredited programs have continued to comply with their professional accrediting agencies and being a priority for UPR-Ponce. All accredited programs have successfully completed their reaccreditation or periodic review processes maintaining the good standing status from their respective accrediting agencies. Table 7.4 presents more details on professional accreditations and evaluations schedule.

Curriculum Revision Improvements

Striving for continuous improvement and in response to the requirements of accreditation agencies and industry trends, the academic departments systematically revise their curriculums to ensure the quality of their offerings. The curricula of the Engineering (2009), Social Sciences (2011), Business Administration (2012), Offices Systems (2012), Computer Sciences (2013), and Education (2013) programs have been revised by improved stakeholder responsive offerings. Also, based on assessment results, the curriculum committees of each department periodically revise the criteria of learning outcomes at course level. As a result, teaching is continuously improved through new delivery and evaluation methods, learning activities, and other strategies aimed to enhance student performance according to the goals of each program.

As an example of a collaborative effort based on assessment results, the Library and the Counseling and Psychological Services Department teamed up to improve the course EDFU 3005; Personal Development and College Success Orientation Seminar. The assessment results revealed that freshman students were lacking certain skills that are essential for on-line searching. Consequently, UPR-Ponce has ensured that all freshman students participate in a basic workshop during their first semester at the institution.

New academic offerings are part of the institutional renewal plan. In 2009, the Department of Social Sciences began with new curricular offerings, as areas of emphasis, on Rehabilitation Services for the baccalaureates of Forensic Psychology and Mental Health Psychology. It is worth noticing that these programs are unique in Puerto Rico. Also, the Business Administration Department began in 2012 offering a curriculum in Logistics and Maritime Transportation to satisfy the increasing demand in this discipline due to the development of a nearby seaport. A proposal to offer minors and double majors in marketing, accounting, finance, and management is under consideration by the Academic Senate. UPR is currently analyzing its academic offerings with the eleven campuses. Enrollment, retention, and graduation rates are among the factors being considered in an effort to identify major needs for accreditation compliance as well as potential adjustments for meeting standards of excellence.

Furthermore, UPR-Ponce has been proactive in teaming up with other units of the UPR system to offer new transfer programs in disciplines identified as having a high demand, allowing students the opportunity to complete their first two years of baccalaureate studies in our institution. Currently, UPR-Ponce offers 53 transfer programs in coordination with other UPR units (UPR-Ponce Catalog) ([Exhibit 13](#)). [Appendix 3.3](#) details the complete list of UPR-Ponce's transfer programs.

Technological Improvements

Since 2007, the UPR has invested $70,000,000 installing the Oracle management system (E-Business Suite) by phases. To date, purchasing, account payable, and general ledger modules have been installed and in use. Cash management, fixed assets, and human resources modules should be installed by 2016 enabling the institution to better manage its institutional resources.

In March 2008, the Administrative Board approved the Strategic Plan for the Integration of Information Technology (IT) ([Exhibit 14](#)) in UPR-Ponce (Certification 2007-2008-48). The vision of this plan is to meet the needs and expectations of the institution non-faculty, faculty, students, and the university community through the use and management of IT. Also, the plan aims to lead and promote in a simple and reliable fashion the use of technology in learning and teaching processes. As a result of the implementation of this plan, UPR-Ponce has made considerable advances in the technological field. In 2010 all computer networking cables were replaced by fiber optic wiring to improve telecommunications and both internet functionality and accessibility.

The learning experience in classrooms has been improved with the acquisition of technological equipment and the incremental use of web-based learning platforms such as Blackboard and Moodle. In academic year 2013-2014, 486 sections were offered with such platforms compared to 205 in 2007-2008, an increment of 237%. New computers and related equipment have been recently installed in the computer laboratories in different departments as well as many classrooms throughout the institution. In 2014, the Information Technology Office also completed a project that enabled WI-FI access on the whole campus.

Support services to both faculty and students have been improved through the implementation of a new web platform known as NEXT, which was implemented in 2014. NEXT will eventually substitute the Student Information System (SIS) improving web-based services and information accessibility to both students and staff. Among the new features offered by this web portal are student access to academic programs and schedules, financial aid records, grades, and course catalogs. Also, NEXT allows faculty to report attendance and grades to the Registrar Office and to have access to their class rosters and student contact information. In the first semester of academic year 2014-2015, 99.9% of attendance reports were

submitted through NEXT in compliance with federal requirements (Standards for Participation in Title IV, HEA Programs). Also, professors entered students' grades. Now, this process is easier, more accessible, and students are able to know their grades faster than before.   UPR-Ponce is the first unit within the UPR system to successfully implement the first phase of NEXT. This web platform is scheduled to be fully operational in four years and will include modules to serve admissions, registration, financial aid, and financial processes.

Since 2010 UPR-Ponce has invested about $750,000 in computers, smart boards, projectors, and related hardware for academic purposes. In 2014, the photocopiers of all department and administrative offices were substituted by new cutting edge technology machines to provide administrative support to faculty and student services. This initiative improves the use and cost managing of the equipment at an investment of about $300,000 for the next five years. In 2015 the institution invested $240,000 in a new phone system, internet bandwidth was upgraded from 100mb to 250mb and Microsoft Office 365 was made available free of cost to both students and staff.

INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

The University of Puerto Rico receives, for its operational budget, an annual appropriation of 9.60% of the average of the two previous years of total income received by the Government of Puerto Rico. Also, UPR-Ponce receives funds from institutional auxiliary enterprises and external resources such as donations, state and federal programs and grants. According to information provided by the Planning Board of the Government of Puerto Rico, indicators of income received by the Government revealed a decline tendency in the last years, especially in 2008, 2009 and 2013, when income of the Commonwealth had waned by 5.68%, 7.76% and 1.82% respectively. Reductions in appropriations from the Government of Puerto Rico, along with a depressive economic situation in the island have impacted the operational budget received from the state by the University of Puerto Rico. Table 3.2 illustrates the operational budget of the academic years from 2010-2011 to 2014-2015.

Table 3.2
UPR-Ponce operational budget

Total Operational Budget		
Fiscal Year	**Operational Budget**	**% of change from previous year**
2010-2011	$23,063,866	----------
2011-2012	$22,890,166	-0.75%
2012-2013	$23,922,094	4.51%
2013-2014	$24,295,587	1.16%
2014-2015	$26,425,324	8.77%

Source: Budget Office and Financial System

UPR-Ponce has been strengthening efforts to identify alternative revenue sources to ensure its ongoing financial stability.   These efforts respond to reductions in direct state appropriations from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico that have declined a cumulative 5.45% since academic year 2010-2011. One of the key cornerstones in these efforts has been the external resources, which along with the operational budget represent the consolidated budget to effectively comply with the fulfillment of the UPR-Ponce's mission. Figure 3.2 depicts the total consolidated budget for UPR-Ponce for the last five years. As of June 30, 2015, the financial system registered a total consolidated budget of $46,376,679.77.

Figure 3.2
UPR-Ponce consolidated budgets
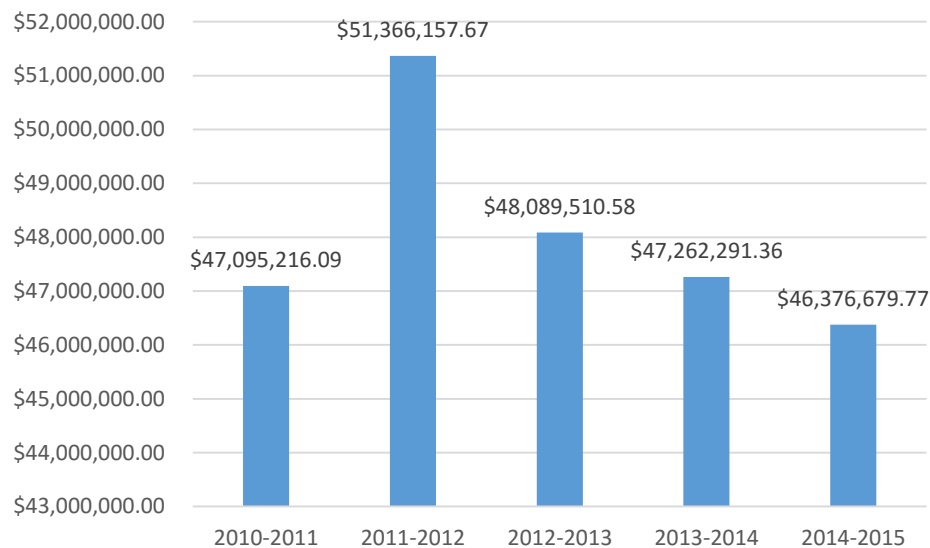
The institution has been able to fulfill its mission and goals offering quality services to its constituents. As evidenced in the 2013-2014 *Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory,* UPR-Ponce scored 5.19, on a 1 to 7 scale, when students were asked if they were satisfied on how academic support meets their needs. This score is comparable with the national mean for public universities of 5.20. Also, the 2014 *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE) report shows competitive levels of service satisfaction. Regarding student services UPR-Ponce scored 6.2 (on a 1 to 7 scale) surpassing the 4.7 national mean of similar institutions, on administrative services the institution scored 4.8, equal to the national mean, and 5.3 on academic advising surpassing again the national mean of 5.2.

UPR-Ponce has continued to increase its efforts to seek external funding in order to supplement revenues coming from state and tuition sources and to maintain a total consolidated budget strong enough to fulfill UPR-Ponce's mission. These resources include funding from state and federal agencies, as well as from private donors. External funds are mainly directed towards funding faculty research projects and initiatives to improve teaching-learning processes. During academic years 2010-2011 to 2014-2015, a significant amount of funds ($10,240,109) was granted by the Department of Education of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to certify elementary and secondary school teachers, as well as to enhance their knowledge and teaching skills in Science and Mathematics. During this period, UPR-Ponce obtained $13,753,946 (approved budget) from grants, which includes funds from state, federal, and private sources, plus $412,321 in donations, for a grand total of $14,166,267. Figure 3.3 shows the amount of external funding corresponding to each year from state, federal or private sources including grants awarded and donations.

Figure 3.3
External resources by funding source

	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Private	$63,158.09	$116,817.47	$47,555.17	$32,011.25	$52,182.72
Federal	$762,809.00	$481,676.40	$563,751.59	$559,654.57	$594,454.97
State/Local	$2,580,323.0	$5,010,311.0	$2,186,502.0	$760,178.00	$354,882.00

Totals	$3,406,290.09	$5,608,804.87	$2,787,908.76	$1,351,843.82	$1,001,519.69
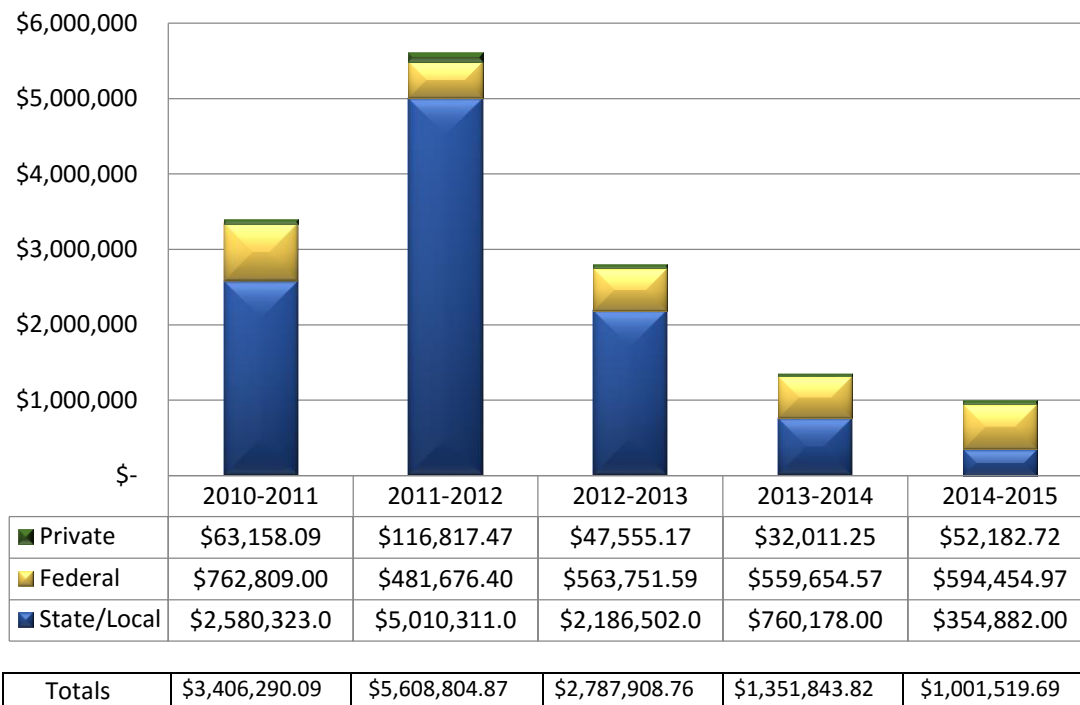
Source: UPR-Ponce External Resources and Finance Offices

These figures represent an increase of 52% ($4,845,678) over the amount obtained in the previous cycle, from 2005-2006 to 2009-2010 which was $9,320,589. Most of these funds come from the state, which has accounted for 76.89% of the institutional external resources. On the other hand, during the same cycle, a total of $412,321 came from donations, mostly from private sources. During the last ten years, UPR-Ponce has received, on average, a total of over two million dollars per academic year.

In spite of the reduction on the federal funding obtained, due to the ending of Title V funds in 2011, in the past two years funds granted have represented an important advancement in the research projects. In the last five years, the institution has considerably increased the funds devoted to research projects, both funded by the institution and by external agencies. As a result, a significant amount of students and faculty members have had the opportunity to enhance their scholar experiences participating in internships (locally, nationally, and internationally) in important research-intensive institutions.

Alumni donations make-up a small apportionment of private funding, but might increase if new strategies to tap this source prove successful. Accordingly, UPR-Ponce has increased its efforts contacting potential donors and securing their donations to increase the institution Endowment Fund. To date, the value of this endowment (funded by alumni, parents, students, employees and private donors) is over $30,000. There is still much to be done in this area, as the institution moves forward to have more aggressive and structured fundraising campaigns on a regular basis.

Along with efforts made to increase external resources, the institution has carefully established several measures in order to control expenditures. The Governing Board of the University of Puerto Rico, as well as the Administrative Board of UPR-Ponce, has clearly defined the necessary measures to be taken in order to control expenses, considering the reduction in the total consolidated budget. Data extracted

from the financial system demonstrates that the expenditures have decreased by 3.71% from fiscal year 2010-2011 to 2014-2015, representing a reduction in costs totaling $1,505,499. Most of the savings were attained through reductions on payroll, purchases, and travel expenses. The measures established by the respective university boards have represented a key cornerstone when it comes to controlling expenditures, without affecting the mission of the institution.

For the upcoming years, UPR-Ponce will continue dealing with financial challenges by strengthening its external funds base and maximizing its academic programs and administrative resources. UPR-Ponce will continue receiving a proportionate amount of the UPR annual allocation from the 9.60% formula while increasing the portion of the total budget represented by external resources. Also, the continuous development of the assessment culture and the awareness of the constituents about financial issues will help the institution to face these challenges.

Human Resources

Human resources continues to be the main asset of UPR-Ponce. To fulfill its mission and goals, the institution allocates approximately 90% of its total operating budget to human resources salaries and benefits.

UPR General By-Laws establishes policies, regulations, and procedures, which are managed by the Human Resources Office, for the recruitment of faculty and non-faculty staff. Department chairpersons or office chairpersons evaluate staffing needs according to their operational plans and goals. When additional staff is needed, a request is submitted to the corresponding dean.   To ensure transparency in fund management, the Budget Chairperson has to approve and certify that funds are available for the post. Once the Dean, the Budget, and Human Resources Chairpersons evaluate and recommend the post, the Chancellor has to give the final approval according to the institution mission and goals.

For the 2014-2015 academic year, the institution's workforce consisted of a total of 203 faculty members and 229 non-faculty support staff. According to demand, administrative and academic support services have been offered satisfactorily as previously mentioned on studies conducted by *Noel-Levitz* and the *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)* in 2013-2014. Table 3.3 shows a comparison of the distribution of personnel by type of appointment for academic years between 2010-2011 and 2014-2015.

Table 3.3
UPR-Ponce distribution of personnel

UPR-Ponce Personnel	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	Average
Faculty	200	180	187	188	203	192
Non-Faculty	233	234	237	236	229	234

Source: Institutional Annual Data Profiles

Physical Facilities and Equipment

UPR-Ponce's facilities are located within a 64-acre campus in one of the most valuable, accessible, and convenient commercial-residential districts of the city of Ponce. Its 333,362 square feet of facilities consist of 23 buildings, including one main academic building where 42 classrooms, 38 laboratories, and 112

faculty offices are located. Another 13 classrooms, 10 laboratories, and 76 faculty spaces are housed in other buildings throughout the campus. Other main buildings include the Student and the Administration Deanships, the Library, the multi-use sports complex, and the theater.

Between 2007 and 2014 UPR-Ponce invested approximately $5,262,887 in permanent improvements. In 2007 a total overhaul of the library was completed with an investment of $4,000,000. The library is located on a 47,487 square feet building and offers academic support services for students and faculty. Among the improved facilities the library offers modern multimedia, instruction, conference, group study, and projection rooms for academic activities. Also, the library provides direct access to 105 computers and five printing service areas in addition to traditional library service areas such as reference, reserve, circulation, journal collections, among others. Several small administrative buildings, such as the printing services, the Pre-school Center, and the Security Office are also located within the campus.

As a result, academic support services were improved by the offering of new areas for studying, conferences, instruction and related library resources. Academic support offices such as the Counseling and Psychological Services Department, the Student Affairs Deanship, the Academic Computer Center, and the offices of the Education, Social Sciences, and English departments have been upgraded to provide better services to the university community. A new research laboratory was constructed in 2009 while the laboratories of Engineering, Biology, Office Systems, and Technological Assistance were refurbished in 2008. Also, in 2012 UPR-Ponce obtained $100,000 through a federal grant to install a photo-voltaic system to reduce energy consumption in the Student Affairs Deanship building.

Chancellor Leonardo Morales is working closely with the President of the University and the Governing Board to identify and obtain fund allocations for additional permanent improvements. At present time, the Central Administration of UPR is conducting a request for proposal (RFP) to install a solar energy system which is estimated to produce up to 75% of the energy needed by UPR-Ponce. This solar system will allow significant savings in electricity consumption enabling additional funds to be assigned for permanent improvements.

The Physical Resources Office annually outlines and assesses the current condition and improvements to be made in the following years. Among the identified priorities for UPR-Ponce are the replacement and installation of new air conditioning units, revamping the sport facilities, re-asphalt roads and parking spaces, roof sealing, and improving the aesthetics of the campus main entrance, among others. The Physical Resources Office works continuously to fulfill the mission of UPR- Ponce maintaining its buildings and infrastructure in adequate conditions. This task is supported by a staff of about 50 employees, including janitors, refrigeration technicians, electricians, plumbers, gardeners, and related personnel. In spite of budget reductions, UPR-Ponce has gradually improved its physical facilities and updated some of its infrastructure. Appendix 3.4 shows the complete list of permanent improvements performed since 2010.

Auditing Process at UPR-Ponce

The firm Ernst & Young audits the financial statements of the University of Puerto Rico. These financial statements are submitted as a whole, combining its eleven campuses, and other component units. During the last five years, the University has received an unqualified opinion[1] from the CPA firm external auditors,

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[1] "Independent auditor's declaration that he or she has no reservation in certifying that the audited firm's financial statements (1) adequately disclose material information, (2) present fairly its financial position, and (3) show results of its operations in conformity with the provisions GAAP". Definition extracted from http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/unqualified-opinion.html

thus indicating financial statements and information related is reliable and free of material misstatements (Ernest & Young Audit Reports). Financial information provided by UPR-Ponce represents an integral part of the UPR financial statements.

Besides the external auditing process, the Puerto Rico Comptroller's Office audits selected accounting periods to evaluate the efficiency of the fiscal operations and administrative processes. The Comptroller's office has clearly defined through Circular Letter 15-17 (published every two years) eleven criteria to both, evaluate both the effectiveness and efficiency with which the Institution is administered. These criteria are:

- Accounting
- Bank reconciliations
- Debts to government agencies
- Strategic plan
- Personnel development and training plan
- Compliance with Law 41 on irregularities and loss of public funds and property
- Compliance with Law 18 and Regulation 33 on award of contracts
- Corrective action plans
- Ethics Committee
- Document filing and control system
- Information technology

The Comptroller's reports indicate that the UPR-Ponce has consistently complied with the law and current regulations (*Evaluation Sheet for Comptroller Audits*). Along with the external audit performed by both, the CPA firm and the Comptroller Office, the UPR-Ponce is also audited by internal auditors appointed by the Governing Board. These auditors periodically assess the following areas:

- Evaluate if budget allocation is consistent with existing policies and procedures. These include the Purchase and Pre-Intervention Procedures Manuals and the Record of Contracts in the Puerto Rico Comptroller's Office, among others.
- Operational audits of the UPR-Ponce to make recommendations to improve management operations and for the optimum use of funds.
- Evaluation of Financial Aid Office processes.
- Operational audits of the financial area, including the Purchasing, Pre-Intervention, Property, and Accounting Offices.

The UPR-Ponce has an audit coordinator, which oversees any auditing process performed at the institution. The audit coordinator is supervised directly by the Chancellor and is responsible for the submission of any corrective action plan and the progress of the audit being performed.

Finally, the Finance Office performs an annual assessment of its operations in order to identify potential risks and works toward minimizing them. These risks are usually identified in areas where state and federal regulations have a direct impact in the finance operations. Following this approach, many of the risks identified have been worked out, thus minimizing any potential risk that might have an impact in the financial statements. As an example, procedures to keep track of all payment checks emitted by UPR-Ponce and random audits performed to all cashiers' petty cash have been implemented, thus reducing financial risks for the institution.

These audits, performed periodically at the institution, have served to assess how effectively and efficiently the UPR-Ponce is using its resources. Also, they have represented a sound instrument to continuously improve academic and administrative excellence.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the analysis of the findings, the following can be concluded:

1. UPR-Ponce has been successful in implementing its strategic and operational plans according to its mission.
2. The institution has continued to enhance teaching and academic support services through the effective use of technology, strategic resource allocations, and by establishing a culture of continuous improvement.
3. The institution has been effective in facing reductions in the consolidated budget without affecting operations adversely.
4. External resources represent a minor percentage of UPR-Ponce consolidated budgets as institutional funding relies greatly on state appropriations.
5. The levels of satisfaction reflect that administrative and academic support departments are well staffed and equipped to render quality services.
6. UPR Ponce's financial reports consistently comply with the law and all applicable regulations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations derive from findings and conclusions:

1. Strengthen the efforts to increase external funding through research proposals, donations, grants, and its auxiliary enterprises.
2. Find other ways to strengthen ties with alumni and the external community.
3. Continue devoting resources to maintain professional accreditations and to continuously renew its curricula keeping the infrastructure in optimal condition.
4. Implement the new strategic plan that will guide the institution for the 2016-2021 period.

CHAPTER 4: LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE (STANDARD 4) AND ADMINISTRATION (STANDARD 5)

INTRODUCTION

Leadership and Governance are two key elements in any institution's system of policy development and decision-making process. This chapter presents and analyzes the administrative structure that enables and facilitates the learning process, research, and fosters improvement. In addition, it presents how the university's organization and governance are supported. Likewise, the chapter examines the scope in which the institution abides by ethical standards and its own policies in conducting its programs and activities.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce (UPR-Ponce) is part of the University of Puerto Rico System, a large publicly supported multi-campus, coeducational university system. The Central Administration (UPR-CA) is located in Río Piedras. The Central Administration oversees the operations of the eleven academic units, including UPR-Ponce. The Governing Board of the University of Puerto Rico is the highest governing and administrative body of the UPR system, and was created by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Legislature on April 30, 2013, under Law 13 (PC 927). Previously, the Board of Trustees had the responsibility of governing the public university system. However, Law 13 repealed Article 3 of Law 1 of January 20, 1966, as amended, known as the "UPR Law", and replaced it with a new Article 3, for the purpose of eliminating the Board of Trustees of the University of Puerto Rico and creating the Governing Board of the University of Puerto Rico. This change reduced the number of members from 17 to 13.

UPR University Law (Law 1 of 1966, as amended) (Exhibit 15) clearly outlines the university's governing structure, including the composition, duties, and responsibilities of each university constituent in the development of policies and in the decision-making process. The internal management of each institutional unit is governed by appropriate dispositions of the law, UPR General By-Laws, and general application complimentary by-laws. In addition, units are managed by resolutions adopted by the Governing Board, by the guidelines established by the University President, and by the rules and regulations adopted by each institutional governing body (Governing Board Certification 2012-2013-40). The UPR General By-Laws in Chapter II describe the composition of the UPR university system. Chapter III of the By-Laws describes the central governing system and Chapter IV describes the institutional units. Each entity that constitutes the UPR System shares responsibility in elaborating, planning, and executing policies that are expounded at each level bounded by the parameters that govern their responsibilities and duties within the vision, mission, and goals of the Institution and the UPR System.

University of Puerto Rico-Central Administration

The following organizational chart reflects the structure of the UPR-CA. The UPR-CA manages the entire UPR system and through this structure, information and decisions flow throughout the entire system. The UPR-CA is systematized in such a way that each component of the structure responds to either an academic or administrative area.

Figure 4.1
UPR Central Administration Organizational Chart

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                              ┌──────────────────┐
                              │ Governing Board  │
                              └──────────────────┘
                                       │
    ┌────────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐    ┌────────────────────┐
    │ Staff Appeal's Board│───│    President      │────│  University Board  │
    └────────────────────┘    └──────────────────┘    └────────────────────┘
                                       │
                                                    ┌──────────────────┐
                                                    │   Aides to the   │
                                                    │    President     │
    ┌──────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐    └──────────────────┘   ┌──────────────────┐
    │ Vice-President of│    │ Vice-President of│                            │ Vice-President of│
    │  Research and    │    │ Academic Affairs │    ┌──────────────────┐    │  Student Affairs │
    └──────────────────┘    └──────────────────┘    │   Legal Aides    │    └──────────────────┘
                   ┌──────────────────┐             └──────────────────┘
                   │      UPR         │
                   │    Editorial     │
                   └──────────────────┘

    ┌──────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐                 ┌──────────────────┐
    │  Development and │    │ Fiscal Affairs and│                │   Physical and   │
    │   Alumni Office  │    │ Administration Area│               │  Infrastructure  │
    └──────────────────┘    └──────────────────┘                 │ Development Office│
                                                                  └──────────────────┘
              ┌──────────────────┐         ┌──────────────────┐
              │  Finance Office  │─────────│  Budget Office   │
              └──────────────────┘         └──────────────────┘
              ┌──────────────────┐         ┌──────────────────┐
              │Administrative Svc│─────────│ Human Resources  │
              │     Office       │         │     Office       │
              └──────────────────┘         └──────────────────┘
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DESCRIPTION OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Governing Board

The Governing Board is responsible for formulating policy for the system, guiding its development, allocating its budget, and appointing the President and Chancellors of each campus. It also assists in generating the resources needed to sustain, improve, deal with policy, and philosophy associated to University activities directed towards obtaining external funds from nonpublic sectors and organizations. In its Internal By-laws (Certification 2012-2013-40), the Governing Board states that its primary loyalty is to the University of Puerto Rico and its unwavering commitment is to work towards its improvement so that the UPR can respond to society's needs. The Governing Board is conceived as a democratic body that makes decisions by majority vote or by consensus.

The new composition of the Governing Board includes two students (one undergraduate, one graduate); two professors from different units within the university system, the Secretary of Education of Puerto Rico

(ex officio), and eight representatives of the citizens. These citizens have the following characteristics: one with experience in finance, one resident of Puerto Rico with established leadership in social and community affairs; five residents of Puerto Rico distinguished in the arts, sciences and professions, of which three must be alumni of the University, and one will have established relationships with the Puerto Rican communities residing in other parts of the world. This Board assumed its responsibilities as soon as the law was enacted.

With this amendment, the relative participation of faculty representatives and both the absolute participation of students are increased. Student representation increased from 1 to 2, placing students on equal footing with faculty representation. In addition, this amendment sets the groundwork for a more appropriate student participation, with provisions that incorporate one representative at the undergraduate level and a second at the graduate level. In relative terms, student participation increased from 1 of 17 in the previous Board of Trustees to 2 of 13 in the current thirteen -member Governing Board.

Law 13 of 2013 specifically establishes clear criteria for the selection of the different members of the Governing Board in terms of areas of expertise—such as finance, arts, science, and other professional areas—in order to reflect a diversity of representation that fortifies our institutional mission, perspective, and culture. The Law also requires that three members be alumni of the University of Puerto Rico, one of which must be a distinguished social and community leader. In order to include the 4 million Puerto Ricans who live in the United States and other parts of the world, one of the members of the Governing Board must have established links with this community abroad. The Chair of the Governing Board is one of the thirteen members elected by all Board members.

All members of the Governing Board must abide by Law 12 of July 24, 1985, as amended, which is known as *Law of Governmental Ethics of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico*. No member of the Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico, nor any person who works for the government or other public corporations, except that of the UPR and the Secretary of Education of Puerto Rico that serves on Board in an ex-officio manner, nor any employee of a private institution of higher education can be designated by the governor to be part of the Governing Board. This is to guarantee that members designated to the Governing Board are perceived as being free from any conflicts of interest. Participation of university community members in this body evidences the interest of the constituents, while the membership of citizens from various professional fields reflects the public interest (Governing Board Certification 2013-2014-02).

President

The UPR University Law confers on the President the highest organizational rank, with the responsibility of leading the University System. He acts in representation of the Governing Board, which appoints him in consultation with the Academic Senates of the UPR system. The President of the University of Puerto Rico, in collaboration with the University Board, which he presides, coordinates and supervises the academic, administrative, and financial tasks of the Institution. The President also harmonizes Governing Board and University Board initiatives, as well as his own, to promote University development and improvement. The University Board and the Governing Board advise the President in administrating the university system and establishing general institutional policies. The President is in continuous communication with all sectors of the academic community in order to make them participants of the current issues concerning UPR.

President Uroyoán Walker-Ramos, appointed by the Governing Board in 2013, is a full professor who brings to his position twelve years of experience within the university system. He received his

undergraduate degree in 1996 from the University of Puerto Rico, a Master's Degree and a Ph.D. from Louisiana State University in 1998 and 2001, respectively. He began as an Assistant Professor in the UPR-Mayaguez in 2002, and he has occupied numerous teaching and administrative positions since then.

University Board

Chapter III, Article 15, Section 15.1 of the University Law decrees the composition of the University Board. Chaired by the President, its members are the Chancellors of the eleven UPR units, the UPR Central Administration finance chairperson, three additional University members appointed by the President with the approval of the Governing Board, one representative from each unit's Academic Senate, and a student representative from each campus. The Chancellor, one senator elected by the Academic Senate, and a student elected during Student Council elections represent UPR-Ponce on this Board.

The University Board has the responsibility of maintaining a cohesive university system through a planning process that responds to the university's mission and goals. It advises the President regarding the academic, administrative, and financial progress of the units. These functions are carefully balanced to respect the autonomy of individual units.

Chancellor

At the institutional level, the Chancellor holds the maximum academic and administrative authority at the institution. The candidate is nominated by the UPR President in consultation with the Academic Senate of UPR-Ponce, staff, and students' committees according to Article 19 of the UPR General By-Laws. The Governing Board, in accordance with Law 170 of August 12, 1988 (Administrative Procedures Law) (Exhibit 16), appoints the Chancellor. The Chancellor's duties are outlined in Article 7 of the University Law, and Section 19.3 of the UPR General By-Laws. These duties include the following:

- Provide orientation and supervision to university personnel, as well as to the teaching, research, technical, and administrative tasks.
- Formulate the projected budget based on recommendations from the departments and offices.
- Represent UPR-Ponce in official ceremonies, activities, and academic roles.
- Preside over the Academic Senate, the Administrative Board, and faculty meetings.
- Appoint the academic, administrative, and student deans in consultation with university constituents.
- Hire university personnel and visiting lecturers.

In the last five years, various qualified members of the university community have held the position of Chancellor at the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce. In June of 2014, Dr. Leonardo Morales was appointed to the position of Chancellor by the Governing Board. Dr. Leonardo Morales is a Professor with more than fifteen years of teaching experience. Dr. Morales holds a B.S. in Computer Science from the University of Puerto Rico in Mayaguez as well as a Master's Degree in Applied Mathematics from UPR Rio Piedras. He also holds a Master's Degree and Doctoral Degree in Pure Mathematics from the University of Iowa.
Dr. Morales has held various administrative positions at the UPR-Ponce, among these Interim Dean of Academic Affairs, Chairperson of the Information System Office, and Chairperson of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research. Also, he has been an Academic Senator and presided the committee that developed our current Strategic Plan.

Academic Senate

The Academic Senate (AS) is the formal deliberative forum of the academic community at each campus. It is responsible for a variety of matters that include, but is not limited to, academic matters that range from course and curricula content to admission requirements. The composition of the Academic Senate, as established by UPR General By-Laws Article 21, Section 21.4 consist of the University President, the Chancellor and the Deans, who serve as ex-officio members, and representatives from academic departments. In addition, a representative from the Counseling and Psychological Services Department, one from the Library, the Director of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (as observer), and four students are part of the AS. Recently, the Ombudsperson has been added as an observer during the AS meetings (Governing Board Certification 2014-2015-119).

The members of this body have sufficient experience to carry out their duties. The composition of the Academic Senate for 2014-2015 is as follows: six professors, three associate professors, four assistant professors, two instructors, two librarians, one counselor, one non-faculty staff, and four students. Sixty-three percent of the members have 16 to 21 years working at the institution and 21 percent of the members have 31 to 42 years.   Twenty-two percent of the members have administrative positions in the institution. Twenty-two percent have a Doctoral Degree, sixty-one percent hold a Master's Degree, and seventeen percent are students.

Administrative Board

The Administrative Board advises the Chancellor on various matters and has the responsibility for elaborating plans and projects for institutional development. The Board also evaluates and approves the distribution of the institutional budget submitted by the Chancellor, as well as the UPR-Ponce academic calendar (UPR-Ponce Administrative Board By-Laws, Chapter 5-Section 1.1.3) ([Exhibit 17](#)) and decides on and approves faculty requests for leaves, tenures, financial aid, and promotions. Administrative Board composition is established by Puerto Rico's Council of Higher Education Certification (1970-1971-49); (1985-1986-180) also, Law 186 from August 7, 1998. Its members are the President of the UPR (ex-officio); the Chancellor of the UPR-Ponce; the Deans of Academic, Student, and Administrative Affairs; four academic department chairpersons designated by the Chancellor; two elected faculty representatives of the Academic Senate; and one student elected by peers in an assembly, in accordance with the Student By-Laws. All members of the 2014-2015 Board (with the exception of the student representative) have had administrative experience and all have been with the institution for more than 10 years.

Deans

The Dean of Academic Affairs is responsible for the supervision of all academic departments, the Library, the Continuing Education and Professional Studies Division, the Honor's Study Program, the International Studies Office, and the Academic Support Center for Students and Faculty. The Dean also supervises and oversees academic programs that have professional accreditation.

The Dean of Student Affairs coordinates student-support services and supervises the following offices: Registrar, Quality of Life, Financial Aid, Alumni, Counseling and Psychological Services, Admissions, Medical Services, Athletic Program, Students Recreation Center, Technological Assistance, Extracurricular Activities, and Veterans' Affairs.

The Dean of Administrative Affairs supervises the administrative support services, which include Human and Physical Resources, Security, Internal Post Office, Printing Services, Operations and Maintenance, Switchboard, Documents Administration, and Finance (Accounting, Disbursement, Property, Purchasing, Payroll, Pre-Intervention, and Bursar).

Professors and administrative personnel from different administrative and academic areas, ranging from Science, Mathematics, Office Systems, and Health to Liberal Arts and with an average of more than 13 years of academic and administrative experience, have held Deanship positions. Many of those who have held the position of Chancellor have previously held the position of Dean or Department Chairperson.

This provides ample flow of information to higher levels in order to assure that the final decision makers have the necessary information to make the best possible decision and to formulate appropriate policies.

Department Chairpersons

Department chairpersons are faculty members with administrative functions. They are the main executive and administrative official of the departments. As part of their responsibilities, they preside department meetings and are the official representatives of their departments before university authorities. They are *ex-officio* presidents of all of the department permanent committees with the exception of the Personnel Committee in which they are a member and the president is selected from the Personnel committee members (UPR By-Laws Articles 25.3-25.4).

The Chancellor, based on the recommendation of the Dean of Academic Affairs, names the department chairpersons. Before making such recommendation, the Dean will consult with the members of the department following the dispositions stated in Article 40 of the UPR General By-Laws. Appendix 4.1 details the academic credentials and experience of present department chairpersons.

Office Chairpersons

Office Chairpersons are non-teaching personnel who may or may not be career personnel and who are in positions of trust. Positions of trust include Director of Budget, Finance, Human Resources, and other high-ranking positions that are similar to the categories previously mentioned. The Chancellor appoints office Directors after consulting with members of the particular dependency (UPR By-Laws Article 37 Section 37.3.2). Appendix 4.2 details the academic credentials and experience of present office chairpersons of student services and administrative affairs.

Institutional Policies

Governing bodies give direction and facilitate the effective operation of UPR-Ponce by approving policies, regulations, certifications, and any other dispositions, which must respond to a priority norm as established by Article 7 of the University of Puerto Rico General By-Laws. Any rules, norms, resolutions, instructions, and procedures established by the corresponding University authorities must respect the following regulations:

- Applicable dispositions by law
- UPR General By-Laws
- Certifications of the Governing Board

- Integral Development Plan for the University System
- Norms, instructions, resolutions, and any other disposition of the President
- Certifications of the University Board
- Regulations of each institutional unit in accordance with the internally established hierarchy

When any rule, norm, resolution, instruction or procedure is proposed, not only must the established hierarchy be taken into consideration, but it must also guarantee democratic principles, the functional autonomy of each unit, and provide uniform articulation and solidarity as established in the Declaration of Principles of the General By-Laws of the UPR. This minimizes any possible conflicts and foster a sense of belonging to the group, which is a basic requirement for the effective administration of any institution. The Law of the University of Puerto Rico guarantees that in the effective government of each unit, including UPR-Ponce, the University Law prevails over any other rule, norm, procedure, certification, resolution, and usual practices. When conflicts arise over applicability of laws, the Governing Board will establish the rules. The President can establish policies, but the Governing Board should be informed about them (Articles 5 and 6 of the UPR General By-Laws). When establishing any public policy, whether administrative or academic, governing bodies must guarantee UPR-Ponce autonomy (Article 10.1 of the UPR General By-Laws).

Effective administration requires that the community have access to and be well informed about governance documents, policies, and procedures. Governing bodies issue official certifications when a new policy or procedure is adopted or changed in order to ensure both its fulfillment and community awareness. Purposively, the UPR Governing Board disseminates certifications throughout the university system by electronic means, such as e-mails and the webpage (http://www.vcertifica.upr.edu). UPR-Ponce Academic Senate and Administrative Board regularly send by e-mail approved certifications to the university community. These certifications are also available in the UPR-Ponce webpage (www.uprp.edu). Elected senators present written and oral reports at faculty meetings regarding academic issues of interest to this body, and newly approved certifications.   These are also discussed in departmental faculty meetings. In addition, the Academic Senate keeps students informed about its decisions and activities through the Student Council representatives.

Involvement of Constituents in Decision-Making Process

Law 16 of June 16, 1993 and the UPR Law guarantee faculty and student representation in UPR-Ponce governing bodies to ensure their participation in the decision-making process.

The UPR-Ponce Academic Senate is a deliberative body in which a tenured faculty member represents each academic department. Student representation is evident in this body through the participation of the Student Council President and three members elected by their peers in the student election process every year. The Senate is involved in academic decision-making and matters related to the academic community.

The UPR-Ponce Administrative Board is another deliberative body whose decisions affect the entire institution. Its composition, which was explained earlier in this chapter, provides faculty, non-faculty, and students with the opportunity of participating in the process of making decisions on matters that pertain to them.

Faculty members also have the opportunity to express their opinions and to take part in the decision-making process in issues that affect them at faculty meetings. These meetings occur at least once every semester, as established in UPR General By-Laws, but extraordinary meetings can be convoked as necessary. Institutional and departmental committees also provide faculty, administrative personnel, and students with opportunities to participate in the decision-making process at different levels. The Chancellor appoints institutional committees, while department chairpersons appoint departmental committees. Appendix 4.3 shows a chart that contains some of the institutional committees in which faculty members participate.

The Disciplinary Board is another body in which students, administrators, and faculty make decisions on matters concerning student discipline. The Dean of Student Affairs, two members of the Academic Senate elected by their peers, and two student representatives, as stipulated in Article 17, of the UPR General Student By-Laws, make up this Board.

The Student Council was established to channel student concerns with issues affecting them, as well as ideas and initiatives for institutional improvement. This student body is the official forum for the student community. It is elected every academic year and is represented in UPR-Ponce's main governing bodies, as mentioned previously in this chapter. Student senators may submit proposals on issues affecting them to UPR-Ponce's governing bodies. The Student Council was actively involved in the selection of the Ombudsperson for the academic year 2014-2015.

Members of student organizations also have the opportunity to present their concerns and ideas to the Dean of Student Affairs, who channels them to the appropriate governing body. For example, student athletes submitted a proposal for early enrollment, which was approved and extended to other student organizations, such as the Choir, the Marching Band, and the Theater Group. Student representation is also evident in institutional and departmental faculty meetings, where they can express their opinions on matters discussed that affect them. Students also participate in departmental committees such as program assessment, curriculum, accreditation, and others.

Non-faculty staff also have important roles within the decision-making process. They are an important part of the institutional assessment structure and of the Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal (ECIR) whose members include non-faculty staff in decision-making positions. This includes for example the Financial Chairperson, Auditing Coordinator, the Institutional Assessment Coordinator, and Budget Chairperson. The role of the ECIR is to advise and recommend processes or policy to the Chancellor. Support offices such as Admissions, Financial, Budget, and other offices, which are directed by non-faculty personnel, provide input and recommendations to the different institutional policy makers (Chancellor, Academic Senate, and Administrative Board). Finally, they also participate in the consultation process for the selection of the Chancellor and the Deans.

During the last five years, and as part of our systemic culture, the institution has celebrated public hearings in which all sectors of the university community have the opportunity to participate, give suggestions, and recommendations to strengthen the decision-making process. The following are examples of these hearings: for the selection of UPR President, the Chancellor, and Deans; for the creation of UPR-Ponce's Strategic Plan; for the revision of the institutional mission, and for accreditation purposes, among others.

Assessment of Leadership and Governance

As established by UPR Law, Section 3 (e) (7), the Governing Board will evaluate the work of the President of the UPR and the Chancellors of the institutional units in terms not shorter than three and not longer than five years of their incumbency. This evaluation shall be in writing and becomes part of the corresponding Governing Board's file. Board of Trustees Certification 2004-2005-50 defines the procedures to assess the performance of the Chancellors of the UPR units and of the President.

The UPR Law and General By-Laws sustain the evaluation model and guidelines included in the working document. They establish that the evaluation of the President and the Chancellors has four purposes, which are as follows: to improve the performance of the institutional leaders, to account for the exercise of the duties of these officials, to make decisions regarding their retention, and to promote a relationship of support and trust between the Governing Board and institutional leadership.

Academic Department Chairpersons are annually evaluated by the Dean of Academic Affairs using the criteria that was approved by the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate (Certification 2006-2007-40). Appendix 4.4 shows the assessment instrument used for this purpose.

As part of the function and duties of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR), this office gathers data about the perception of students, faculty, and non-faculty personnel of institutional effectiveness. The OPIR also prepares annually the Institutional Assessment Report and the Annual Institutional Effectiveness Report.

ADMINISTRATION

UPR-Ponce has a well-defined organizational structure with clear lines of organization and authority to facilitate its efficiency and effectiveness. The UPR-Ponce organizational chart (Appendix 4.5) illustrates this structure. Evidence to support that these lines are actually followed can be found in numerous documents, which clearly respect hierarchical lines of communication and approval. Among these documents are: Request for Approval of Contracts, Request for Purchases, and Request for Activating Courses, among others (Exhibit 18).

Duties and responsibilities of institutional administrators and academic leaders are established in UPR General By-Laws, Chapter IV (2006, as amended). These include, among others, academic program planning, development, and assessment; personnel management; budget approval and distribution; proposal writing; innovative project development; external funding activities and administration; and supervision and assessment of student support services. These responsibilities involve their interaction with other administrators of the university system, local and federal government agencies, and the community as a whole.

Following the Chancellor in the organizational structure are the Deans of Academic, Student, and Administrative Affairs. They are appointed by the Chancellor, endorsed by the President and approved by the Governing Board after a rigorous consultation process among faculty members, non-faculty, and students. The deans continue in office at the request of the Chancellor. The process for selecting the UPR-Ponce institutional leadership is clearly defined in Articles 20 and 37 of the UPR General By-Laws. The deans are supported by academic department chairs and by the chairpersons of corresponding administrative offices. A careful examination of the job descriptions for persons in positions of trust and administrative positions shows that authority and accountability for policy development and decision-

making is clearly assigned. The deans, the academic department chairpersons, the Academic Senate, the Administrative Board, and the office chairpersons assist the Chancellor in the decision-making process at UPR-Ponce.

Other administrators who share responsibilities for ensuring that institutional plans and activities are carried out are the Chairpersons of the Planning and Institutional Research, External Resources, Budget, and the Information Systems Offices. Their duties and responsibilities are clearly defined in detail in the job description questionnaires available in the Human Resources Office. These administrators respond directly to the Chancellor.

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 inherent to the duties and responsibilities of their positions (Appendix 4.1). The Institution recruits its administrative leadership using the consultation process stipulated in the UPR General By-Laws (Articles 19 and 20, 2006, as amended). 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. The UPR-Ponce's Academic Senate ensures that the consultation process is carried out as mandated.

Traditionally, administrative leaders come from the ranks of the institution, where approximately 60% of the faculty has a master's degree and 40% hold a doctoral degree. Twenty-seven percent has a rank of at least associate professor or higher. Policies for the selection and assessment processes for administrators are established in Articles 75-79 of the UPR General By-Laws. Appendix 4.1 presents the qualifications and experience of the current chancellor, deans, academic department chairpersons, and other institutional administrators. In an institution, whose mission is to offer associate and baccalaureate degrees and transfer programs, this profile is adequate.

The Deans of Academic and Administrative Affairs are experienced full-time faculty members with a hundred percent release time from teaching duties, in order to guarantee that they have the necessary time to discharge their duties effectively. This policy is usually followed when the Dean of Students Affairs is a faculty member, but at present a non-faculty staff member chairpersons the Deanship of Students Affairs. The current Dean has a Master's Degree and previously headed the Pay Roll Office and the Admissions Office. At this position, she had vast amount of direct contact with students.

The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and the Chairperson of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research have a 75% release from their teaching duties. The Academic Department Chairpersons are released from 50% of their teaching load. Qualified non-faculty staff members with the appropriate skills and experience to perform their responsibilities occupy other administrative positions.

According to the UPR General By-Laws (Article 25, Section 25.3), the Chancellor names academic department chairpersons after receiving the Dean's recommendation, who in turn takes into account the opinions of the department members. The chairperson should be a full-time faculty member.

Faculty members with administrative work assignments receive financial compensation according to their appointments. The Governing Board sets these compensations according to the level of complexity of the

charge and to the nature and size of the campus. Compensations are revised in order to retain and recruit the best talent available to fulfill the institution's mission (Board of Trustees Certification 2007-2008-87).

The administration keeps the community informed about all relevant matters in multiple ways, including forums, meetings, electronic distribution of material, distribution of printed material as well as posted dissemination of the relevant information in student spaces. This broad access ensures effective communication and, thus, more transparency in the administration. UPR-Ponce guarantees its constituents the right to freely express, associate, meet openly, formulate petitions, and organize activities as long as these activities do not interfere with legitimate activities and must comply with institutional codes as according to UPR General By-Laws and Students By-Laws.

UPR-Ponce strives to be honest in its dealing with the public. The institution has never been accused of distributing misleading information in its publications. It strives to remain transparent and make public documents accessible to the community. The majority of the community feels that the channels of communication are clearly defined as indicated in the *Self- Study Perception Survey* with 83% whom agree and 79% thinks is honest.

Providing identifiable and clear channels of communication is an essential characteristic of an educational system that promotes effective communication. It is also very important to have reliable channels of communication with the non-faculty staff and student body. In the *2014 Self-Study Perception Survey*, 49% of non-faculty staff indicated that they have proper access to information that allows them to make recommendations about important issues pertaining to the institution.

Assessment of UPR-Ponce's Administration and Services

The Chancellor of the UPR-Ponce is the executive in charge of the evaluation of personnel in positions of trust at the University as stipulated in the University By-Laws of the UPR, Article 39, Section 39.1 and 39.3. The Chancellor uses the document Evaluation of Faculty Personnel in Administrative Functions, Certification 2006-2007-40 of UPR-Ponce Academic Senate. For assessing non-faculty staff in administrative functions, he uses the instrument shown in Appendix 4.4.

The Chancellor, as the principal executive of the institution, evaluates the Deans using the same instrument that deans evaluate department chairpersons. Academic Senate Certification 2006-07-40 provides the bases for using Evaluations of Faculty and Non-Faculty Personnel in Administrative Functions (Appendix 4.4) to evaluate the Deans.

The Dean of Academic Affairs is the executive in charge of conducting the evaluation of the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and the academic department chairpersons by using the instrument Evaluations of Faculty Personnel in Administrative Functions, Certification 2006-2007-40 of UPR-Ponce Academic Senate. The Deans of Student and Administrative Affairs evaluate the chairpersons of the respective administrative offices using the form OCRH-001, Non-faculty Staff Evaluation Form.

Deans follow-up on findings from evaluations by meeting periodically with the administrative personnel after the evaluations (Academic Senate Certification 2006-2007-40). Areas for the improvement of administrative structures and services are identified through needs assessment surveys and addressed in the institution's staff development program to improve administrative services. For example, the Dean of Academic Affairs conducts a survey among Department Directors on topics to discuss or receive

orientation during the annual Director's Academy. The Director's Academy provides a forum to receive input on ways to improve procedures and services.

As part of the periodic assessment process of the effectiveness of administrative structures and services at UPR–Ponce, multiple audits (Appendix 4.6) are conducted by internal and external regulatory agencies as follows:

- Office of the Comptroller of Puerto Rico- Annual audits are performed to evaluate the effectiveness of the administrative processes, institutional management, and fiscal operations. These audits were carried out in December 2010, March 2013 and October 2013. UPR-Ponce was found in 100% compliance, respectively, with the assessment criteria. The UPR-Ponce obtained the best scores for the entire UPR university system in these years. Also, it carries out Assessment of the Institution's Operational Phase (fiscal operations). The aim of this audit is to determine if institutional operations are carried out effectively and efficiently, and if they comply with all the applicable regulations.
- UPR Governing Board- This Board assesses different administrative and compliance processes through the Internal Audit Office. The results are used to improve these processes on a continuous base. Audits are performed on an annual base.
- Contracted External Audits- External auditing companies are contracted by the UPR to make annual assessments of the effectiveness of different administrative, operational, academic, and fiscal processes related to financial aid programs.
- Federal Audits- Federal agencies, such as the US Department of Education and Veteran's Affairs Department, regularly assess UPR-Ponce in its administrative processes, including student services such as Veterans' and Financial Aid Services.
- Regulatory Agencies- Other state and federal agencies such as Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Women's Advocate Office, Disabled Citizens' Ombudsperson Office, Office of Government Ethics, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and others make periodic assessments of the institution's fulfillment of agency mandatory regulations.
- Assessment of the Annual Institutional Effectiveness Reports- The Institutional Annual Report contains an assessment approach of the institutional effectiveness in compliance with its strategic plan.

After these assessments are carried out, the Institution, through the Chancellor's staff, develops and implements plans for improvement, to address concerns raised by audits, and submits them to corresponding agencies. The regularity of the audits ensures the institution's compliance with the plan submitted. Examples of how the findings of the assessments are used to improve the effectiveness of administrative structures and services are pointed out in other sections of this report.

The *2014 Self-Study Perception Survey* shows the opinion of the constituents (faculty, non-faculty, and students) on the administration fulfillment (compliance) of institutional mission and goals. Results show that 82% of the UPR Ponce's constituents totally agree that the administration fulfills institutional mission and goals while 18% partially agree with this view.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the analysis of the findings, the following can be concluded:

1. The clearly-defined structure provided by the University Law and the established policies provide the necessary guidance and direction that facilitates the effective governance as well as the functioning of the institution. The lines of authority are well defined and followed, which supports the clear structure that exists.
2. Members of governing bodies have sufficient expertise to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities.
3. Governing bodies' by-laws and policies provide appropriate directions and facilitate the effective governance and functioning of the institution. These are shared with the community through print and electronic media.
4. An analysis of constituent's participation in the decision-making process at the institutional level shows an adequate balance. Teaching, non-faculty staff, and students are represented at the different levels of the decision-making process.
5. The administrative structure of the university provides stability, even with changes in administration at higher levels. The UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan provides the necessary guidelines that permit the continuation of the ongoing processes.
6. Administrative structures and services are periodically assessed to improve their effectiveness and performance within the university community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations derive from findings and conclusions:

1. Continue giving formal orientation concerning the institution's mission, organization, goals, and academic programs to the Governing bodies of UPR-Ponce.
2. Seek new strategies to enhance the constituents' perception of their roles and accomplishments and create a mechanism to communicate their perceptions periodically.

CHAPTER 5: STUDENT ADMISSIONS (STANDARD 8) AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES (STANDARD 9)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents how the UPR-Ponce's admissions policies, procedures, and practices are stated, widely communicated, implemented, and periodically assessed. It also shows its consistency with the institution's mission, goals, and objectives and how they contribute to its fulfillment. The student support services available at UPR-Ponce, to help students achieve their goals, are described in this chapter, as well as the assessment of those services.

STUDENTS ADMISSION

The admissions process for freshman students to the UPR system is centralized. The UPR Central Administration's Admissions Office (UPRCA-AO) prepares a brochure with information on all academic programs offered at each of the University's eleven campuses, which is available in printed form and online (http://www.upr.edu/documentos/porque-la-upr.pdf). It provides general facts about the UPR and lists the academic offerings at undergraduate and graduate levels. Also, this brochure explains the admission process, contains the admission calendar, and provides contact information of each UPR unit (Exhibit 19). In order to determine that the information provided in these brochures is accurate, the UPRCA-AO requires that both Deans of Academic and Students Affairs certify that the information to be disseminated in the brochure clearly reflects current academic offerings. Brochures are distributed to all units of the system and these are redistributed to high schools based on their geographical proximity. Prospective students may select up to three program alternatives, in order of priority, based on their preferences. Since 2002-2003, they have the alternative of submitting an online application form (www.upr.edu/admisiones). An online tutorial that explains the online admission application and the process is available (http://estudiantes.upr.edu/reconsideraciones/tutorial-solicitud-linea.pdf). For academic year 2015-2016, students who apply for UPR admission will not have an application fee when applying; the fee will be paid once they are admitted.

UPR-Ponce provides all high school students with timely and accurate information about the programs and services it offers. An Admission Officer has been designated to visit all high schools served by UPR-Ponce to provide students with brochures of the institution's academic offerings and a general orientation about financial aid available. The schools are located in the geographical area served by the UPR-Ponce which includes the following cities: Adjuntas, Arroyo, Coamo, Guánica, Guayama, Guayanilla, Jayuya, Juana Díaz, Maunabo, Patillas, Peñuelas, Ponce, Salinas, Santa Isabel, Villalba, and Yauco. The *2014-2015 UPR-Ponce Freshman Students Profile* (Exhibit 20) indicated that 86% of respondents come from this geographical area. According to the 2014 *Self-Study Perception Survey*, 79% of students agreed that the information offered by UPR-Ponce to external and internal community is trustworthy. The *2013-2014 UPR-Ponce Freshman Students Profile* (Exhibit 21), revealed that 89% of freshman students were satisfied with the recruitment materials that provide information about the UPR-Ponce academic offerings. Also, 77% of students agreed that the information disseminated by UPR-Ponce about financial aid is precise and detailed.

When the Admissions Office (AO) of each unit distributes brochures to high school counselors, who are in charge of advising students about their university options, the Financial Aid Office at each unit provides them with financial brochures. Admissions criteria, financial aid options, deadlines for application, and

any other concerns are explained at that time. In addition, the Central Administration's Admissions Office holds a yearly Conference for High School Counselors which is held by region and at the different UPR campuses. This ensures that counselors are well-informed about all policies and procedures related to the admission process and financial aid options, thus, ensuring the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the information. When students are admitted, UPR-Ponce AO offers them a group orientation about the documents required to complete the enrollment and financial aid processes. The information offered during the orientation and the documents that students must complete are also available in the Admissions Office blog (www.Admisionesuprponce.blogspot.com).

Through Certification 2003-2004-25, the Board of Trustees of the University of Puerto Rico established the freshmen admissions norms and policies: 1) graduation from an accredited high school with a grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or higher, or approval of the high school equivalency test offered by the Puerto Rico Department of Education; 2) scores on the College Evaluation and Admission Test (CEAT) offered by the College Board, which assess students in five different areas: verbal and mathematical reasoning, and achievement in English, Mathematics, and Spanish; and 3) the General Application Index (GAI) established for the course of study selected by the student. The GAI is based on the GPA and the CEAT scores for verbal aptitude and mathematics. The UPR webpage provides an online calculator to determine automatically students' GAI (http://estudiantes.upr.edu/admisiones/carreras/igs.php).

Although the Board of Trustees, as previously stated, establishes the rules and regulations for freshmen admission, the UPR-Ponce can admit up to 2.2% of its total of freshman students taking into consideration criteria based on their abilities, talents or exceptional conditions (Certification 2003-2004-25). Students applying under these conditions must comply with the high school graduation and College Board examination requirements. In the application form, they are also requested to indicate their abilities, talents or exceptional conditions which make them worthy of consideration. Students can have up to twenty points under the required GAI scores required for their programs of choice. The Admissions Office certifies students who comply with the requirements for the various disciplines and subsequently these students must demonstrate their ability and are interviewed by the director of the department of interest. Finally, they are evaluated by a committee that certifies that students have met all the requirements for admission.

GAI for institutional programs are determined through a specific process. The academic department submits the proposal for the program's Minimum Admission Index (MAI) considering the following criteria: 1) last five years trend of MAIs; 2) evaluation of the minimum MAIs for the students admitted the previous year; 3) retention rate trend for the last five years; 4) correlation between the MAI and the GPA for the first semester of freshman students. Based on the analysis of this data, department chairpersons make recommendations to the Dean of Academic Affairs regarding the minimum GAI to be required for the program and the enrollment quota for freshmen. The information is analyzed at the Deanship level and submitted to UPR-Ponce's Academic Senate since 2011-2012, which officially approves the information and submits it to the Central Administration's Admissions Office. Previously, the GAI was approved by the Administrative Board. This process ensures that students accepted to the academic programs of their choice have the required competencies. The UPR Governing Board approved as a short term measure that each UPR unit will establish and adopt a methodology for the establishment of the academic programs quota (Certification 2014-2015-50). They will consider the following criteria: analysis of program demand, program emphasis, assigned resources, demographic factors, among others, and should review it periodically. The Certification also states that the goal of the University is to increase the number of students enrolled in the bachelor programs by completing the 100% of established quota. To attain this goal, a pilot project will be implemented. A conditional admission will be granted to students

with an MAI lesser than the established, but not lower than the one determined by the unit for each academic program for this purpose. Through Certification 2014-2015-28, the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate designated a special committee which will develop a new methodology to establish the academic programs quota considering the criteria stated by the UPR Governing Board in Certification 2014-2015-50.

Table 5.1 shows the UPR-Ponce five-year trend regarding admissions quota, applicants, admitted, and enrolled freshman students.

Table 5.1
Admissions quota, applicants, admitted, and enrolled students

Year	Admissions quota*	Applicants*	Admitted**	Enrolled**	% Admitted that enrolled
2010-2011	1,188	1,258	810	754	93
2011-2012	1,006	1,260	812	615	76
2012-2013	912	1,206	991	768	77
2013-2014	902	1,152	810	758	94
2014-2015	948	1,222	855	812	95

Sources: * Admissions Office ** UPR-Ponce Office of Planning and Institutional Research

When comparing 2010-2011 and 2014-2015, it is observed that the total of students enrolled has increased. The percentage of admitted students that enrolled increased by 2% from 2010-2011 to 2014-2015. According to UPR-Ponce Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR), for 2010-2011 to 2013-2014 academic years between 1% and 2% of freshmen enrolled students were admitted based on their abilities, talents or exceptional conditions.

Table 5.2 presents a distribution of students enrolled by General Application Index (GAI) for academic years from 2010-2011 to 2014-2015.

Table 5.2
Percentage of enrolled students' distribution by GAI

GAI	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
200-249	5	7	6	6	6
250-299	52	53	51	53	55
300-349	40	37	39	38	38
350-400	2	2	4	3	2
Over 250	**94**	**92**	**94**	**94**	**95**

Source: UPR-Ponce Office of Planning and Institutional Research

The analysis of the GAI of students enrolled from 2010-2011 to 2014-2015 reveals that over 90% had a GAI higher than 250.

Transfer Students

UPR-Ponce enrolls internal transfer students coming from other UPR-campuses and external transfer coming from other institutions. Table 5.3 presents a distribution of internal and external transfer students admitted to UPR-Ponce.

Table 5.3
Number of enrolled external and internal transfer students

	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
External transfers	23	**79**	**82**	51	34
Internal transfers	**52**	22	64	**57**	**46**
Total	**75**	**101**	**146**	**108**	**80**

Source: UPR-Ponce Office of Planning and Institutional Research

UPR-Ponce enrolled the higher amount of external and internal transfer students during academic year 2012-2013. A student who comes from an accredited or authorized institution and which has not previously studied at the University of Puerto Rico is considered an external transfer applicant. Through Certification 2009-2010-36, the UPR-Ponce's Academic Senate formally approved norms and policies for the acceptance of external transfer students. External transfer students are required to approve 50% or more of the required specialization credit hours at UPR-Ponce. The Certification establishes the procedure to be followed in order to apply as an external transfer student. This procedure includes the following steps: filling out an application form, submitting two official transcripts of all college-level work, and a letter of recommendation from the Dean of Students or the official responsible from the institution which the student previously attended. This document is indispensable for the evaluation of the case. If the student has studied in more than one institution, the letter of recommendation will be that of the most recent one.

Regulations regarding the evaluation process require that committees at the program level evaluate the applicant and that reasons for denying acceptance be given if a student is rejected (either because of noncompliance with specific program requirements or because of completion of department transfer quota). If the student is accepted, it is required that a transfer credit form be included with program acceptance. Giving credit to courses taken in other institutions is part of the evaluation process; therefore, no student should be admitted without the credit equivalencies form having been completed.

The UPR-Ponce's Academic Senate approved norms and policies guiding the approval of transfer courses from other institutions as stated in Certification 2002-2003-34. Criteria used to establish equivalence among courses are as follows: courses must have been taken at an accredited institution; each course description and content, as described in the syllabus, should have a 75% equivalency with that of UPR-Ponce's courses; and courses should have been approved with a grade of "C" or higher. At institutions that grade with C-, C, C+ the grade should be C+ or higher.

By November 2014, the UPR-Ponce Deanship of Academic Affairs published the revised *Table for Courses Equivalencies of Public and Private Universities at Puerto Rico* which expedite the process of giving credit for courses taken at other institutions by transfer students.
Internal transfer students are considered based on the following criteria: approval of thirty (30) credit hours in any of the other units of the UPR system and compliance with the minimum GPA required by the program to which the student is applying. UPR-Ponce Academic Senate Certification 2002-2003-34 states the general criteria to establish the equivalence among courses taken at other UPR units. The UPR has a uniform course coding system for transfer students among units. The courses with different codifications are evaluated using the criteria considered for courses taken in other higher education institutions for equivalence purposes.

Evaluation of Admission Process

The following table presents the results of the evaluation of admission process, according to freshman students, graduating students, and alumni.

Table 5.4
Freshman students' evaluation of admission process

Percent evaluating as excellent or good	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	Average
	85	91	82	91	91	88

Source: Freshman Students Profiles

Table 5.4 shows that an average of 88% of freshman students' assessed the admission process as excellent or good.

The *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Students Satisfaction Inventory* (Exhibit 4) mean score was 5.31 (scale of 7) for the criterion *admissions counselors respond to prospective students' unique needs and requests*. It also assessed if *admissions counselors accurately portray the campus in their recruiting practices* and the mean score was 5.34. The mean scores obtained for these criteria by the national four-year public institutions that completed the satisfaction inventory were 5.07 and 5.09, respectively.

Profile of Freshman Students

Table 5.5 presents the profile of freshman students for 2010-2011 to 2014-2015 academic years.

Table 5.5
Profile of freshman students

Characteristics		Percentage by academic year				
		2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Gender	Female	56	50	55	55	55
	Male	44	49	44	44	45
Marital status	Single	96	99	99	99	100
	Married	< 1	< 1	1	< 1	0
Average age (years)		18	18	18	18	18
Type of high school	Public	74	74	74	70	64
	Private	25	25	24	30	36
Mode of transportation	Commute with own car	49	51	49	48	47
	Public Transportation	0	1	1	2	9
Living with parents or relative		82	79	83	80	83
Handicapped		Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	11%	19%
Of Hispanic origin		100	100	100	100	100

Characteristics	Percentage by academic year				
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Coming from southern region*	87	84	87	86	86

Source: UPR-Ponce Freshman Students Profiles/Admissions Office, UPR's Central Administration
* As define in Puerto Rico's Planning Board's municipalities assigned in the southern region: Adjuntas, Arroyo, Coamo, Guánica, Guayama, Guayanilla, Jayuya, Juana Díaz, Maunabo, Patillas, Peñuelas, Ponce, Salinas, Santa Isabel, Villalba, and Yauco.

An analysis of the characteristics of freshman students for academic years 2010-2011 to 2014-2015 reveals the following characteristics that describe the majority of the UPR-Ponce's freshmen: female, single, from a public high school, live with their parents while studying, and come predominantly from the UPR-Ponce's assigned geographical area. In addition, they are of Hispanic origin and come from the traditional 18-year old cohort. Close to 20% of freshmen come from families whose yearly income is under $15,000 (Appendix 5.1).

The distribution of incoming freshmen by high school grade point average (GPA) shows an increasing trend in the percentage of high school GPAs of 3.00 or over (Appendix 5.1). The distribution of incoming freshmen by College Evaluation and Admission Test (CEAT) results shows that for the last five years an average of 57% of UPR-Ponce freshman students scored over 500 in Spanish and an average of 66% scored over 500 in Mathematics. An average of 54% of freshman students scored over 500 on the English achievement test (Appendix 5.1).

The annual Freshman Students Survey compiles information regarding students' goals and aspirations. The following table presents relevant findings on freshmen educational goals.

Table 5.6
Percentage of UPR-Ponce freshmen rating different goals as very important

Goals	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Prepare for a profession	98	96	97	95	96
Improve technical knowledge and skills	92	91	94	82	85
Improve employment opportunities	87	85	90	87	87
Receive a college degree	86	86	87	90	90
Participate in student and university activities	28	28	37	37	33
Develop knowledge and skills that enrich their cultural heritage	49	53	63	54	57
Participate in cultural, social, and sports activities	29	33	34	36	33
Initiate studies to transfer to other UPR unit	34	31	35	32	38
Improve capacity to be independent and self sufficient	77	76	80	77	78
Develop leadership skills	54	52	61	61	62
Prepare to serve society better	68	66	81	78	80
Develop thinking skills	74	73	78	71	74

Source: UPR-Ponce Freshman Students' Profiles

Consistently, students rate the following as important goals to be accomplished through their college years: prepare for a profession, improve technical knowledge and skills, improve employment

opportunities, receive a college degree, improve capacity to be independent and self-sufficient, develop thinking skills, and prepare to serve society better.

UPR-Ponce freshmen rated their need for help in certain areas (Appendix 5.1). Students repeatedly show an interest in learning how to prepare for tests, be oriented about job searching, improve study habits, learn to manage time, strengthen mathematics skills, and improve oral and written expressions in English. Goals and areas in which students indicated they need help show that students point to academia.

Admissions Criteria and Academic Success

The students' academic success is measured considering two institutional indicators: first to second year retention and graduation rates for students in degree-seeking programs at UPR-Ponce.

First to Second Year Retention Rates

The UPR-Ponce every year calculates retention rates for students who continue into their second year. The cohorts taken into consideration are only first-time degree seeking students. Figure 5.1 shows retention data for a five-year period.

Figure 5.1 UPR-Ponce first to second year retention rates
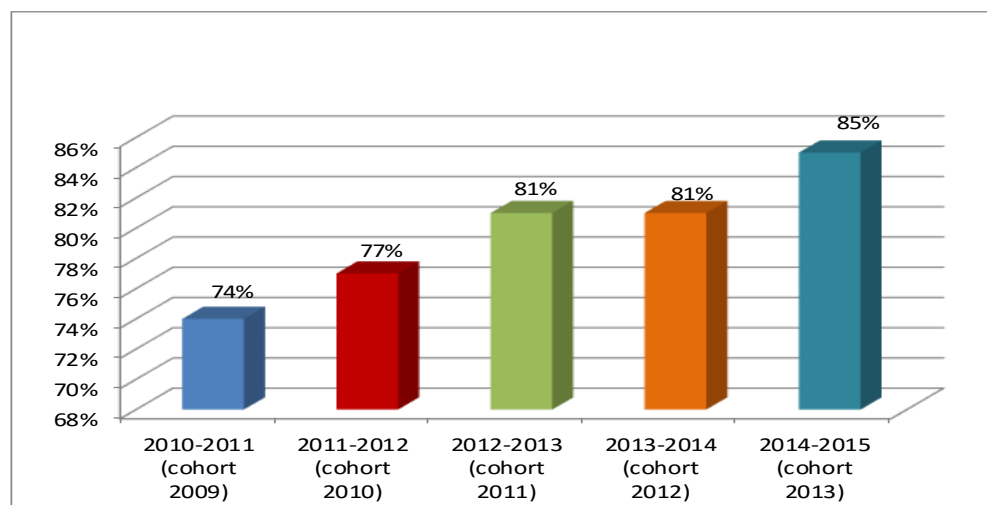
Source: UPR-Ponce Office of Planning and Institutional Research

UPR-Ponce average retention rate for the five-year period from 2010-2011 to 2014-2015 was 80%. Retention rate has increased by 11% when comparing the 2009 and 2013 cohorts. According to the *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System* (IPEDS) Fall Enrollment Report 2014 (Exhibit 22), the retention rates are similar to those of a comparison group integrated by 13 public baccalaureate institutions located in Puerto Rico. The group includes 10 UPR units (Aguadilla, Arecibo, Bayamón, Carolina, Cayey, Humacao, Mayagüez, Medical Sciences, Rio Piedras, and Utuado), *Colegio Universitario de San Juan, Escuelas de Artes Plásticas de Puerto Rico, and Puerto Rico Music Conservatory*. The 2013 cohort average retention rate reported by the IPEDS for this group was 85%.

Graduation Rates

The institution monitors its student graduation rates to determine if the admission criteria are appropriate and whether students are succeeding in achieving their goals and aspirations. To determine institutional graduation rates, cohorts are tracked for up to 150% of the time required for graduation from the program of study.

Figure 5.2 UPR-Ponce graduation rates
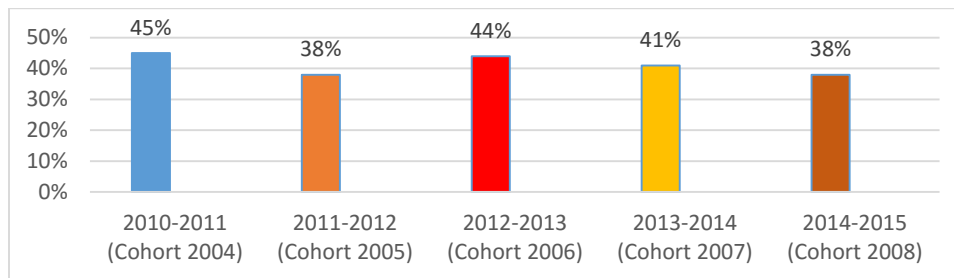
Source: UPR-Ponce Office of Planning and Institutional Research

The UPR-Ponce average graduation rate for the five year period from 2010-2011 to 2014-2015 was 41%. Graduation rates are similar to those of a comparison group integrated by 13 public baccalaureate institutions located in Puerto Rico. The average 2008 cohort graduation rate reported by IPEDS for this group was 38%. In the *2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students* (Exhibit 24) participants indicated the reasons that interfered in the attainment of their associate degree in two years or their bachelor degree in four years. The main reasons were the following: 41% changed to other academic program, 16% had to repeat courses, 14% indicated that UPR-Ponce did not offer the courses when they requested them, 13% had to repeat major courses, and 8% had personal problems. In the UPR-Ponce 2016-2021 Strategic Plan, it is stated that the UPR-Ponce goal is to maintain the graduation rate over 40%. The activities proposed to attain this goal include the establishment of an integrated tutoring center and the strengthening of academic support services. Both efforts will be assessed through satisfaction surveys.

Table 5.7 presents benchmark data about graduation rates related to other UPR campuses which offer academic programs at the undergraduate level.

Table 5.7
Graduation rates for comparable UPR campuses (Cohort: 2008)

UPR campuses	Overall graduation rate	Overall transfer rate	Baccalaureate graduation rate
UPR-Aguadilla	34	15	35
UPR-Arecibo	39	7	37
UPR-Bayamón	35	17	45
UPR-Carolina	36	11	49
UPR-Cayey	43	1	44
UPR-Humacao	44	11	44
UPR-Utuado	18	15	27
UPR-Ponce	**38**	**4**	**41**
Average	36	10	40

Source: UPR-Ponce Office of Planning and Institutional Research, IPEDS Data Center

UPR-Ponce's overall graduation rate for the 2008 cohort (38%) exceeds most of the other UPR campuses, with the exception of Humacao (44%), Cayey (43%), and Arecibo (39%).   For graduation rates at the baccalaureate level, UPR-Ponce's performance (41%) is above UPR campuses average which is 40%. Information regarding institutional retention and graduation rates is published at UPR-Ponce's webpage, specifically, on the Student's Right to Know section and Office of Planning and Institutional Research section.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

One of the major goals in UPR-Ponce's mission statement is "to provide students with appropriate and timely services complementary to academic life." The Dean of Student Affairs coordinates most services offered directly to students. The goals of the Deanship of Student Affairs are to provide:

- Students with appropriate and timely services complementary to academic life.
- The means for students to overcome their academic deficiencies.
- Quality personal, and physical development activities for students.

The main objectives addressed through student support services are to:

- Provide students with basic health services.
- Identify the academic, occupational, and personal needs of students.
- Help students in the decision-making process in the selection of an occupation or profession.
- Encourage participation in student associations and co-extracurricular activities.
- Promote sports as an important aspect of the integral development of the students.

The UPR-Ponce fosters the integral development of students with special emphasis on intellectual, psychological, physical, and personal aspects. UPR-Ponce has a variety of services that complement students' academic life. The Institution also promotes students participation in student organizations, Student Council, and different artistic groups. The services are mentioned and explained later in this chapter.

Student support services at UPR-Ponce are provided by staff with the appropriate credentials and experience. The personnel recruited at the UPR-Ponce must comply with minimum requirements in terms of academic preparation and experience, according to the Plan for Classification and Retribution of Staff. Supervisors determine during a probationary period if the employee satisfactorily fulfills the responsibilities of the position. Employee's evaluations are considered to determine if the tenure is granted.

The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) has carried out assessments of student support services by surveying alumni and graduating students' perceptions**.** The assessment was based on a weighted average, in which Excellent = 5, Good = 4, Fair (Average) = 3, Poor = 2, and Deficient = 1. The support services assessed were: admission process, enrollment process and payment, Bursar's Office, Financial Aid Office, medical services, bookstore, cafeteria, housing orientation, academic and personal counselling, vocational counselling, extracurricular activities, and athletic activities. The assessment results gathered through these surveys as well as assessment results obtained from each office's assessment activities are part of this chapter.

According to the 2014 *Self-Study Perception Survey* (Exhibit 5) done by OPIR during the first semester of academic year 2014-2015, 83% of the students totally agree that student support services offered by the UPR-Ponce are appropriate to satisfy their needs and help them attain their academic expectations. The 2008 Alumni (Exhibit 23) and 2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students (Exhibit 24) assessed the support services in general with scores of 3.66 and 3.83 on a scale of 5, respectively.

Office of the Dean of Student Affairs

The Deanship of Student Affairs of the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce is committed to the holistic development of the students, from the psychological to the intellectual as well as the personal aspects. It develops effective and efficient services through different offices, such as Psychological and Counseling—which counts with an Educational and Occupational Resource Section, Medical Services, Financial Aid, Placement, Lodgings (off-campus), and Veteran Services, the Office of Extracurricular Activities, Athletic Activities, Student Associations, the Student Council, the Bookstore, and the Choir and Band Associations. Within the objectives of the Dean's Office are the expansion of the educational dimensions and social development of the students through providing social, cultural, educational, and athletic activities that fit the academic facets.

This Office assesses the efficiency and effectiveness of all its services and provides support for changes that will enhance them. Besides coordinating all assessment efforts at the Deanship, the Dean is actively involved in developing strategies that will enhance student participation in institutional decision-making. For the 2013-2014 academic year, and as a part of use of assessment results, the Dean proposed to strengthen the promotion of the process for applying for an on-line extension to pay registration fees. Strategies were developed to provide students clear and precise instructions about the process. For the 2012-2013 academic year, the goal of the Dean's Office was to continue improving the access to the platform during the Student Council elections. The Office used different ways to improve the process and to increase the number of voters. Some of these were: divulge with anticipation the information about the students' elections through diverse means like e-mails and Student Council and Students Deanship social pages and increase promotion efforts in departments and among professors who were asked to encourage their students to actively participate in student government.

Admissions Office

The Admissions Office provides interested high school students, mostly from the southern part of the island, with application forms and assists them in completing them. Office personnel receive and evaluate requests for admission from private and public schools, as well as other universities. They also offer orientation on admission policies and procedures to high schools in the region. Through various resources, this office provides students with the information that the candidates need and collaborates with their selection. In addition, they process the evaluation of request for admission of transfer students.

When students visit the Admissions Office, they fill out a satisfaction survey that assesses the quality of services they received. The *2014-2015 UPR-Ponce Freshman Students Profile* assessed students' satisfaction with the orientation offered by the Admissions Office regarding the requirements for admission with a score of 4.00 on a scale of 5. The *2008 Alumni, 2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students*, and *2013-2014 Freshman Students Profile* assessed the admission process as good with scores of 4.10, 4.09, and 4.40 on a scale of 5, respectively.

Moreover, the Admissions Office 2011-2012 Assessment Plan shows that 89% of high school counselors classified the orientation services provided as excellent or good. For the academic year 2013-2014, 86% of students admitted assessed the admission process as excellent or good.

Financial Aid Office

The Financial Aid Office at the UPR-Ponce oversees all financial aid programs available at the institution and administers such programs to students with financial need. The Office provides financial assistance and counseling. The financial aid is determined by the difference between current educational cost and what individual students can pay towards these costs. Students are required to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) sent to a federal student aid processor where a need analysis is performed using a standard formula. From the Expected Family Contribution Index (EFCI) generated from this analysis, the Office determines eligibility for different financial aid programs. Office staff offer orientation to high school and college students, process Pell Grant applications and student loans, supervise the work-study program, keep meticulous records of all student aid, and process records for students who transfer to other institutions.

Table 5.8 presents a distribution of financial aid received by students from state, federal, and private sources from 2010-2011 to 2014-2015 academic years. Data reveal that between 76% and 91% of students received financial aid from those sources. *UPR-Ponce Freshman Students Profile* of the past ten years revealed Pell Grants as the main source of financial aid. The percentage of students receiving financial aid increased from 2010-2011 through 2011-2012, and since then this percentage has been decreasing mainly due to nonrecurring funds like ACG Grant, SMART Grant, and WIA Law. The 2013-2014 *Noel-Levitz Students Satisfaction Inventory* assessed the adequacy of financial aid available for most students*.* UPR-Ponce obtained a mean score of 5.33 (on a scale of 7). It also assessed if tuition paid by students is a worthwhile investment. The mean score obtained was 5.87.

Table 5.8
Sources of financial aid

Source	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Pell Grant	$12,423,526.01	$12,099,304.13	$11,695,824.12	$11,694,749.78	$12,579,191.30
Legislative Grant	712,913.00	712,913.00	731,457.00	731,457.00	744,837.50
SEOG Grant	179,404.80	179,403.00	179,404.00	179,404.00	159,300.00
Law 176	1,441,291.00	1,523,998.09	1,480,300.00	0	0
Work Study	511,453.00	511,453.00	511,453.00	506,517.13	349,900.79
Direct Loans*	1,471,550.00	1,479,650.00	1,009,625.00	1,016,934.00	1,169,081.00
Private Grants	74,695.00	239,900.00	44,258.36	38,043.37	0
Other non-recurrent grants**	890,171	0	0	0	0
Total amount of Financial Aid	$17,705,003.81	$16,746,621.22	$15,652,321.48	$14,167,105.28	$15,002,310.59
% Total financial aid coming from Pell grants	70.2%	72.2%	74.7%	82.5%	83.8%
% students receiving financial aid	86%	91%	84%	77%	76%
Average amount of aid per student	$6,354.99	$6,300.46	$6,041.03	$5,597.43	$5,770.12

*Includes Stafford Loans, **Includes ACG Grant, SMART Grant and WIA Law Funds
Source: Annual Institutional Data Profile and Statistics from the Financial Aid Office.

High school students are informed about their financial aid options by conferences held by the staff from the financial aid office at the open house activities and by the distribution of the brochures. The staff of the Financial Aid Office is also available for current and prospective students who might seek information about their options for funding their educational expenses. Information is also available through the UPR-Ponce website. The 2014 S*elf-Study Perception Survey* revealed that 77% of students agreed that the information disseminated by the UPR-Ponce about financial aid is accurate and comprehensive.

In order to improve the services provided by the Financial Aid Office during the academic year 2013-2014, a system-wide electronic portal called NEXT was used to fulfill all of the necessary requirements for this year's Financial Aid Application process. According to the assessment performed by this Office about student's process of applying for financial aid, 69% of the students who used the portal submitted the necessary documents on time, thus expediting the process of updating their records. In addition, the portal clearly stated the deadlines for document submission and gave students a receipt when documents had been submitted.

The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) surveys used to assess services of the Financial Aid Office showed that services were assessed as good. The mean scores obtained were: 3.73, 3.80 on a scale of 5, on the 2004 and 2008 *Alumni Surveys* (Exhibits 25 and 23); 3.99, 3.76 on the *2010 Graduating Students' Survey* (Exhibit 26) and on the *2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students* (Exhibit 24).

During the academic year 2012-2013, the Financial Aid Office assessed students' satisfaction regarding the services provided. The study demonstrated that 66% of students who completed the survey are very satisfied or satisfied with the services provided by the Office. Moreover, on 2014-2015, 87% of the students were either very satisfied or satisfied with these services. In addition, surveys administered to students by OPIR to assess the services of the Financial Aid Office revealed scores between 3.73 to 3.99 (out of 5.00) in the level of satisfaction of Graduating Students and Alumni with the services provided by the Financial Aid Office.

The *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Students Satisfaction Inventory* was used to assess *the usefulness of the financial aid counselors.* The mean score obtained was 5.33 (on a scale of 7). The item *financial aid awards are announced in time to be helpful in college planning* was assessed with a mean score of 5.33 (scale of 7). The UPR-Ponce results measure favorably against these national evaluations.

Registrar's Office

This Office provides information in an accurate manner with consistent quality service that responds to the needs of the college community. The Registrar has the responsibility of maintaining academic records of all its undergraduate students while ensuring the privacy and security of these records. It provides registration services to departments and students, records and reports grades, issues transcripts, schedules final exams and certifies attendance, grade point averages, and degrees.

As custodian of student records, the Registrar's Office recognizes and guarantees students' rights under the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* of 1974 which holds that students: 1) have the right to examine their academic records, 2) have the right to ask that their student records be amended so that they reflect factual information, 3) must consent for release of information in their academic records, and 4) have the right to file a complaint if the University of Puerto Rico has not complied with these conditions.

Information about this Law is widely disseminated to students during registration, in EDFU 3005 (Personal Development Guidance Seminar), a course offered for freshmen, in the Compendium of Institutional Policies given to all students, in the institution's catalog, in the webpage of UPR-Ponce, and by email.

To ensure that students' academic records are adequately safeguarded, certain norms and procedures have been established:

- Institutional Policies and Procedures for the Legal and Ethical Use of Information Technologies at the University of Puerto Rico (Board of Trustees' Certification 1999-2000-72).
- Procedures for granting access to the Student Information System (SIS) at the UPR-Ponce.
- Norms and regulations for using accounts within the SIS.
- Protocol for student records required by federal and state agencies.

Institutional norms and procedures have also been established to regulate academic record audits, grade changes, and removal of incompletes.

The *2004 and 2008 Alumni Surveys* assessed the enrollment process as good with scores of 3.55 and 3.69 (out of 5.00), respectively. The *2010 Graduating Students' Surveys* and the 2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students assessed the enrollment process as good; the mean scores were 3.82 and 3.80 (out of 5.00). The *2014-2015 UPR-Ponce Freshman Students Profile* results revealed that the enrollment process was good; the mean score was 4.29, on a scale of 5.

Also, the Office of the Registrar's assessment plan demonstrated that 75% of students were totally satisfied or satisfied with the orientation received in the office's reception when they requested a transcript. In addition, 67% of students were either very satisfied or satisfied or with the speed of the services provided and 70% of students were also either very satisfied or satisfied with the assistance received from personnel. For 2013-2014, 78% of students assessed as either excellent or good the attention received at the reception desk. Through the *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Students Satisfaction Inventory,* students assessed if the registrar office is open during hours which are convenient for most students. The mean score obtained was 5.33 (scale of 7).

Counseling and Psychological Services Department

The Counseling and Psychological Services Department, along with the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs, offers students support services. This Department, which has been accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) since 2010, plays an important role in helping students to adapt to college and to be successful academically. Professional counselors offer personal, academic, and vocational counseling, and the Personal Development and College Success Orientation Seminar (EDFU 3005) to individuals and groups. The purpose is to support students through preventive, developing, and remedial processes in their life and career planning. It also offers psychological services such as evaluations, treatment, and crisis intervention to students. These services are also available to employees.

The *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Students Satisfaction Inventory* was used to assess if *counseling staff cares about students as individuals.* The mean score obtained was 5.46 (on a scale of 7). It was higher when compared with the mean score of 5.04 obtained by the national four-year public institutions that completed the satisfaction inventory.

Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) surveys used to assess personal counseling and academic counseling offered by UPR-Ponce professional counselors showed that services were assessed as good. The mean scores obtained were: 3.70, 3.79 (out of 5.00) on the 2004 and 2008 *Alumni Surveys*; 4.29, 4.03 (out of 5.00) on the *2010 Graduating Students' Survey* and *2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students*. In 2010-2011, the Counseling and Psychological Services Department assessed the usefulness of EDFU 3005: Personal Development and College Success Orientation Seminar in improving academic skills. Results revealed that 98% of freshman students stated that they improved their academic skills through that course.

During 2012-2013, the Department assessed students' level of satisfaction regarding the services provided. One-hundred percent of students either totally agreed or agreed that they were satisfied with services provided by the Department. For 2013-2014, 100% of the students surveyed totally agreed or agreed with the excellence of the services provided by this Office.

Health Services Office

The Health Services Office staff at the UPR-Ponce serves and cares for the physical health of students. It includes a physician, a registered nurse, two administrative assistants, and a social worker. Ambulatory and first-aid services are offered to all students regardless of their health plan. When necessary, patients are referred to specialists, laboratories, and hospitals. The Office complies with all regulations required by the HIPPA Privacy Law. An Official of Privacy was designated since 1996 when the law was implemented. The official is responsible for implementing and assuring that privacy and confidentiality is guaranteed and that UPR-Ponce complies with standards and patients' rights related to the privacy of their health information as defined by the federal legislation known as HIPPA. The Health Services Office maintains the documents that evidence that the employees received information related to norms and literature about the HIPPA Law.

OPIR surveys used to assess satisfaction with services offered by Health Services Office showed that in 2004 and 2008 alumni perceived that the Office provided good services, according to the mean score of 3.69 and 3.99 (out of 5.00), respectively. *Graduating Students Survey* conducted in 2010 and the *Exit Interview to Graduating Students* of 2012 revealed that students assessed the services as good; the mean scores were 4.11 and 4.00 (out of 5.00). Also, the Health Services Office Assessment Plan demonstrated that 92% of students were very satisfied or satisfied with the services provided. In addition, 82% of students indicated they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the attention received from the personnel.

Quality of Life Office

The primary objective of the Quality of Life Office is to promote healthy lifestyles among the university community and to ensure that students develop in a healthy environment. The Office's commitment is to achieve security on campus so that students can meet their educational objectives. Similarly, this office is based on compliance with federal regulations such as the Student's Right to Know Act and Campus Crime and Security Survey (Jeanne Clery Act) demonstrating that UPR-Ponce is committed to the safety and well-being of its students, faculty, and non-faculty.

According to its 2012-2013 assessment plan, personnel of the Quality of Life Office visited, as in other years, the EDFU 3005: Personal Development and College Success Orientation Seminar sections to explain to students their services and philosophy and to invite them to share with other students the message of

prevention and promotion of better lifestyles. For 2012-2013, 17 freshman students enrolled in the Program as volunteers. This represented an increase of 51% in the total of volunteers compared to previous years.

The Office assessed if the activities done during 2011-2012 academic year promoted the enjoyment of life in a safe and natural way (free of drugs and alcohol) through the FIESTA IX Project. According to the results, 95% of respondents either totally agreed or agreed that the activities attained the purpose mentioned. Students participated in 41 activities. As part of the 2011-2012 office assessment plan, a survey was administered to UPR-Ponce community revealed that 94% of participants totally agreed or agreed that it is important to carry the message of prevention in order to promote healthy lifestyles.

Technological Assistance Office (TAO)

The Technological Assistance Office has the task of serving the population of students with disabilities offering information, guidance, workshops, training, and technical assistance in areas related to technological assistance, reasonable accommodation, and laws that protect people with disabilities. This Office has ten computer stations equipped with programs that provide electronic accessibility for visually, hearing, and physically impaired students. Other equipment available for students include: TTY phone, two printers (one regular and one Braille), an electronic board, and a scanner. There is also a meeting room for tutoring and study groups. The Office processes students' requests for reasonable accommodation and access to the equipment available for usage outside the TAO.

During the 2012-2013 academic year, the Office assessed the effectiveness of the processing of reasonable accommodation requests, according to students. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Law Committee processed 80 students' requests for reasonable accommodation and 96% of them were approved. Students with reasonable accommodation assessed the services provided by the ADA Law Committee and by the TAO. A total of 170 students received services from the TAO in the first semester of the 2014-2015 academic year. According to the survey, 100% of students were either very satisfied or satisfied with the services provided by both.

Since October, 2010, the TAO coordinates two film forums each semester about specific disabilities with the participation of all sectors of the university. By the 2014-2015 academic year, a total of 17 film forums have been presented (Appendix 5.2).

Athletic Department

The Athletic Department offers athletically talented students the opportunity to participate in a series of sports for which the institution provides professional coaching and training. Both female and male varsity teams participate in track and field, basketball, cross-country, weight lifting, tennis, beach volleyball, table tennis, baseball, softball, volleyball, soccer, and chess. The Athletic Department promotes participation in sports activities that have a formative effect on students' lives and complement the academic phase in student-athletes. Since August, 2006, students participate in the competitive activities carried out under the direction of the Intercollegiate Athletic League (IAL). Students are committed to exalt the red and black colors that represent UPR-Ponce. UPR-Ponce has various sports facilities such as, Victor Manuel Madera Multiple Use Building with indoor volleyball and basketball courts, a weightlifting gym, and two tennis courts.

The Athletic Department undergoes rigorous evaluation measures. All student athletes must meet the academic requirements presented in the Board of Trustees Certification 2011-2012-50, to compete and to receive aid or benefits in college. The Department has a professional counselor to guide students on academic achievement. They also have tutors to assist athletes to support their academic achievement. The Athletic Department also offers every semester a motivational workshop with a clinical psychologist. The *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Students Satisfaction Inventory* was used to assess if *the intercollegiate athletic program contributes to a strong sense of school spirit.* The mean score obtained was 5.21 (on a scale of 7). It was higher when compared with the mean score of 4.80 obtained by the national four-year public institutions that completed the satisfaction inventory.

OPIR surveys administered to graduating students and alumni assessed the quality of sports activities. The results revealed that alumni evaluated the quality of sports activities as fair, while the graduating students evaluated them as good. The mean scores obtained through the 2004 and 2008 Alumni Surveys were 3.34 and 3.44 (out of 5.00), respectively. In the 2010 *Graduating Students Survey* and the *2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students Surveys,* the mean scores were: 3.84 and 3.76 (out of 5.00), respectively.

The Department Assessment Plan for 2010-2011 revealed that 98% were either very satisfied or satisfied with the early registration, while 69% were very satisfied or satisfied with the tutoring program for athletes. In addition, the 2011-2012 Athletic Department Assessment Plan demonstrated that 85% of students were either very satisfied or satisfied with the facilities provided at Victor Manuel Madera's Building.

Extracurricular Activities Office

The main objective of the Extracurricular Activities Office is to help complement students' academic upbringing with nonacademic activities. In order to achieve this goal, it organizes concerts, conferences, art expositions, recitals, a variety of shows, plays, book presentations, and any other activity that may foster cultural, artistic, and intellectual enrichment to our student body and the general community. All of the activities and services sponsored by the Extracurricular Activities Office are announced via the UPR-Ponce e-mail system, through flyers posted on the various bulletin boards on campus and brochures prepared by the Office. The number of activities performed by the Extracurricular Activities Office for academic years 2010-2011 to 2014-2015 fluctuates between 7 and 18. During 2010-2011, 16 activities were sponsored; for 2011-2012, 18; for 2012-2013, 10; and for 2013-2014, 11. During 2014-2015, UPR-Ponce sponsored 7 extracurricular activities.

The UPR-Ponce, through the Extracurricular Activities Office, encourages students to organize groups and associations, which represent students' interests related to different aspects such as: social, academic, cultural, athletic, and religious, among others. The UPR-Ponce sponsors and officially recognizes student organizations. The institution provides the opportunity for students to develop the best of their abilities, their qualities of leadership, responsibility, understanding and spirit of cooperation for the collective good.

In order to achieve accreditation, all student organizations must follow the procedures set forth by the Deanship of Student Affairs as stated in the *Internal Procedures for Students Organizations By-Laws.* There are 33 accredited organizations for the academic year 2014-2015 (Appendix 5.3). As shown in Table 5.9, the number of student organizations has more than doubled when comparing 2010-2011 and 2014-2015 academic years.

Table 5.9
Student participation in accredited groups or associations

	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Number of accredited groups or associations	14	31	27	30	33
Number of students participating	*	1,187	1,033	1,178	1,094

Data source: Deanship of Academic Affairs
*Data Not Available

One of these associations is the Coalition of Students Pro-Agriculture (CEPA acronym in Spanish). This multidisciplinary group of students is involved with an ongoing project of food security since 2014. Part of their work plan is the creation and maintenance of the Atabey Urban Garden where students plant various crops within the premises of our campus, the "school adoption program" in which the students help private and public schools from the southern area to establish their urban gardens, the proposal "Keep Your Community Green Project" which works with forestation and maintenance of a clean environment, the proposed project "Social Reinsertion through Agriculture Program" which offers inmates the opportunity to learn alongside students how to create gardens and work with permaculture, the annual agricultural fair Atabey in collaboration with Development Integral of the South, Inc. (DISUR) which joins the community at large with the university community in a weekend long celebration of nature and agriculture. Students of CEPA also give and help organize conferences and workshops related to gardens, agriculture, and the environment for different members of the internal and external community. To collaborate in all these activities and the upkeep of the Atabey Garden, each of its members contributes at least ten hours of voluntary community service each month.

The coalition has been featured in various local and national newspapers in both paper and digital formats. CEPA is currently working with various community projects in collaboration with other student associations at the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce, the Department of Environmental Control and Recycling of the Autonomous Municipality of Ponce, the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources of Puerto Rico (DRNAPR), the Public Health Association of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico Recycling Partnership (PRRP), Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center (EFC) and the program Generating Replicable Environmental Education Networks in Puerto Rico (GREEN - PR).

The *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Students Satisfaction Inventory* was used to assess if students can easily get involved in campus organizations. The mean score obtained was 5.81 (on a scale of 7). It was higher when compared with the mean score of 5.28 obtained by the national four-year public institutions that completed the satisfaction inventory.

According to the *UPR-Ponce Freshman Students Profiles* for academic years 2010-2011 to 2014-2015, between 56% and 69% of the students were interested in participating in the various student organizations. As shown in Table 5.8, more than 1,000 students participate in groups and organizations. This represents about a third of enrollment. Students may obtain information about active groups and organizations at UPR-Ponce by visiting the Deanship of Academic Affairs or through recruitment activities performed by the organizations during the beginning of each academic year.
The Extracurricular Activities Office also provides information to students about housing opportunities. To ensure students' safety and well-being, the Extracurricular Activities Office publishes in the UPR-Ponce website and through flyers a list of housing available near campus that complies with all state regulations. Students interested in receiving more information on housing may visit the Extracurricular Activities Office for orientation.

The 2004 and 2008 *Alumni Surveys* showed the following mean scores for the extracurricular activities assessment: 3.50 and 3.42 (out of 5.00). The alumni perception about these activities range from fair to good. In 2010 and 2012 graduating students assessed the extracurricular activities offered by the UPR-Ponce as good; the mean scores obtained were: 3.98 and 3.91 on a scale of 5. According to the 2014 *Self-Study Perception Survey* done by OPIR during the first semester of academic year 2014-2015, 75% of the students totally agreed that the extracurricular activities offered by the UPR-Ponce respond to their needs and characteristics.

OPIR surveys used to assess community housing information showed the following mean scores in a scale of 5: 2.90 and 2.74, respectively, in the 2004 and 2008 *Alumni Surveys;* and 3.37 and 2.89, respectively, in the 2010 *Graduating Students Surveys* and the 2012 *Exit Interview to Graduating Students*. Both constituents agreed in evaluating this service as fair.

Veterans Affairs Office

The Office is in charge of overseeing and coordinating the educational benefits available through the Veterans Affairs Administration to eligible students who are veterans, soldiers, or their dependents. Students are encouraged to visit the Officer to receive the appropriate orientation, and to fill out an application form. Information about applicable laws and available benefits for eligible students may be accessed through the UPR-Ponce website and can also be found in the UPR-Ponce Catalog. According to a written communication from the Department of Veterans Affairs, by calendar year 2014 our institution had 94 students who received GI Bill Benefits.

Alumni Office

This Office maintains an up-to-date database of all graduates who obtained a university degree in UPR-Ponce. In addition, it keeps track of those students who attended UPR-Ponce for a period of time but who did not complete their degree. This updated record allows the Office to promote the participation of alumni in academic and cultural activities to strengthen their commitment and identity with their "Alma Mater".

Alumni ties with UPR-Ponce are promoted by their participation in UPR-Ponce Graduation as sponsors, as members of advisory boards of UPR-Ponce academic programs, their collaboration in the programs accreditation and their participation in activities coordinated by the institution and the academic departments. In November, 2014, the Student Deanship in coordination with the Central Administration of UPR celebrated the National Day of UPR Employed Alumni. In March 2015, the University of Puerto Rico celebrated the National Alumni Day. Also, in June, 2015, UPR-Ponce celebrated the 1st Alumni Fest.

The UPR-Ponce maintains communication with alumni through its Facebook Webpage, e-mails, and the electronic platform developed by the UPR Office of Development and Alumni. Also, graduating students' data is gathered through Graduating Student Assemblies, at the academic gown point of sales, among others.

Student Ombudsperson's Office

Since the year 1995, UPR-Ponce possesses a Student Ombudsperson's Office whose mission is to offer students an accessible, neutral, confidential, and independent forum for conflict resolution and

consultation. The Office also disseminates information to the student body about their rights and duties, ensuring that they receive fair and reasonable treatment through mediation. Through Certifications 2005-2006-32 the Board of Trustees and Certification 2014-2015-119 of the Governing Board of the University of Puerto Rico established official policies for the Ombudsperson's Office for all the campuses of the UPR. The Certifications provide guidelines on: 1) the criteria that should govern the offering of the services; 2) the functions of the ombudsperson; 3) criteria to properly choose the person who would serve as the ombudsperson; 4) how to evaluate the ombudsperson; 5) how to handle complaints against the ombudsperson; and 6) the requirement of an annual report from the office. Also, the Student Ombudsperson has been included as an observer during the Academic Senate meetings.

In order to address a grievance or complaint, a student must initiate the appropriate procedure in the corresponding unit. In the event that such pursuit is unsuccessful, a student is able to seek direct intervention from the Student Ombudsperson as long as complaints are presented personally or in writing.

The Ombudsperson's Office designed a brochure (Appendix 5.4) to better disseminate the information about the office's mission and functions, the different types of conflicts students could report, and its service hours. In addition, the office provides this information during the freshman students' orientation and through emails sent to the UPR-Ponce community. Some of the conflicts the office handles are: academic dishonesty, grade revisions, disciplinary processes, sexual harassment claims, academic probation, disputes related to institutional regulations, and conflicts between students, faculty or other personnel, among others. According to the *Self-Study Perception Survey* done by OPIR during the first semester of academic year 2014-15, only 34% of the students believed that they know the procedures to establish a complaint with the Ombudsperson's office at the institution. The *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Students Satisfaction Inventory* was used to assess if *channels for expressing students' complaints are readily available.* The mean score obtained was 4.13 (on a scale of 7).

Center of Academic Support for Students and Faculty

The Center for Academic Support for Students and Faculty (CASSF) of the UPR-Ponce is a support unit for the university community. It is under the Academic Affairs Deanship. It provides technological assistance in the learning process, as well as training through the offering of workshops and tutoring.   Tutors are recruited from members of the student body who have approved the course that they will be tutoring with an A and who have been recommended by their professors. Tutors are offered a stipend for their services through the work-study program and are required to attend several conferences, workshops, or orientations throughout the academic year.

The Center performs assessment of the level of satisfaction with the student tutors and the tutoring sessions. As shown in Table 5.10, the participants of the tutoring sessions gave a rating of "excellent" or "good" to the tutors, their level of support, empathy and sessions offered. For all academic years most scores surpassed 90%.

Table 5.10
Assessment of tutors and tutoring sessions

Criteria	Academic Year				
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Capability of tutors to meet their responsibilities	100%	100%	99%	99%	99%
Interest of the tutor towards participants' problems and difficulties	99%	99%	98%	97%	94%
The tutor verifies whether students are clear about the material	99%	98%	99%	98%	95%
Disposition to help	99%	99%	99%	98%	96%
Overall evaluation of tutor	99%	98%	99%	99%	97%
Level of support provided during tutoring sessions	99%	100%	98%	95%	92%
Level of comfort to freely express questions that might arise	94%	86%	92%	92%	88%
Usefulness of the tutoring sessions in improving academic scores	99%	99%	99%	99%	96%
Meeting of expectations with the tutor	98%	95%	98%	95%	83%

Data Source: Center for Academic Support for Students and Faculty

Cafeteria

The Cafeteria of the UPR-Ponce offers breakfast and lunch. It operates Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The 2004 and 2008 *Alumni Surveys* showed the following mean scores for the cafeteria services assessment: 3.55 and 3.56 (on a scale of 5.0). In 2010 *Graduating Students Survey* and the *2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students,* the mean scores for this service assessment were: 3.78 and 3.59. Both constituents agreed in evaluating this service as good.

The *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Students Satisfaction Inventory* was used to assess if *there is an adequate selection of food available in the cafeteria.* The mean score obtained was 5.07 (on a scale of 7). It was higher when compared with the mean score of 4.50 obtained by the national four-year public institutions that completed the satisfaction inventory.

During academic year 2013-2014 a satisfaction survey for cafeteria services was administered to the UPR-Ponce community. The survey revealed that 48.8% of the student body was satisfied with the service hours in general, while 67.8% was satisfied with the breakfast and lunch service hours. According to the study, 47.9% of students were satisfied with the quality of food and 10.5% with the prices. Regarding the personnel service, 63.4% was satisfied; and 37.7% was satisfied with the Cafeteria environment.

Rogelio's (Students' Recreation Center)

The main objective of Rogelio's at the UPR-Ponce is to create a healthy environment where students can socialize and enjoy their spare time. In addition, it tries to back up and support the balance of academic and personal life of our students through the holding of recreational activities such as: video games,

billiard tables, domino tables, ping pong tables, movies and musical video presentations, soft drink, and snack bar. Students also have Internet access. There is a coffee shop that provides extended hours.

Bookstore

The Bookstore of the UPR-Ponce is managed by an external company called University Books since academic year 2013-2014. The primary objective is to provide textbooks and educational material necessary for different courses at competitive prices.

OPIR surveys used to assess the quality of the Bookstore services showed the following mean scores: 3.78 and 3.59 (out of 5.00), respectively, in the 2004 and 2008 *Alumni Surveys*. In 2010 *Graduating Students Survey* and the *2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students* mean scores were: 4.06 and 3.95 (out of 5.00), respectively. Both constituents assessed this service as good.

Student Council

The Student Council is a body that represents the student sector at the UPR-Ponce. This organism was created by the University Law 1 and its mission is to facilitate the expression of the students about their concerns. The Council organizes activities that promote a healthy atmosphere of student life which in turn complements academic work. They are a link between students and the administration and contribute with ideas for the proper management of the institution and its leadership development. There are four representatives of the Student Council participating at the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate and another at the Administrative Board.

This organism has the following duties and responsibilities: 1) Officially represent the students who elected them in the events celebrated within and outside the University, 2) Serve as a student's forum for the discussion of problems affecting them, the university community, and the community in general, 3) Present, before the corresponding authorities, their opinions and recommendations regarding situations affecting their constituents and the University, 4) Sponsor and coordinate cultural, social, recreational, scientific, academic, educational, and orientation activities, among others, to complement the university education, 5) Participate in the University processes for the creation and amendment of students, academics and institutional bylaws and politics, 6) Participate in the process of selection and evaluation of the Students Ombudsperson, 7) Call for students assemblies and promote their participation in the assemblies and in the processes of elections and consultation, and 8) Meet with the Chancellor and Dean of Students Affairs at least twice a semester, among others.

According to the *Self-Study Perception Survey* done by OPIR during the first semester of academic year 2014-15, 76% of the students totally agree that they have the opportunity to express their opinions and concerns. The *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Students Satisfaction Inventory* was used to assess the item *freedom of expression is protected on campus.* The mean score obtained was 5.63 (on a scale of 7). It was higher when compared with the mean score of 5.47 obtained by the national four-year public institutions that completed the satisfaction inventory.

Music and Theater

Students with musical or theatrical talent may be members of the theater group, band, color guards, dance team, and concert choir. The Concert Choir is composed of 38 students from different disciplines and is one of the most distinguished in the UPR system. This Choir has participated in local, national, and

international activities such as: international choirs festivals, First Choir Festival of the University of Puerto Rico, Winner of the Gold Cup in a choirs competition (Verona, Italy, 2005), International Competition of Choirs Singing, International Choirs Festival (Vienna, Austria, 2007). Winner of two first prizes, for mixed choir and presentation of obligatory piece, at the International Choir Festival (Prague, 2012). It hosted and participated of the festivals Discover Puerto Rico and its Choir Music (Ponce, 2009 and 2014), and the Peace and Brotherhood Festival (Rome, 2015).

Since 1979, the UPR-Ponce has a Concert Band which is comprised of 40 musicians. The institution also has a Parade Band organized in 1990. The band has a color guard and a dance team. They have participated in the Puerto Rican Parade in New York. The band also presents the Christmas and Spring Concerts. They participate in parades and carnivals celebrated around the island, graduations, the activities carried out under the direction of the Intercollegiate Athletic League, and UPR-Ponce activities.

"Mascarada" is the theater company from UPR-Ponce. This company was established on the 70's and has presented more than 32 productions of different genres. It is composed of twenty members from different academic departments.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AND INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Noel-Levitz Students Satisfaction Inventory

Table 5.11 presents *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory* results for criteria used to assess campus support services, with ratings based on a 7-point scale. A comparison is included between UPR-Ponce students and national four-year public institutions.

Table 5.11
Students' satisfaction with aspects related to campus support services

Criteria	Percentage Selecting Very Much or Quite a Bit	
	UPR-Ponce	National Four-Year Public Institutions
Library staff is helpful and approachable.	5.30	5.56
Library resources and services are adequate.	5.86	5.58
Computer labs are adequate and accessible.	5.01	5.47
Tutoring services are readily available.	5.38	5.43
Academic support services adequately meet the needs of students.	5.19	5.20
There are adequate services to help me decide upon a career.	4.94	5.12
Bookstore staff is helpful.	4.87	5.51
Average	**5.22**	**5.41**

Source: Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, 2013-2014

UPR-Ponce average mean score for the criteria including library staff and resources, computer labs, tutoring services, career services, and bookstore was 5.22 on a 7-point scale. For these criteria, the National Four Year Public institutions scored similar to UPR-Ponce with a mean score of 5.41.

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

Table 5.11 presents 2014 NSSE results for criteria assessed by freshman and senior students concerning the extent to which UPR-Ponce emphasizes different aspects related to institutional environment, with ratings based on a 4-point scale.

Table 5.12
Extent to which the institution emphasizes aspects related to institutional environment

Criteria	Year	Percentage Selecting Very Much or Quite a Bit	
		UPR-Ponce	Carnegie Classification
Providing support to help students succeed academically	FR	72	76
	SR	68	69
Using learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)	FR	65	76
	SR	64	65
Helping students manage their non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	FR	52	39
	SR	47	31
Providing support for students' overall well-being (recreation, health care, counseling, etc.)	FR	60	58
	SR	58	51
Attending campus activities and events (performing arts, athletic events, etc.)	FR	62	57
	SR	59	47

FR = freshmen; SR = seniors. Source: NSSE 2014

UPR-Ponce freshmen and seniors scored higher than the Carnegie Classification comparison group in the criteria *helping students manage their non-academic responsibilities*, *providing support for students' overall well-being* and *attending campus activities and events*. UPR-Ponce freshmen obtained lower scores than the Carnegie Classification comparison group for the criteria *providing support to help students succeed academically* and *using learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)*. For these criteria, UPR-Ponce seniors compared favorably to the Carnegie Classification comparison group.

The following table shows the results of assessment regarding the quality of interactions among freshman and senior students with student services staff and other administrative staff and offices.

Table 5.13
Quality of interactions

Criteria	Year	Percentage Selecting rating 6 or 7 on a scale from 1="Poor" to 7="Excellent"	
		UPR-Ponce	Carnegie Classification
Student services staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.)	FR	31	42
	SR	53	37
Other administrative staff and offices (registrar, financial aid, etc.)	FR	32	40
	SR	42	40

FR = freshmen; SR = seniors. Source: NSSE 2014

UPR-Ponce scored higher than Carnegie Classification comparison group in the criterion *quality of interactions of students and student services staff* for senior students. Also, the Institution scored similar to the Carnegie Classification comparison group in the criterion *quality of interactions of students and other administrative staff and offices* for senior students. Freshman students scored lower for both criteria. This discrepancy might be because freshman students are still in a transitional phase and are learning how processes work in the university.

Information about these support services is widely disseminated to students during registration, in EDFU 3005 (Personal Development and College Success Orientation Seminar, a course offered to freshmen), in the Compendium of Institutional Policies handed to students, and in the institution's Catalog. Furthermore, information about these offices is available through the University's website. In addition, their services and activities are promoted through flyers around the campus and by means of the university's e-mail. Moreover, many of these offices have various social networks available to the UPR-Ponce students.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the analysis of the findings, the following can be concluded:

1. The criteria and standards for academic programs admission are adequately developed, clearly stated, consistently applied, and widely disseminated to potential students.
2. First to second year retention rates at the institutional level compare favorably to those reported by the comparison group within the same Carnegie classification as UPR-Ponce.
3. Graduation rates at the institutional level compare favorably to those reported by the comparison group within the same Carnegie classification as UPR-Ponce and is one of the three UPR units with the highest rates.
4. The percentage of students admitted who actually enrolled has increased during the last two years.
5. The criteria used to establish equivalence among courses taken at other institutions is clear and straightforward.
6. The assessment of freshman students' goals and areas in which students state that they need help shows that their priorities are in academia.
7. Student support offices of the UPR-Ponce provide quality services to the student body population to aid in their academic, psychological, vocational, and personal development. These offices are continuously assessing their services and modifying their strategies according to students' needs.
8. The institution enforces norms and regulations that ensure students' right to confidentiality and the students are aware of it.
9. Students have assessed in different surveys the quality of support services as fair or better.
10. NSSE benchmarking results show the institution scored lower on: *providing the support students need to help them succeed academically and usage of learning support services*.
11. NSSE benchmarking results in *quality of interactions between freshman students and services staff and other administrative staff and offices* were lower when comparing with Carnegie Classification comparison group.
12. The UPR-Ponce webpage is a mechanism used to make information available to the institution's constituents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations derive from findings and conclusions:

1. Implement an institutional plan to strengthen students' retention and graduation rates.
2. Strengthen support services to help students in achieving their goals, especially those related to academic success.
3. Provide students with a suitable program of co and extracurricular activities, off-campus housing information, and job placement to satisfy students' needs.
4. Improve the dissemination of the procedures to establish a complaint with the Ombudsperson's Office.
5. Strengthen the use of assessment results to improve learning and student support services for their academic success.
6. Redesign and update the UPR-Ponce webpage to make it more attractive and user friendly assuring that the key information is available to the community.
7. Implement strategies to strengthen interactions among students and service offices personnel and other administrator staff.

CHAPTER 6: FACULTY (STANDARD 10)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the extent and effectiveness with which the faculty discharges its primary responsibilities of teaching, research, and service, as well as their related roles in student advising, curriculum development, academic policy making, and governance.   It will also scrutinize faculty recruitment and retention, performance assessment, and promotion.

FACULTY PROFILE

The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce establishes in its mission statement that it is "an institution dedicated to the intellectual, humanistic, scientific, cultural, and ethical development of their students" as established in Certification 2013-2014-60 of the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate. To keep it aligned to the mission, the faculty serves as a medullar factor. Table 6.1 presents a profile of the UPR-Ponce's qualified full-time and part-time faculty that develop, support, and carry-out UPR-Ponce's academic programs.

Table 6.1
Faculty profile

	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Total Faculty	200	180	187	188	203
By academic preparation					
Baccalaureate	6 (3%)	1 (< 1%)	2 (1%)	2 (< 1%)	3 (1%)
Master	134 (67%)	122 (68%)	116 (62%)	120 (64%)	109 (54%)
Doctorate	60 (30%)	57 (32%)	69 (37%)	66 (35%)	91 (45%)
By rank					
Instructor	86 (43%)	72 (40%)	82 (44%)	85 (45%)	71 (35%)
Assistant Professor	43 (22%)	43 (24%)	36 (19%)	42 (22%)	67 (33%)
Associate Professor	35 (17%)	32 (18%)	32 (17%)	30 (16%)	23 (11%)
Full Professor	36 (18%)	33 (18%)	37 (20%)	31 (17%)	42 (21%)
By type of contract					
Tenured	117 (59%)	111 (62%)	110 (59%)	102 (54%)	98 (48%)
Tenure-Track	8 (4%)	7 (4%)	7 (4%)	6 (3%)	7 (3%)
Temporary	1 (< 1%)	1 (< 1%)	2 (1%)	3 (2%)	1 (1%)
Service Contract	74 (37%)	61 (34%)	68 (36%)	77 (41%)	97 (48%)
By classification					
Full-Time	146 (73%)	144 (78%)	143 (74%)	134 (71%)	119 (59%)
Part-Time	54 (27%)	36 (22%)	44 (26%)	54 (29%)	84 (41%)

Source: Institutional Annual Data Profiles (2010-2011 to 2014-2015 academic years)

Data show that during the last five years there has not been a significant difference in the faculty profile, except in the proportion of service contracts compared to tenured faculty. The approximate average over the last five years was 192 professors. In terms of academic preparation when one compares 2010-2011 to 2014-2015, professors with bachelor's degrees remained almost the same; master's degrees decreased from 134 to 109; and doctoral degrees increased from 60 to 91. This increase in doctoral degrees represents a 15% increase of all faculty, and is consistent with Article 42 of the UPR General By-Laws

(Exhibit 1), that faculty should have a doctoral degree to seek a tenure-track contract. In terms of rank, assistant professors has shown an increase, while the percentage of associate professors decreased. Tenured faculty decreased from 117 to 98, while service contracts increased from 74 to 97 during this period.

Table 6.2 shows full-time equivalent (FTE) student to faculty ratio which has been constant in 16:1 during the last five years.

Table 6.2
Full-time equivalent faculty to student ratio

Academic Year	FTE Student Enrollment	FTE Faculty	FTE Faculty to Student Ratio
2010-2011	2,978	146	16:1
2011-2012	2,895	144	16:1
2012-2013	2,999	143	16:1
2013-2014	3,015	134	16:1
2014-2015	3,117	191	16:1

Source: Institutional Annual Data Profiles (2010-2011 to 2014-2015 academic years)

Table 6.3 shows student-faculty ratio per degree seeking department for 2014-2015 academic year. It should be noted that the departments presenting the highest ratio are Biology, Business Administration, and Office Systems. The average ratio is 24:1.

Table 6.3
Student to faculty ratio per degree seeking department

Academic Department	Total Students	Total Faculty	Student-Faculty Ratio (Total Students/Total Faculty)
Business Administration	450	18	25:1
Allied Health	227	13	17:1
Computer Science	161	7	23:1
Biology	641	18	36:1
Office Systems	219	8	27:1
Education	281	12	23:1
Engineering	188	11	17:1
Social Sciences	627	28	22:1
TOTAL*	2,794	115	24:1
Total Enrollment	**Total Faculty**	**Student to Faculty Ratio**	
3,229	203	16:1	

Source: Institutional Annual Data Profiles (2014-2015 academic year)
*Students and faculty not classified in above departments are not included.

Table 6.4 shows the distribution of faculty average teaching load for each of the academic departments during the last five years.

Table 6.4
Faculty average teaching load

Academic Department	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	Average
Allied Health	15.02	16.27	16.33	16.20	15.76	15.92
Biology	15.20	15.60	16.33	16.55	16.00	15.94
Business Administration	14.49	14.74	13.72	14.25	14.05	14.25
Chemistry & Physics	17.45	16.52	17.60	16.74	15.88	16.84
Engineering	15.53	15.30	14.77	15.04	13.79	14.89
Computer Science	14.29	16.20	15.57	15.20	15.63	15.38
Education	14.16	13.76	13.31	14.83	15.24	14.26
English	15.59	17.91	16.49	17.66	15.00	16.53
Humanities	14.85	14.61	15.17	14.79	16.12	15.11
Mathematics	16.76	16.07	16.30	15.34	15.71	16.04
Office Systems	13.66	15.33	15.67	14.11	15.01	14.76
Social Science	16.47	14.93	16.61	16.10	13.93	15.61
Spanish	15.80	15.00	15.40	16.11	13.33	15.13

Source: Office of Planning and Institutional Research (2010-2011-2014-2015 academic years)

Faculty teaching loads can exceed the established 12-credit hour norm. In case of institutional need, faculty can take a teaching overload that cannot exceed an 18-20 credit hour limit established by UPR-Ponce Administrative Board (Certification 2001-2002-62). Extraordinary cases exceeding the stipulated overload have to be analyzed by the Dean of Academic Affairs and approved by the Chancellor. While no average teaching load exceeds the Board's stipulated top, averages are consistently over the 12-credit hour norm. The academic departments that, on average, have shown higher teaching loads are Chemistry and Physics, English, and Mathematics. Table 6.5 presents the demographic profile for full-time faculty at UPR-Ponce.

Table 6.5
Demographic characteristics of full-time faculty

	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Total Full-Time Faculty	146	144	143	134	119
By gender					
Female	90 (62%)	86 (60%)	85 (59%)	79 (59%)	67 (56%)
Male	56 (38%)	58 (40%)	58 (41%)	55 (41%)	52 (44%)
By age group					
25-44 years	30 (21%)	29 (20%)	28 (20%)	31 (23%)	29 (24%)
45-54 years	91 (62%)	92 (64%)	86 (60%)	83 (62%)	35 (30%)
55 or more years	25 (17%)	23 (16%)	29 (20%)	20 (15%)	55 (46%)
By place of birth					
Born in Puerto Rico	122 (84%)	123 (85%)	117 (82%)	113 (84%)	97 (82%)
Born in United States	12 (8%)	11 (8%)	12 (8%)	11 (9%)	11 (9%)
Born outside of Puerto Rico	12 (8%)	10 (7%)	14 (10%)	10 (7%)	11 (9%)

Source: Office of Human Resources (2010-2011 to 2014-2015 academic years-first semester)

The data shown in Table 6.5 reflect that the UPR-Ponce Faculty Profile is mainly female in the range of 55 years or more. Most faculty is of Hispanic origin, born in Puerto Rico, United States, Spain, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica, and Cuba. Faculty from other countries, like Italy or Canada, constitutes a small minority. The 2014 *Self-Study Perception Survey* (Exhibit 5) revealed that 95% of the faculty perceived that the institution promotes diversity related to age, gender, race, nationality, and others among faculty members.

FACULTY RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, TENURE, AND PROMOTION

The principles of merit and fairness established by the UPR's General By-Laws in Article 41 specify the dispositions for granting categories and ranks for the faculty staff. Among professors, the categories schemes are: instructor (for incoming professors), assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor. In addition, Articles 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, and 47 of the UPR's General By-Laws set the framework for the establishment of rules and regulations regarding faculty recruitment, retention, tenure and promotion.

Article 42 establishes a doctoral or terminal degree from an accredited institution of higher education in the discipline to be taught, as a minimum degree requirement. Article 43 sets the criteria for faculty recruitment: quality of the applicant's academic record and of the institution that conferred the degree, mastery of the discipline to be taught, and capacity to integrate it with related disciplines, teaching experience, and experience applying knowledge in a particular field of study, published papers and lectures given, identification with the philosophy and objectives of the University Law, and capacity for scientific and creative research. As the general rule, Article 44 stipulates the incoming rank for the new faculty at the category of instructor. Articles 44.1.1 and 44.1.2 specify the norms for granting exceptions to the general rule in accordance to faculty considerations of merit for exceptional cases, and to faculty with doctoral degree at the associate professor category.

Through Certification 2002-2003-60, the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate approved the *Norms and Procedures for Faculty Recruitment* that provides guidelines to academic departments on rules, regulations, and procedures for hiring new personnel. The specific academic preparations required to teach in each of the departments are part of this Certification. Faculty candidates can complete a job application and submit their credentials for qualification, or personnel committees can contact potential candidates and ask them to complete the application and submit documents for qualification. The university has posted announcements through newspapers and academic sites asking for potential faculty candidates to apply. Potential new faculty is qualified following a procedure in which the Departmental Personnel Committee examines the candidate's credentials and submits its recommendations to the Dean of Academic Affairs, who finally qualifies the candidate. The Chancellor finally appoints the professor. The qualification form was revised by the Dean of Academic Affairs and approved by the Academic Senate (Certification 2003-2004-35). The qualification is included in the candidate's record, which is kept by the Human Resources Office.

Faculty tenure and promotions are guided by an evaluation design whose framework is UPR's General By-Laws, Article 45. This article states that the following criteria should be considered when promoting and granting tenure to faculty: quality of teaching, research or disclosure; dedication to university work and service; compliance with teaching duties; professional improvement; involvement in faculty work, including committees and study programs; research and creative work; conferences offered related to their field of study; publications, exhibits, concerts, and other related activities; recognitions received; documented opinions of colleagues and other people related to their work; and professional attitude.

Through Certification 2002-2003-77, the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate approved the *Complementary Norms, Criteria, and Procedures for Evaluation of Teaching Faculty at the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce*, which were approved by the UPR University Board through its Certification 2002-2003-37 in order to comply with Section 45.2 of the General By-Laws. The document describes the general characteristics of the evaluation process, responsible officers and entities, duties of faculty and institutional entities in the evaluation process, faculty rights related to their evaluation, administrative appeals, evaluation procedure, and confidentiality of evaluation documents. Faculty is evaluated by peers, department chairpersons, and students, using locally developed instruments. The criteria considered in each instrument are briefly described below:

- Peer evaluation instrument (Academic Senate Certification 1999-2000-27): knowledge of the discipline (35%); methodology (35%); interaction with students (20%); and communication (10%).
- Department head evaluation instrument (Academic Senate Certification 2000-2001-54): compliance with teaching responsibilities stipulated in the University By-Laws; syllabus revision; evaluation and recommendation of learning resources; and development of initiatives which show commitment to student learning.
- Student evaluation instrument (Academic Senate Certification 2000-2001-61): course objectives and content; methodology; assessment practices; development of critical thinking and information skills; faculty-student interactions.

The faculty evaluation process is carried out in the following way:

- Part-time and tenure-track faculty: Peers evaluate faculty member each semester; students from two sections taught by faculty member evaluate him/her every semester; department head performs an evaluation each semester.
- Tenured faculty: Peers evaluate once a year; students from one section taught and selected by faculty member evaluate him/her every semester; department head does a yearly evaluation. Faculty members are not evaluated once they reach the highest rank (full professor).

Results from the peer evaluation process are discussed with faculty, as required by Academic Senate Certification 2002-2003-77. The evaluation results are assigned the following weights: Peer evaluation (43%); Department head's evaluation (43%); and Students' evaluation (14%).

Article 46 of the UPR General By-Laws stipulates the rules and regulations for granting tenure to faculty. The Administrative Board is empowered by law to grant tenure, requiring that faculty has occupied a tenure-track position and provided five years of satisfactory services. Exceptions to this rule are noted in this Article. Through Certification 2004-2005-15, the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate establishes the internal procedures for the process, with a clear description of institutional constituents' roles and responsibilities, and faculty rights and modes of appeal.

Promotion procedures are stated in Article 47 of the UPR General By-Laws. The Administrative Board, which is empowered by Law to grant promotions, must abide by the procedures, time between ranks, and special considerations that are described in the Article. The Administrative Board regulated the promotion procedure in which a set of elements has to be assessed and accounted for through Certification 2001-2002-03. Table 6.6 shows these elements and the acceptable evidence used in faculty evaluation for promotion.

Table 6.6
Criteria for faculty promotion

Element	Evidence to support element
I. Quality of teaching	Yearly evaluations of peers, students, and department head
II. Creation and publication activities	Original faculty work, such as: Books; anthologies; educational modules; research projects; proposals; academic manuals; courses created; bibliographical works; conferences offered; exhibits, concerts, poster sessions, direction or participation in plays; professional designs; active participation in seminars, symposia, forums, workshops, and panels; competitions; camps and clinics; translations; University-related consultation; radio, TV, and video productions; and others.
III. Professional improvement activities	New degrees received; courses taken, with or without credit; professional titles; seminars, symposia, forums, workshops, panels, congresses, conventions, and conferences; membership in professional associations; cultural trips; and others.
IV. Participation in committees, dedication to university service, and to the federal, state, and municipal governments	Participation in governing bodies and committees at the System, UPR-Ponce, and departmental levels; administrative responsibilities; and others.
V. Community service	Provision of service to nonprofit institutions which benefit the community directly.

Source: UPR-Ponce Administrative Board Certification 2001-2002-03

Faculty is required to prepare a portfolio with documented evidence supporting each element, according to the Instruction Manual for the Promotion Checklist developed by the Administrative Board. The evidence is qualitatively and quantitatively assessed by Personnel Committees. The total score is obtained by adding the scores for each element and the number of years of service.

Minimum scores in order to qualify for promotion (Administrative Board Certification 2001-2002-04) are: 100 for Assistant Professor, 115 for Associate Professor, and 135 for Full Professor. Scores are not cumulative and, once a rank is achieved, faculty initiates a new evidence accumulation to support the next promotion. The portfolio is assessed by the Departmental Personnel Committee (composed of fewer than three and not more than seven tenured faculty coming from the highest ranks and the department head) and the Faculty Personnel Committee (composed of one representative of each of the Departmental Personnel Committees, up to three department chairpersons appointed by the Chancellor, and the Academic Dean, who presides it) before reaching the Administrative Board, with each level scrutinizing evidence and submitting recommendations supported by evidence. The Administrative Board gives a strong weight to these recommendations before granting promotions. The UPR-Ponce Academic Senate is presently revising the Instruction Manual for the Promotion Checklist (Certification 2011-2012-40).

Due to budget constraints, promotions were not granted for the 2010-2011 academic year. Through Board of Trustees Certification 2009-2010-137, eligible candidates for 2010-2011 academic years were registered in a waiting list for promotions to be granted in 2011-2012. Nevertheless, in view of the continuing economic crisis, Certification 2013-2014-2 of the Governing Board extended the norms contained in Board of Trustees Certifications 2009-2010-137, 2010-2011-153, and 2011-2012-97 for granting promotions according to the chronology of the registry of the faculty waiting list which was in

effect until the 2013-2014 academic year. For the academic periods comprising 2011-2012 through 2014-2015, 21 promotions were granted: 2 Assistant Professors, 6 Associate Professors, and 13 Full Professors. For 2014-2015, the recommended promotions were approved to 100% of professors who submitted the necessary evidence.

In pursuit of fairness and maintenance of quality teaching certain stipulations have been put in place. The Law of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the UPR General By-Laws guarantee faculty the right to file complaints if unsatisfied with results from institutional processes such as tenures and promotions. Article 35 of the UPR General By-Laws stipulates the criteria and procedures for undertaking disciplinary action against faculty. During 2010-2011 to 2014-2015, no disciplinary procedure was presented.

Through certifications, which are institutionally distributed, the UPR Board of Trustees established a uniform salary scale for faculty that includes salary differentials based on rank, years of service, and academic preparation. University fringe benefits include a health plan, social security, a retirement plan, worker's compensation, Christmas bonus, among others. Due to budget reduction, the compensation for teaching courses above the 12-credit hour minimum load has decreased by 5% and a stipend for educational materials was removed in 2013-2014. Table 6.7 shows a comparative table of salaries between UPR and other institutions of higher education in Puerto Rico.

Table 6.7
Average of annual salary of full-time faculty according to rank

Institution	Instructor	Assistant Professor	Associate Professor	Full Professor
University of Puerto Rico – Ponce	$45,840	$57,228	$63,792	$74,928
Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico – Ponce (private)	$34,008	$45,000	$54,672	$66,324
Inter-American University of Puerto Rico – Metro (private)	$40,896	$46,920	$56,304	$71,472

Source: 2014 Faculty Survey, IPEDS (2014-2015 academic year)

In spite of budget limitations, the table reflects that salaries at UPR are much higher when compared to those at private institutions.

FACULTY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Articles 63, 64, and 65 of the UPR General By-Laws establish the duties, functions, and responsibilities of the faculty. Duties include developing faculty and departmental objectives, attending meetings, presenting and discussing university-related issues, respecting the institution's fundamental values, participating in consultation and election processes, keeping up-to-date in their disciplines, participating in professional development and evaluation processes, planning academic programs, and complying with those obligations related to their teaching duties.

The faculty has representation in the development, evaluation, and revision of the academic programs throughout the departmental committees and in the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate. At the Academic Senate, each academic department has its representation where different committees are formally established. Departmental committees provide opportunities for the participation of the constituents in

planning, delivering, and operating programs. The Academic Senate participates in determining the general course of UPR-Ponce's teaching programs.

The UPR General By-Laws (Article 25.6) and policies promote the effective participation of faculty in the decision-making process at departmental, institutional, and systemic levels. There are well-defined structures that allow faculty to participate in different committees, such as Professional Development, Accreditation, Curriculum, Assessment, and Personnel through the procedures established by Certifications 2005-2006-42 of UPR-Ponce Academic Senate, 2005-2006-80 and 2006-2007-43 of the Board of Trustees. At the departmental level, the committees are appointed by the department's chairperson, or elected among peers; at the institutional level, the committees are appointed by the Chancellor.

Another aspect of the academic duties that faculty at UPR-Ponce is expected to take part is related to research. The Academic Affairs Deanship evaluates, selects, and supports research proposals submitted from faculty members. In the past five years, eleven research proposals from faculty members of the departments of Business Administration, Biology, Mathematics, English, Engineering, and Social Sciences were awarded (Appendix 6.1). Also, proposals submitted for research projects through the External Resources Office have been awarded.

Since 1998, the Creation and Research Congress is held in UPR-Ponce to share academic research, development, and artistic creations of faculty members mainly from the UPR system. Also, faculty members have participated in national and international congresses presenting papers, research findings, or as members of selected academic teams such as: Puerto Rico Teachers of English to Students of Other Languages, Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, Psychology Association of Puerto Rico, Caribbean Psychology Congress, among others. Faculty also serve as mentors of students who present their research during the Undergraduate Creation and Research Congress.

Since 2010, three books from UPR-Ponce faculty members have been presented: Dr. Carlos Zapata's "*Luis Muñoz Marín, Estados Unidos y el establecimiento del Estado Libre Asociado (1946-1952)*", Dr. Sheila Barrios' "*La ventana al silencio"* and Dr. Carmen López's "*Cuentos para reflexionar y reir*". More than 30 research papers and essay articles from faculty have also been published in *Ceiba* (recognized by Latindex), UPR-Ponce journal, during the last five years (Appendix 6.2). As evidenced on the different Annual Institutional Effectiveness Reports, during the last five years, around 42 articles has been published by UPR-Ponce's faculty in various professional and international magazines and journals. Appendix 6.3 shows a complete list of publications.

UPR-Ponce's faculty is also involved is the Arts Commission. It was created by Certification 2011-2012-73 of the Administrative Board. Among the objectives of the Commission is to develop and promote artistic expression of Puerto Rican artists by providing a place to present art work. Through the Commission, the institution aspires to be an artistic center in the southern region of Puerto Rico.

In addition, academic counseling is a faculty-inherent responsibility, as stated in Article 65.2 of the UPR General By-Laws. Assessment results of the students' perceptions of academic counseling showed that 66% of the students who answered the *2004 Alumni Survey* (Exhibit 25), and 71% of ones who answered the *2008 Alumni Survey* (Exhibit 23) rated this type of counseling as excellent and good, while 88% of the graduating students answering the *2010 Graduating Students' Survey* (Exhibit 26), and 76% of those who answered the *2012 Exit Interview to Graduating students* (Exhibit 24), perceived the UPR-Ponce academic counseling as excellent and good.

Results from 2013-2014 *Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory* (Exhibit 4) showed UPR-Ponce students' general satisfaction is 5.51 in comparison to other National four-year public colleges' satisfaction, 5.37, with a statistically significant difference of 0.14 (difference statistically significant at the .05 level). These ratings included academic advisors concern with the student's success, academic advisor approachability, knowledge of requirements of the student's major, and clear and reasonable major requirements.

Professional Development

The UPR-Ponce faculty has adopted a plan for professional development as an institutional priority to better equip them to respond to students' needs. Through Certification 2004-2005-26, the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate endorsed an action plan and implementation process that emphasizes education projects, research, and investigation. Appendix 6.4 presents the professional development activities for 2010-2011 to 2014-2015 academic years.

The Deanship of Academic Affairs coordinates the initiatives geared to achieving the goals and objectives of the Professional Development Plan. The Deanship appoints an institutional professional development committee that coordinates different to promote faculty improvement. The faculty development improvement program serves three main components: a) orientation to new professors, b) professional enrichment for the use in the classroom, and c) the strengthening of research for academic improvement. During 2010-2011 to 2013-2014, a faculty member was named as coordinator of the committee to expand the professional development plan according to the results of the needs assessment survey conducted every two years. For the 2014-2015 academic year, the committee was appointed, but a coordinator, as established in the Certification, had not been named. Nevertheless, the committee's task was completed.

In order to comply with these constituents, the Deanship of Academic Affairs carries out every two years a *Faculty Professional Development Needs Assessment Survey* to determine priorities and decision making regarding offerings, and therefore, budgetary allowances. Orientation to incoming and newly appointed professors has been designed to orientate about all aspects related to the institution's regulations, vision and mission expectations, and educators' performance. Moreover, in order to strengthen the faculty's knowledge and expertise, educators participate, and are encouraged, to make proposals for investigation purposes and research projects which are supported with allocated yearly monetary allowances. The assessment instruments that are used to facilitate the professional needs for educational practices are compiled from the faculty evaluation processes by peers and students, and other profile studies prepared by the institution to support academic systems.

Under the auspice of the Deanship of Academic Affairs, UPR-Ponce provides support for a wide, varied range of in-house and off-campus academic and cultural focused activities, leaves, and support for the completion of doctoral degrees, publications, and research. At the level of the academic departments, educators are committed to engage in the annual development and participation of activities that provide updated professional enrichment. Activities are open to all faculty members. Ten of twelve of the academic departments have constituted a professional development committee; while three other departments have had the committee during some academic years. Appendix 6.5 presents the institutionally supported projects and scientific research for the last five years.

In addition, other professional development activities are being planned, delivered, and promoted by the volunteering faculty members of the Institute of Education and Thought Development (IETD) and the

Interuniversity Consortium of the Knowledge Society at UPR-Ponce. The IETD's initiative is to align with UPR-Ponce's mission and vision, and to collaborate with other southern higher educational institutions, to the continuous acquisition of knowledge; and by that means, promote critical thinking dialogues and discussions that constitute open communication venues amongst all of the public and private, educational, and economic sectors responsible of the growth for the Ponce area (Appendix 6.6). The IETD has celebrated different activities in coordination with private and public higher education institutions from Ponce.

By planning various intellectual, scientific, and academic activities of a range of varied topics, the IETD impacts the expanded community with innovative ideas in topics that can provide solutions to the Southern Region's developmental needs. By the beginning of each academic year, the IETD plans and schedules a series of collaborated events. These events range from seminars, colloquiums, conferences, congresses, and forums on areas such as art, theology, education, science, sociology, astronomy, psychology, economics, biology, and many more.

The faculty is assigned an annual allowance for participation in activities which are designed to enhance the knowledge and expertise of the faculty members. The Personnel Committee evaluates the appropriateness of the requests according to the merit. The Deanship of Academic Affairs informs and reports to the faculty about the availability of the recurrent funding for the submission of proposals for research, publishing, and other creations as stipulated by the Institutional Research Policy and Academic Creations of the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce through the Administrative Board Certifications 2000-2001-41;55.

UPR-Ponce has consistently provided economic support for faculty to attend off-campus professional development activities. Budgetary limitations for faculty professional improvement has meant that funds may not cover the total cost of an activity but have been granted as partial stipends. Also, faculty members invest in their own professional improvement activities. Table 6.8 presents the budget spent for professional development activities during the last five years.

Table 6.8
Budget spent for off-campus faculty professional development activities

	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Budget spent	$24,747	$30,965	$16,479	$18,093	$13,806

Source: Budget and Finance Offices

As observed in the above table, the budget spent for faculty development activities was $108,967 in the past 5 years.

The institution provides leaves for studying as another means of professional development for faculty. The UPR General By-Laws, in Article 50, provides the regulations regarding the leaves granted for this purpose: sabbaticals, leaves with pay, and leaves without pay, economic aid, and special aids. All leaves require faculty commitment to a number of years of service which has to exceed the number of years of leave.

During 2010-2011 to 2013-2014 academic years, the Administrative Board allocated $50,000 for study leaves for faculty and non-faculty personnel (Certifications 2009-2010-88, 2010-2011-55, 2011-2012-39 and 2012-2013-30 of the Administrative Board), distributing the funds by 83% for faculty and 17% for non-

faculty personnel (Certifications 2009-2010-89, 2010-2011-56, 2011-2012-40 and 2012-2013-31 of the Administrative Board). Table 6.9 shows the leaves granted by UPR-Ponce Administrative Board.

Table 6.9
Leaves granted by UPR-Ponce Administrative Board

Type of leave	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Leaves with pay	1	0	1	0	0
Special Economic aids	1	2	2	4	2
Total leaves	2	2	3	4	2

Source: Academic Affairs Deanship (2010-2011-2014-2015 academic years)

The UPR-Ponce shows a continuous commitment to use resources assigned for leave purposes to help faculty improve professionally. During 2010-2011 to 2014-2015 academic years, 2 leaves for studying doctoral degrees were granted by the UPR-Ponce Administrative Board. One of those 2 professors obtained doctoral degree during this period.

Technology in Teaching

UPR-Ponce encourages and supports the use of technology in the teaching-learning process. The institution has always supported technology as an effective tool for enriching the teaching-learning process and in providing students with the experience needed to develop technological competency. In 1999, Title V proposal was approved, and technology resources were improved on campus. The institution received $2.5 million dollars from the U.S. Department of Education. When the Title V grant finished, UPR-Ponce continued with the project, creating the Academic Support Center for Students and Faculty (ASCSF). Title V, and then subsequently the ASCSF, provided the faculty with intensive training about technological resources for applying technology for curricular support and delivery.   Appendix 6.7 provides a list of more than 150 training activities supported by Title V then ASCSF during the last five years.

Title V funding facilitated the creation of three Multi-Activities Teaching Centers, a Faculty Computerized Work Center, and an Interdisciplinary Computerized Center for Students, which are now part of the ASCSF. Faculty continuously revises the courses and syllabi to include technology resources in teaching. Internet access and WIFI system were improved on campus during 2013-2014 to cover open spaces, halls, and auditoriums. Also, the institution shifted from the Blackboard Platform to the Moodle Platform. More than 50 classrooms have been equipped with smart boards, digital projectors, and televisions for interactive courses.

The 2014 *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE) (Exhibit 3) results from the Learning with Technology Module show that 91% of first-year students, and 79% of seniors, acknowledged that the Institution emphasizes teaching with new, cutting-edge technologies. Seventy-four percent of first-year students and 88% of seniors reported that they completed assignments using data bases of articles, books, and journals. NSSE 2014 also shows that 87% of first-year students and 97% of seniors used technology during the current school year to communicate with the faculty.

Excellence in Teaching

The UPR-Ponce Faculty is distinguished for offering outstanding teaching. This statement is evidenced by the results of the evaluation tools that confirmed teaching effectiveness from peer, student, and department chairperson evaluations. According to the Dean of Academic Affairs Office, an average of 98% of faculty scored more than 80% in peer evaluation in the last five years. Eighty-eight percent of the faculty scored more than 80% in student evaluation and 94% scored more than 80% in the evaluation made by the department chairpersons.

Consistent evaluations with higher percentages evidence the excellence in teaching of UPR-Ponce faculty. Results from alumni and graduation candidates reaffirm the faculty's commitment. Tables 6.10 and 6.11 present some of these findings.

Table 6.10
Percentage of alumni rating different aspects of the quality of teaching as excellent or good

Measure	2004 Alumni Survey	2008 Alumni Survey	Average
Quality of teaching	87%	89%	88%
Faculty concern for student learning	75%	75%	75%
Course content	75%	82%	79%
Teaching methods	62%	74%	68%
Mastery of course content	87%	88%	88%

Source: Office of Planning and Institutional Research Surveys

Table 6.11
Percentage of graduating students rating different
aspects of the quality of teaching as excellent or good

Measure	2010 Graduating Students' Survey	2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students	Average
Quality of teaching	98%	91%	95%
Faculty concern for student learning	91%	79%	85%
Course content	96%	83%	90%
Teaching methods	88%	77%	83%
Mastery of course content	97%	89%	93%

Source: Office of Planning and Institutional Research Surveys

The results for both groups, show that the quality of teaching and mastery of course content are rated consistently high. The results of alumni and graduating students' survey indicate that the area with the lowest rating is teaching methods.

The *2014 National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE) has provided UPR-Ponce with a tool for benchmarking institutional results in relation to teaching and learning processes. The survey presents four engagement indicators. Table 6.12 shows institutional and national results for each of the benchmarks.

Table 6.12
NSSE benchmark scores for engagement indicators

Engagement indicator	First year		Seniors		Summary of Results UPR-Ponce	
	UPR-Ponce	National	UPR-Ponce	National	Freshmen	Seniors
Academic Challenge						
Higher-Order Learning	2.88	2.90	3.28	3.08	---------	↑
Reflective and Integrative Learning	2.74	2.70	3.11	2.94	----------	↑
Learning Strategies	2.83	2.97	3.00	3.10	↓	----------
Quantitative Reasoning	2.13	2.43	2.60	2.47	↓	↑
Learning with Peers						
Collaborative Learning	2.68	2.53	2.83	2.63	↑	↑
Discussion with Diverse Others	3.13	3.00	3.30	3.10	↑	↑
Experiences with Faculty						
Student-Faculty Interaction	1.80	1.98	2.40	2.23	↓	↑
Effective Teaching Practices	2.84	3.02	3.16	3.06	↓	----------
Campus Environment						
Quality of Interaction	4.78	5.10	5.42	5.08	↓	↑
Supportive Environment	2.75	2.73	2.75	2.58	----------	↑

--------- No significant difference,
↑ Average was significantly higher
↓ Average was significantly lower
*Students' average was significantly higher or significantly lower at (p < .05) with an effect size at least .3 or equal to .3 in magnitude.

For first-year students, the mean for the engagement indicator *Learning with Peers* is comparable with NSSE top 50% high performing institutions. For senior students, the mean for three of the areas included in the engagement indicator *Academic Challenge* is comparable with NSSE top 50%. The mean for the following engagement indicators is comparable with NSSE top 50%: L*earning with Peers, Experiences with Faculty* and *Campus Environment* (NSSE 2014 Engagement Indicators, Comparisons with High-Performing Institutions).

NSSE presents six high-impact practices: learning-community, service learning, research with faculty, internship, study abroad, and culminating senior experience. Table 6.13 presents an analysis of high-impact practices items. Results for the high-impact practices indicate that UPR-Ponce exceeded the national level for freshman students that had participated in one high-impact practice. The institution also exceeded the national level for senior students that had participated in two or more high-impact practices.

Table 6.13
Analysis of items in high-impact practices (HIP)

High Impact Practices	Performance	
	Freshmen	
	UPR-Ponce	**National**
Learning-Community Service Learning Research with Faculty	10% participated in two or more HIP	7% participated in two or more HIP
	77% participated in one HIP	47% participated in one HIP
	Seniors	
	UPR-Ponce	**National**
Learning-Community Service Learning Research with Faculty Internship Study Abroad Culminating Senior Experience	16% participated in one HIP	28% participated in one HIP
	77% participated in two or more HIP	57% participated in two or more HIP

Source: National Survey of Student Engagement

The *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey* has provided another tool to assess students' satisfaction with different aspects of the academic life. The results on Table 6.14 are based on a 7-point scale.

Table 6.14
Student's satisfaction with academics

Measure	UPR-Ponce	National	Mean Difference*
Faculty care about me as an individual.	4.83	5.04	-0.21
There is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus.	5.74	5.37	0.37
Academic support services adequately meet the needs of students.	5.19	5.20	-0.01
Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	4.81	5.24	-0.43
The instruction in my major field is excellent.	5.72	5.46	0.26
Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.	4.51	5.07	-0.56
Faculty take into consideration student differences as they teach a course.	4.70	4.97	-0.27
The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.	5.88	5.36	0.52
Faculty are usually available after class and during office hours.	5.39	5.60	-0.21
Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	6.02	5.69	0.33

Source: National Survey of Student Engagement
* Difference statistically significant at the .01 level

Results for the indicators: "there is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus, the instruction in my major field is excellent, the quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent, and nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field" point that UPR-Ponce exceeded the national

satisfaction level. Other indicator results such as "faculty care about me as an individual, faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students, and faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course" show that UPR-Ponce is below the national satisfaction level.

Academic Freedom

Article 11 of the UPR General By-Laws defines academic freedom as the right of every faculty member to teach the subject with objectivity and integrity, without restrictions other than those imposed by the moral and intellectual responsibilities of covering all the elements of a course as approved by the corresponding authorities. It also includes the respect for different points of view, the responsibility of teaching using pedagogical methods identified with the search for truth and ethical teaching. This right will not diminish the students' fundamental right to learn all the essential elements of each course and to have their beliefs respected as well as to enjoy freedom of expression.

Faculty was asked in the 2014 *Self-Study Perception Survey* about the institutional commitment to academic freedom, and 96% perceived that the UPR-Ponce guarantees academic freedom to each of its faculty members. No legal claims have been filed by UPR-Ponce faculty regarding academic freedom violations.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the analysis of the findings, the following can be concluded:

1. The UPR-Ponce has a well-qualified, experienced, mainly tenured, and full-time faculty that contributes to achieve the institution's mission.
2. During the last five years, there was an increase in faculty service contracts, reducing the tenure-track contracts.
3. Faculty roles and responsibilities are clearly stated in institutional regulations.
4. The institution supports its faculty. The faculty actively participates in professional development activities in technology, teaching, research, and community service.
5. The Academic Senate approved an action plan for faculty professional development to establish the implementation process to focus on this important area.
6. The institution has always supported technology as an effective tool for enriching the teaching-learning process.
7. There is a strong perception that the institution upholds the rights of faculty by respecting academic freedom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations derive from findings and conclusions:

1. Continue efforts to support the use of technology resources in the teaching-learning process.
2. Strengthen the faculty professional development program and research endeavors to enhance teaching effectiveness.
3. Develop a plan and allocate resources to hire faculty in tenure-track positions that allows an adequate participation in the roles and responsibilities, as stated in rules and regulations.
4. Continue improving strategies that will enrich the educational experiences on campus.
5. Support the Faculty Professional Development Plan as endorsed by the Academic Senate.

6. Keep disclosing the results from the tools used to assess the teaching and learning processes, such as NSSE, should be disclosed among faculty members. Develop and implement plans to attend findings.

CHAPTER 7: EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS (STANDARD 11), GENERAL EDUCATION (STANDARD 12), AND EDUCATIONAL RELATED ACTIVITIES (STANDARD 13)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter expands upon the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce's (UPR-Ponce) assessment of content, rigor, and coherence of academic programs and the clear identification of student learning goals and objectives. In addition, it analyzes students' acquisition of college-level proficiency in general education through the completion of capstone courses. Related assessment of educational activities are also indicated concerning content, focus, and location. Major findings and recommendations for future actions will be stated at the end of this chapter.

EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

UPR-Ponce offers a variety of programs to satisfy the needs of the southern region of Puerto Rico in the areas of arts and sciences. Baccalaureate degrees are offered in Business Administration, Computer Sciences, Office Systems, Social Sciences (Psychology and Mental Health, and Forensic Psychology, both with an option for an emphasis in rehabilitation services), Elementary Education, Athletic Training, and Natural Sciences (Biomedical Sciences and Biology with three sub-specializations: Bio-diversity Evaluator; Biotechnology; and Marine Coastal Environment Evaluator). Associate degrees are also offered in Physical Therapy, Civil Engineering Technology (Drafting and Construction), and Industrial Engineering Technology. The campus also offers transfer programs in the Natural Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, and Physics), Mathematics, Education, Engineering, and Arts (Humanities and Social Sciences). The Division of Continuing Education offers non-credit, credit courses, and workshops.

All instructional programs at UPR-Ponce are offered in fields of study consistent with the institution's mission. Also, the programs are appropriate to higher education criterions and culminate in student accomplishment of identified learning outcomes and achievement of their degrees. The Institutional mission is reflected and promoted through the curricular structure of each academic program. The curricula support the fulfillment of the institutional mission, goals, and expected outcomes. The process by which institutional programs are developed, implemented, and modified is designed to ensure that the programs curriculum is academically rigorous and consistent with its mission (Board of Trustees Certifications 2005-2006-80 and 2006-2007-43). Appendix 7.1 illustrates the alignment between institutional mission and the components of its mission and courses objectives for the Associate Degree in Physical Therapy and the Bachelor Degree in Elementary Education as examples.

The UPR-Ponce mission and goals states that students are educated to be citizens and professionals capable of contributing to a global society as critical, creative, and honest leaders committed to continuous learning and community service. The UPR-Ponce programs confirmed the fulfillment of institutional and program mission and goals. According to the 2008 *Alumni Survey* (2013) (Exhibit 23), the 2010 *Graduating Students' Survey,* and the *2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students,* (Exhibits 26 and 24*)*, UPR-Ponce contributes to their development of the competencies as stated in Table 7.1, which were rated between good and excellent.

Table 7.1
Contribution of the UPR-Ponce in the development of skills or knowledge acquisition

Competencies	2008 Alumni Survey (2013)	2010 Graduating Students Survey	2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students
Oral and written communication	3.93	4.21	3.93
Math, scientific, and technological	3.85	4.20	4.01
Logical and critical thinking	4.23	4.58	4.51
Basic information skills	4.36	4.61	4.60
Ethical, aesthetical, and historical valuation	4.28	4.67	4.61
Working collaboratively	4.38	4.71	4.65
Related to the major	4.34	4.66	4.51
Other personal competencies	4.22	4.61	4.54
Averages	**4.20**	**4.50**	**4.40**

Source: Office of Planning and Institutional Research   *on a 5.0 scale

Alumni and graduating student surveys have also shown satisfaction with academic, professional, and personal skills development received through the curricula. Competencies that received better evaluation in the three studies were those related to collaborative work skills and basic skills of information. The respondents' opinion reflects that UPR-Ponce's contribution to skills development or acquisition of knowledge in all categories was good. *The 2010 Graduating Students' Survey* shows that the competencies that received better evaluation were those related to collaborative work skills, aesthetic and historical valuation-related and those related to the discipline. Results of *2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students reflected* similar findings.

On the 2008 *Alumni Survey (2013),* 79% rated the preparation received at UPR-Ponce related to their jobs as excellent or good. Another aspect that alumni and graduating student surveys measured was student's assessment of academic programs. Seventy-six percent of students participating in the *2012 Exit Interview to the Graduating Students* perceived that they were informed of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes which they have to develop through their programs (Graduate Profile). Seventy-eight percent of students reported that course sequence of the programs was either good or excellent and 86% rated course content as either excellent or good. In the 2013-2014 *Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory* (Exhibit 4), the UPR-Ponce students indicated a 5.84 level of satisfaction (on a 7.0 scale) in the item: "Major requirements are clear and reasonable."

Academic programs encourage their mission, learning objectives, and UPR-Ponce's mission through information and guidance that is provided to their students. The institution uses multiple strategies to ensure students' awareness such as the institutional Webpage, brochures available at academic departments, and an orientation for new students which includes information about learning objectives for each academic program. Every semester, professors are requested to provide the syllabus to each student and to discuss the course objectives with them during the first meetings (UPR-Ponce Academic Senate Certification 2001-2002-18). Data obtained from the 2008 *Alumni Study (2013)* and from the *2010 Graduating Students Survey* and the *2012 Graduating Students Exit Interview* show students' ratings of their academic programs effectiveness to provide information on issues related to the program mission, goals, objectives, profile of the graduating students among others, was good. These studies also showed

students' ratings of their academic programs effectiveness to promote and inform them about the mission were 3.95, 4.39, and 4.16, respectively (scale 5.0).

Additional evidence is provided by the self-study process required by professional accreditation agencies. Accredited programs such as Physical Therapy, Elementary Education, Engineering, Business Administration, and Office Systems use external standard measures to determine the effectiveness of their curricular offerings and the extent to which these results reflect and promote the institution's mission and goals. The faculty of each program analyzes congruence between program and institutional mission and goals. Academic programs that are not professionally accredited must demonstrate in its five-year evaluation that their goals, processes, and objectives are aligned with the goals of the University (Board of Trustees Certification 2006-2007-43).

Curricular Structure

UPR-Ponce undergraduate curricula are organized to enable students to develop their intellectual abilities and obtain professional training. As an example, an innovative emphasis area on rehabilitation services was added to the educational offerings of the Psychology and Mental Health Program and to the Forensic Psychology Program. These emphasis areas are the first to provide training on rehabilitation at an undergraduate level in Puerto Rico.

UPR-Ponce Catalog (Exhibit 13) will show the structure of program curricula which is divided into four interrelated components: general education, specialization, specialization-related, and elective courses. These four components are aimed to prepare professional citizens with an integrated education and to assure depth as well as breadth of the study of their subject. It allows students to link intellectual ideas across a broad spectrum of content areas. The general education component of UPR-Ponce emphasizes the development of personal and social awareness, effective communication skills, reasoning and critical thinking skills, and ethic and aesthetic sensibility. Capstone courses, designed to integrate theory and practice, are included within the Specialization Courses Component. Table 7.2 reveals the distribution among all components of the programs.

Table 7.2
Distribution of credit-hours in UPR-Ponce's academic programs

Program	General Education	Specialization	Specialization-related	Free Electives	Total credit hours
Baccalaureate Programs					
Business Administration - Finance - Management - Marketing	46 (36%)	21 (16%)	49 (38%)	12 (9%)	128
Business Administration -Accounting	46 (34%)	28-31 (21%)	49 (36%)	12 (9%)	135-138
Computerized Sciences	51 (39%)	52 (39%)	17 (13%)	12 (9%)	132
Office Systems	33 (25%)	61 (47%)	24 (18%)	12 (9%)	130
Elementary Education	42 (30%)	53 (39%)	29 (21%)	12 (9%)	136
Athletic Training	33 (24%)	62 (46%)	28 (21%)	12 (9%)	135
Social Sciences – Forensic Psychology	46 (35%)	41(31%)	33* (25%)	12 (9%)	132

Program	General Education	Specialization	Specialization-related	Free Electives	Total credit hours
Baccalaureate Programs					
-Area of Emphasis on Rehabilitation Services					
Social Sciences-Psychology and Mental Health -Area of Emphasis on Rehabilitation Services	46 (35%)	50 (38%)	24* (18%)	12 (9%)	132
Biomedical Sciences	36 (29%)	25 (20%)	53 (42%)	12 (9%)	126
Biology- Bio-diversity Biotechnology Marine Coastal Environments	36 (29%)	24 (19%)	53 (42)	12 (10%)	125
Associate Degree Programs					
Physical Therapy	21 (29%)	38 (53%)	13(18%)	0	72
Civil Engineering Technology - Construction	18 (26%)	41 (59%)	10 (15%)	0	69
Civil Engineering Technology- Drafting	18 (26%)	42 (60%)	10 (14%)	0	70
Industrial Engineering Technology	18 (25%)	40 (56%)	13 (18%)	0	71

Source: UPR-Ponce Academic Departments
* Eighteen (18) of these credits are courses related to the Area of Emphasis on Rehabilitation Services

At the baccalaureate level, all programs have 12 credit hours of free electives. The specialization and specialization-related components constitute the largest component of the programs. The amount of credits to obtain a Bachelor's Degree range from 125 to 138; for an Associate Degree it is from 69 to 72 credits.

Regarding the differences in the total amount of credits among the academic programs in UPRP, it is worth noting that this is due to the fact that 7 programs are accredited by professional accreditation agencies. Therefore, each accredited program is required a different set of courses generally known as the "common professional component" (CPC).   These courses are offered to comply with different accreditation and professional requirements.   As an example, the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs requires the Business Program to offer CPC courses in the disciplines of marketing, accounting, statistics, management, finance, information technology, global business, economics, business law, and ethics.

Certification 1996-1997-115 of the Board of Trustees establishes that internal transfer programs should be articulated. At present, UPR-Ponce offers 53 transfer programs. Also, the institution receives students of transfer programs from Aguadilla, Humacao, and Utuado colleges. Table 7.3 presents this in detail. In these programs, UPR-Ponce students are guaranteed a space once they transfer to the receiving UPR unit with which the articulation agreement was signed.

Table 7.3
UPR-Ponce transfer programs added since 2007

Discipline	Major	Receiving UPR Unit	Year Implemented
Natural Sciences	Chemistry	UPR Mayagüez UPR Río Piedras UPR Cayey	2007
Natural Sciences	Mathematics	UPR Cayey	2007
Science	Applied Physics	UPR Humacao	2007
Science	Chemistry	UPR Cayey	2007
Secondary Education	Natural Sciences, Special Education, Physical Education, Spanish, History, English, Mathematics	UPR Cayey	2007
Mathematics	Computation	UPR Humacao	2007
Science	Industrial Chemistry	UPR Humacao	2007
Secondary Education	Mathematics, Chemistry, English, Industrial Arts, Physics, Arts, Nutrition and Dieting, Physical Education, Theater	UPR Río Piedras	2007
Elementary Education	Special Education	UPR Río Piedras	2007
Engineering Technology	Material Management	UPR Bayamón	2007
Natural Sciences	Nursing	UPR Mayagüez	2009
Science	Physics, Theoretical Physics	UPR Mayagüez	2014

Source: Academic Affairs Deanship

Ten for the Decade (Exhibit 10), the strategic plan for the University of Puerto Rico system, proposed as one of its goals, to increase the number of academic programs that comply with accreditation requirements from external agencies. As a result, an increasing number of academic programs have complied with their accreditation procedures; UPR-Ponce has seven academic programs professionally accredited. Self-studies required by external agencies and the process for developing new programs or evaluation of the existing ones at UPR-Ponce evidence the quality and rigor of programs. Table 7.4 shows the accrediting agencies, the schedule, and status of each of the UPR-Ponce programs and services, including the Library. All professional accreditations are in good standing to date.

Table 7.4
Professional accreditations and evaluations schedule

Programs and Services	Agencies	First time accreditation/evaluation	Periodic reviews	Accreditation due date
Allied Health Studies-Physical Therapy	Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE)	1980 Reaccreditations in 1989, 1999, and 2009	yearly	2019
Business Administration	Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs	2009	2012, 2014	2020

Programs and Services	Agencies	First time accreditation/evaluation	Periodic reviews	Accreditation due date
	(ACBSP)			
Education-Elementary Education	Council for the Accreditation of Educators Preparation (NCATE/CAEP*)	2008 (NCATE) 2014 (NCATE/CAEP)	yearly	2020
Engineering	Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET)	2011	not requested	2019
Office Systems	Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP)	2010	2012, 2014	2020
Library	Association of College and Research Libraries (ACLR**)	2008	n/a	n/a
Counseling and Psychological Services	International Association of Counseling Services, Inc. (IACS**)	2010	yearly	renewed yearly

* In 2014 NCATE and CAEP were consolidated into one accreditation agency
** Issues a certification

Existing programs at the UPR-Ponce undergo regular assessment, a process of measuring and evaluating the overall performance of academic programs and the extent to which they support the institutional mission. Ongoing program assessment is crucial because it identifies that a program is attaining its goals, determines the areas that need improvement, and develops plans to improve them. Periodic assessment activities are required for academic and non-academic departments at UPR-Ponce. Each program is required to assess specific learning objectives annually. Results of the assessment procedures are discussed annually as part of the Assessment Forums (AF), an academic forum designed to share results throughout the academic and administrator's personnel. Along with institutional conferences and workshops on assessment, the Assessment Forums Cycle is part of a continuous and constant assessment culture at UPR-Ponce. During the last decade, UPR-Ponce has sustained an assessment culture throughout all its deanships. Several programs underwent rigorous external assessments by appropriate accrediting organizations within the same timeframe. To further ensure the rigor of the curriculum and educational excellence, the institution also places great emphasis on meeting the standards that are promulgated by accreditation agencies. The results of accreditation agencies and accreditation criteria or standards that evaluate rigor, content, breadth, and length for college-level programs are presented below in Table 7.5.

Table 7.5
Accreditation agency and accreditation criteria or standard that evaluate rigor,
content, breadth, and length for college-level programs

Baccalaureate programs	Accreditation Agency	Accreditation Criteria or Standard that evaluate rigor, content, breadth, and length for college-level programs
Business Administration Office Systems	Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP)	**STANDARD #4. Measurement and Analysis of Student Learning and Performance** Business schools and programs must have an outcomes assessment program with documentation of the results and evidence that the results are being used for the development and improvement of the institution's academic programs. Each business school or program is responsible for developing its own outcomes assessment program. **STANDARD #6. Educational and Business Process Management** In order to prepare business graduates for professional careers, the curriculum must encompass not only business subjects, but also subjects dealing with the specifics of the global work place and the more general aspects of global society. Since business graduates must be equipped to interact with other members of society, adapt to societal changes, and serve as business advocates, students must be encouraged to study global topics that will prepare them for these challenges. Given these academic demands, business schools and programs are encouraged to be innovative and to provide flexible curriculum options. Two of the major goals of the curriculum should be the development of intellectual curiosity and the creative capacity for independent thought and action. However, regardless of their major, all business graduates are expected to have received a general exposure to economic institutions, the complex relationships that exist between business, government, and consumers, and a basic knowledge of the functional areas of business.
Elementary Education	Council for the Accreditation of Educators Preparation (CAEP)	**Standard 1**. Candidates preparing to work in schools as teachers or other school professionals know and demonstrate the content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and skills, pedagogical and professional knowledge and skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn. Assessments indicate that candidates meet professional, state, and institutional standards. **Standard 3**. The unit and its school partners design, implement, and evaluate field experiences and clinical practice so that teacher candidates and other school professionals develop and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn.
Allied Health Studies-Physical Therapy	Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE)	**Standard 6:** The program has a comprehensive curriculum plan. **Standard 7**: The curriculum includes content, learning experiences, and student testing and evaluation processes designed to prepare students to achieve educational outcomes required for initial practice in physical therapy and for lifelong learning necessary for functioning within an ever changing health care environment.

At UPR-Ponce, program curricula are structured in order to encourage that the students acquire the foundation of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that they will need throughout their professional career. The Programs' curricula provide for skill building, attitude development, and mastery of

increasingly difficult subject content. As an illustration of the curricular structures design, the organization of courses in a sequence along a Baccalaureate in Elementary Education include all four components: General Education Competencies (GEC), specialization, specialization-related, and electives. Within the first year, GEC are embedded. During the second and third year specialty courses are offered and the second level of GEC can be identified. Electives are distributed across the four-year sequence. Finally, during the fourth year students enroll in practicum, capstone courses, and a job related educational experiences complying with the final third level of the GEC (Appendix 7.2).

Appendix 7.3 includes an illustration of the curricular structure of the Associate Degree in Civil Engineering Technology in Architectural Drafting. General education, specialization, specialization-related courses are distributed across the two-year sequence. The curricular structure of this associate degree program does not include an elective course component in the sequence. The GEC is aligned by levels in this Associate Degree program. The first level of GEC is embedded within the first year courses; the second level of competencies is found within the specific major courses in both first and second years. The capstone course, Practicum in Civil Engineering Technology, completes the required third level for the GEC for an Associate Degree program.

An examination of syllabi of two academic programs, Physical Therapy and Office Systems, shows that all courses specify knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students should develop in order to satisfy the expectations set in the graduating or transfer student profiles. Appendixes 7.4 and 7.5 present an analysis of the relationship between intended outcomes, courses, and achievement for a baccalaureate and associate degrees.

At UPR-Ponce the programs curricular sequences facilitate student achievement of competence in theoretical, applied, and behavioral dimensions and is aimed at producing a well-rounded graduate. While the outcomes-based design of the curriculum is the primary way of guaranteeing curricular coherence, each program also builds coherence into the student learning process through experiences of synthesis of learning within capstone courses or culminating experiences. During the final year, students from bachelor and associate degree programs must complete a credit-bearing, professionally-oriented internship, practicums, or research experiences. These courses include a minimum required time on site, structured supervision, appropriate orientation, and in some cases reflective post-internship or practical work. Appendix 7.6 presents the capstone courses in bachelor and associate degrees.

Capstone courses include practicums designed for both the integration of theory and practice, thus providing students with job related experiences. Research courses are also designed for the integration of theory and practice and the development of research skills suitable for their success in graduate studies. Internships are job related educational experiences under the supervision of both a faculty member and an in-site professional trained and with academic preparation appropriate to the program's learning objectives.

Transfer students from other UPR units are provided with a general education component at the UPR-Ponce. There is a written policy (Certification 2002-2003-34 UPR-Ponce Academic Senate) for validating courses taken at other academic institutions of higher learning. Policy requires academic departments to examine the syllabus of a given course to establish if their learning objectives are equivalent to the ones included in the curricular structure of the program (75% percent). Chapter 5 explained in detail the processes for this purpose.

Adelina Coppin Alvarado Library

The Adelina Coppin-Alvarado Library (ACAL), whose mission is to provide information services of excellence to all members of the university community, is under the Deanship of Academic Affairs. It was reopened in 2008 following a comprehensive remodeling. Students can find variety of resources that support, strength, and expand the curriculum and cultural offerings of the institution. Faculty uses different teaching strategies in which they integrate library resources in the courses. It serves as the primary study area for students, who benefit from the following: 85 computers to access electronic learning resources; wireless internet; seating and workspace for 575 students; 4 printers/photocopiers; 9 group study rooms of which 5 have interactive electronic whiteboards; access to 5 physical collections of learning materials totaling 9,281 lineal feet; and air conditioning. The *Students Library Satisfaction Survey* of 2011 and in 2015 revealed that users are satisfied with the library's facilities.

Moreover, it reiterates its role as an active partner in the teaching-learning process. Students can find variety of resources that support, strength, and expand the curriculum and cultural offerings of the institution. Faculty uses different teaching strategies in which they integrate library resources in the courses.

To ensure availability of appropriate learning resources that support the UPR-Ponce's educational programs, faculty members are invited each semester to review and select from books received as part of the Collection Development Department's book consignment approval plan. They may submit other recommendations at any time. In addition, faculty members, in charge of their departmental library committees, are sent catalogs to facilitate selection of new learning resources.

As evidenced in various Annual Institutional Data Profiles, the Library collection growth shows a consistent increase in the number of titles and volumes (Appendix 7.7). Many printed and microform periodicals have been supplemented with on-line periodicals, which have significantly increased the number of periodicals available to users by 410%. There was a reduction of legacy media format items, such as audiocassettes and vinyl records, undertaken in 2008 and 2009, due to damages incurred during the library's remodeling. This resulted in a 17% decrease in titles and a 5% decrease in volumes for the Multimedia Department (Collection Development Deselection Report 2008 and 2009). Actions have been taken to mitigate the loss of damaged items. To facilitate record keeping, a standardized reporting plan of holdings, acquisitions, and deselections was designed on 2014.

ACAL's Information Skills Program contributes to the development of competencies related to information literacy. The instruction room is equipped with an interactive electronic whiteboard and 29 computers for students to use during practical information literacy workshops. The instructor workstation is equipped with iTalc software, a powerful didactical tool allowing instructors to show demos and support participants.

ACAL offers many important services that support the institution's educational programs and help students develop information skills that will prepare them to be lifelong learners. Services are offered seventy-two hours a week. ACAL departments are: Reference, Circulation, Serials, Non-Print Resources, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Information Skills Program, Audiovisual Services, and Academic Computation. ACAL's webpage provides a useful means for faculty and students to access online services. Technological advances and assessment activities challenges are faced through the strengthening of the library instruction program, the ongoing annual subscription to five large databases content providers

such as EBSCO, ProQuest, Gale-Cengage, Science Direct and Wiley, and the digitalization of a historic monograph hosted on a Digital Repository.

The acquisition of learning materials, the proper operation of facilities, provision of library instruction, and other support services depend heavily on professional library staff. The current personnel consists of: 6 librarians, 9 library assistants, 1 specialist in automation for libraries, 1 administrative assistant, 2 secretaries, 1 audiovisual technician, and 1 information technology technician. The library personnel offers workshops to students to help them develop their information literacy skills. Students surveyed as part of the Library's *Assessment Plan* of 2011 reported satisfaction (71.02%) with the quality of ACAL's services.

As ACAL maintains the largest number of public workstations on campus, it has two dedicated IT staff working alongside the Academic Computing Department (ACD) to identify and anticipate potential campus-wide information technology needs and to provide timely technical assistance and innovative solutions. The rate at which the university community seeks and uses electronic learning resources shows a 75% increase in database searches since 2009. In 2014, the UPR Committee on Electronic Resources (CER) decided that article downloads would be used to gauge usage. The CER found that article download counts place UPR-Ponce near the leaders in average downloads per student when compared to other campuses as seen in Table 7.6.

Table 7.6
Articles downloaded by database in UPR campuses
Academic years 2012-2014

Campus	Student enrollment	EBSCO downloads	2012-2014 average number of downloads per student EBSCO	PROQUEST Downloads	2012-2014 average number of downloads per student PROQUEST	CENGAGE downloads	2012-2014 average number of downloads per student CENGAGE
Rio Piedras	14,023	1,001,263	71.40	238,632	17.02	21,8825	15.60
Mayaguez	11,659	80,038	6.86	296,511	25.43	27,785	2.38
Aguadilla	2,828	35,068	12.40	16,422	5.81	6,432	2.27
Ponce	2,999	35,185	11.73	82,079	27.37	5,511	1.84
Arecibo	3,554	30,376	8.55	1,057	0.30	5,172	1.46
Medical Sciences	2,217	51,746	23.34	137,466	62.01	2,662	1.20
Bayamón	4,776	38,212	8.00	21,853	4.58	2,417	0.51
Humacao	3,465	42,701	12.32	17,245	4.98	1,526	0.44
Carolina	3,612	25,157	6.96	13,721	3.80	0	0.00
Utuado	1,420	8,559	6.03	0	0.00	0	0.00

*UPR total students enrollment for 2012-2013 was 54,681
Source: UPR Committee on Electronic Resources, 2014

Student satisfaction with library resources has increased since the last self-study. The 2004 and 2008 *Alumni Surveys* showed the following mean scores for satisfaction with print and non-print resources: 3.61 and 3.45 (out of 5.00), respectively. The alumni perception about services range from fair to good. The 2010 *Graduating Students Survey* and the *2012 Exit Survey of Graduating Students* also assessed

satisfaction with the print and non-print resources; the mean scores obtained were 4.03 and 4.02 (on a scale of 5.00).

To ensure that UPR-Ponce students develop information skills, faculty and librarians collaborate regularly to provide instruction and assess student learning. Results are used for improvement. The library prepares annual assessment plans. Included among assessed skills were students' knowledge of plagiarism, skills in citing according to the APA style and both faculty and students satisfaction with library services. Results from a wide variety of assessment tools, such as short quizzes, questionnaires, one-minute papers, and rubrics, showed that most assessment goals were met. For example, 70% of the students, who took a short quiz about plagiarism, met the intended outcome. Also, 100% of the students attending the workshops about search strategies used a variety of sources and used quality sources; 95% used current sources, and 76% included all the required information in their bibliographic records. Improvement plans were developed for those areas where the assessment goals were not met.

Competencies related to information skills, technology, and the effective and ethical use of information are essential to students' academic formation, their success in the workplace, and their becoming lifelong learners. At the institution, information skills instruction and technology support are integrated into some curricular experiences. Library instruction focused on information skills is embedded into some academic courses as evidenced in various syllabi (Appendix 7.8). This collaboration is critical to ensure that students understand and meet information skills, and that they are indeed able to access, evaluate, and use information in an appropriate and ethical manner. Another way in which the institution promotes the development of information skills is through the course PREH 4990: Introduction to Information Literacy. This 15-hour course has been offered since academic year 2013-2014 and 47 students have enrolled in it.

In 2011-2012, the library personnel surveyed UPR-Ponce Faculty regarding student' usage of information sources for their research projects. According to the results, 100% of professors stated that 70% or more of their students asked for their advice in the identification of their research theme, used a variety of information sources, used appropriate and reliable sources, and documented their reports appropriately. In 2012-2013, they assessed the use of excellent, updated, and appropriate sources for their research projects. Results revealed that 100% of students used varied and quality sources and that 95% used updated sources. In the 2013-2014 academic year, the library personnel assessed whether or not students had the knowledge necessary to do online research. Only 63% of students mastered the skills for online research.

Honor's Study Program

The Honor's Study Program (HSP) is an academic program that enriches the students' collegial experience by providing them with a curriculum that fosters leadership, social responsibility, independent study, and collaborative work. The students are enrolled in special sections of the program's core courses. The HSP offers a certificate to students who satisfactorily complete all the program requirements. The HSP is part of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) and Northeast National Collegiate Honors Program (NNCHP). The students have participated in various activities sponsored by the NCHC and the NNCHP and have been recognized in and out of Puerto Rico. Some of the students have been awarded Special and Academic Excellence Awards. Also, during the past 5 years, 14 students have participated in internships and summer programs such as MIT Summer Research Program in Biological Sciences, Summer Research Opportunities Program from the University of Iowa, Summer Medical and Dental Education Program at Cleveland, Summer Internship in the Federal University of Santa Catharina at Brazil, Life Sciences Summer Undergraduate Research Program at the University of Minnesota, and in the Virginia Commonwealth

University HERO Summer Research Program, among others. As part of their required participation in research programs, they have worked for research programs such as UPR-PRISE (http://prise.uprp.edu/) as evidenced in HSP' Annual Reports. Also, the HSP promotes study trips. These enable students to learn about and experience the culture, geography, social organization, and idiosyncrasies of different countries. Appendix 7.9 shows a list of the innovative courses offered by the HSP.

GENERAL EDUCATION

The Middle States Commission of Higher Education (MSCHE) suggested to the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce (UPR-Ponce), after it submitted its *Self-Study Report* in 2005, "a clear statement of purpose which defines a curricular structure for the General Education Program should be developed."   This recommendation began an on-going official and long-term process for creating an Institutional Policy for the General Education Component at UPR-Ponce.   A series of institutional committees, Committee for the Assessment of the General Education Component (CAGEC) and a Special Senate Committee (SSC), were named dating from 2006 to the present with different assignments. This serves as evidence of the UPR-Ponce's commitment and endeavor to take into account MSCHE's suggestion.

Historical Background

A concise historical background of the development of the definition and structure of the General Education Component at the UPR-Ponce is presented as evidence of the commitment the institution demonstrates in complying with the MSCHE suggestion. During the 2006-2007 academic year, the chancellor at that time appointed a committee to define the General Education Component. The Academic Senate assigned a Senate Affairs Committee to revise and assess the document that was later submitted to the Academic Senate (Certification 2006-2007-57).

The definition for the General Education Component was approved by the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate as Certification 2007-2008-23, which reads as follows:

> The General Education Component of the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce is composed of a nucleus of courses and educational activities fomenting an integral and balanced education. This will prepare the student for life, his/her profession and the world in which he/she lives.   The General Education Component is comprised of oral and written competencies; mathematical, scientific, and technological competencies; logical and critical thinking competencies; proficiency in the basic information skills; and a foundation of ethical, aesthetic, and historical values to prepare the student to be a better citizen.

After the definition was approved, the Committee for Assessment of the General Education Component (CAGEC) was created to assess its competencies. Members in this Committee did a review of literature, read and shared *Assessing General Education Programs* (M. Allen, 2006) and *General Education: A Self-Study Guide for Review & Assessment* (Leskes & Miller, 2005). The CAGEC shared information on General Education Programs from other institutions of higher education, and gathered data on what had been done at the different campuses of the UPR system. The Graduating Student Profile was aligned to the General Education Component at that time. Professional development for the faculty was provided by experts in the field such as Dr. Linda Suskie and by Dr. Maria Aguirre. During the academic year 2009, the CAGEC gathered data on the embedded elements within the courses throughout the different program offerings at UPR-Ponce.

The Academic Senate established a Special Senate Committee, to develop UPR-Ponce's General Education Component, its structure, courses, and policy during the summer of 2009. This Special Senate Committee submitted its report in 2014 (Certification 2013-2014-12).

The Academic Senate approved the General Educational Component (Certification 2013-2014-67) which established the following: the organization of the GEC, its well defined competencies, GEC courses and their characteristics; the educational activities, and capstone courses. Moreover, it includes a suggestion for the need to create a General Education Institutional Committee, which is responsible for the implementation of the General Education Policy. This document also contains the conceptual framework for the GEC at the UPR-Ponce and how it relates to the institutional mission that was in place at the time (Certification 2013-2014-49). The Academic Senate's Certification expressed that it would be effective and implemented at the beginning of the 2014-2015 academic year. It stated that Institutional policies related to General Education at UPR-Ponce should be aligned accordingly, such as assurance that the student transfer policies being aligned.

Organization of the General Education Component

The competencies found, within the General Education Component, are based on the definition of General Education as approved by the Academic Senate (Certification 2007-2008-23). These are integrated across the curriculum for each specialty. The competencies are presented below with a short description.

1. Oral and written communication competence in Spanish and English will be examined and demonstrated through the use of different types of communication activities according to the different audiences, occasions, and purposes that are adequate in the varied professional and academic environments, as well as the ethical issues that may arise in communicating with others.
2. The Mathematical competence will develop logical reasoning and the techniques necessary for the solution of problems for use in the students' personal and professional lives. They will be able to model and solve different situations using diverse strategies and mathematical tools.
3. Scientific Competence will be used by students in developing research skills through the use of the scientific method and critical thinking skills.
4. Technological competence and skills in information literacy are essential in daily life and in workplace for all professionals in order to work efficiently.
5. The critical thinking competence will be developed as a variety of abilities and strategies are used to make reasonable decisions of what one does and believes. Students will be able to evaluate different types of inductive and deductive arguments.
6. Aesthetic values will be developed as the students learn to identify the role of the arts and its influence in culture.
7. Their ethical values will be developed as they learn to apply them in making decisions throughout their lifetime.
8. Historical value will be developed by students as they learn to understand and explain the diverse implications related to the political, social, economic, cultural, and religious perspectives in the past as well as of today.
9. The competence of social and personal sensitivity will be developed as the student learns to identify and explain the relation between the personal "I" and the world.

Responding to the recommendation of the Academic Senate, the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs took upon itself the analysis of the General Education component as found within the different academic

programs. As a result, a matrix was designed to analyze if each of the nine competencies as described above, were found in the different levels within all of the academic programs at UPR-Ponce. These levels go from 1-3, where 1 means basic knowledge of the competencies (comprehension); 2 advanced (application); and 3 capstone (synthesis). Table 7.7 presents a sample of the above mentioned matrix taken from the analysis of the basic courses from the English Department and the complete one is presented in Appendix 7.10.

Table 7.7
General Education Competencies addressed in the English Department basic courses

General Education Competencies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
English Courses										
INGL 3101		X				X	X	X		X
INGL 3102		X				X	X	X		X
INGL 3103		X				X	X	X		X
INGL 3104		X				X	X	X		X
INGL 3113		X								X
INGL 3114		X								X

Source: Deanship of Academic Affairs

*General Education Competencies Key
1. Oral and written communication skills in Spanish
2. Oral and written communication skills in English
3. Mathematical skills
4. Scientific skills
5. Technological skills
6. Information literacy skills
7. Critical thinking skills
8. Aesthetic and ethical values
9. Historical knowledge
10. Social and personal sensibility

The UPR-Ponce continues to demonstrate its compliance with the 2005 MSCHE suggestion by providing related professional development such as the *Forum: General Education in the Academic Formation of the University Student in the 21st Century* presented at the opening of the January 2015 semester by renowned specialists in the field and authors of the book *A Historical Critique of General Education in Puerto Rico: Antecedents and Foundational Stage* (W. Velez, C. Sanchez, and M. Maldonado, 2013).

According to the Conceptual Framework of the General Education Component at UPR-Ponce, the graduate of the UPR-Ponce will obtain, throughout the teaching and learning process, a rational, free and independent, integral, and competent development. This formation will provide each student with the opportunity to integrate the values of equality, justice, veracity, dignity, prudence, and integrity in their lives. This demonstrates how the GEC is based on and supports the UPR-Ponce commitment expressed in its mission and in the development of the required competencies established by the Profile of a UPR-Ponce graduate.

The fundamental purpose of any GEC course is to guarantee that all graduates have attained an integral and balanced formation. At this time the components of general education are embedded within courses in the different programs. The purpose of offering these courses is to expand students' educational experiences they may face beyond their professional experiences. The courses, offering the General Education Component, are based on its certified definition (Academic Senate Certification 2007-2008-23), the Mission of the UPR-Ponce, and the Graduating Student Profile.

The mission of the UPR-Ponce is to contribute to the integral, intellectual, humanistic, scientific and ethical development of citizens and professionals prepared to contribute to the global world (Academic Senate Certification 2013-2014-49). The General Education Competencies are consistent with the institutional mission as they promote the development of critical thinking, scientific skills, and ethical values, among others. As a part of the institutional mission, nine institutional goals have been identified (Academic Senate Certification 2008-2009-59). Some of these goals are: to develop programs of study conducive to

associate and bachelor degrees that cultivate knowledge through creation, investigation, and dissemination. The academic programs develop proficiency in the ten General Education Competencies throughout in their curricular sequences. Appendix 7.11 shows the skills related to the GEC within the different capstone courses.

Each Institutional Assessment Report (Exhibit 27) evidences that the GEC is embedded, proficiency levels attained, and take place continuously throughout the different programs. Programs, such as Education and Athletics, emphasize that students participate in tutoring session that are offered on campus to help them improve their Spanish grammar, oral and written English, and mathematics.

General education requirements are in the process to be included in the description of courses in the most recent UPR-Ponce Catalog, on the webpage, and academic programs' curricula brochures. Certification 2013-2014-67 of the Academic Senate clearly stated that these were to be aligned with all institutional policies. This is currently being worked on within the revised catalog and in the curricular revision currently being undertaken in the different academic programs and service departments. All academic programs include at least one mathematics and science course. Humanities and social sciences courses emphasize the development of values, ethics, and aesthetics. Every program (Associate and Baccalaureate) includes at least one course in both areas.

Assessment of the General Education Component

In order to comply with the General Education Component criteria, the assessment structure of the Institution included the General Education Assessment Committee. As previously indicated, various components are imbedded within different courses; but General Education Components must also align with the student transfer policies and the Graduate Student Profile. Thus, UPR-Ponce academic departments continue to work with the Academic Senate to fulfill all the exigencies of the General Education Component.

The General Education Assessment Committee is under the institutional Student Learning Assessment Committee which gathers data from the different departmental assessment committees throughout each academic year. The Coordinator of this committee creates a report in which the results are presented. Recent reports specifically identify the annual plan, the work that has been done, and the yearly assessment results are presented in the Assessment Forums.

The academic programs curricula are oriented toward accomplishing the UPR-Ponce's General Education Competencies (GEC). Written and oral communication skills are addressed in English and Spanish courses, but also reinforced in the business, social sciences, education, office systems, humanities, engineering, and science courses, as evidenced in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015 Institutional Assessment Reports (IAR) (Exhibit 29). Some of the assessment results pertaining to the GEC are the following:

- The Business Administration Program found that 100% of the students that had been assessed demonstrated that they had attained a 75% or higher proficiency level in oral and written presentations.
- The Biology Department indicated that 90% of the students from the BIOL 3108: Undergraduate Research, obtained 15 points or higher on a 20 point-scale in the oral discussion section of their investigation. Ninety percent of those students also attained an 8 out of 10 score in the analysis and conclusions of their investigations.

- In the course BIOL 3909: Biology Seminar, students obtained 70% or higher on the oral presentation evaluation.
- In SICI 4038: Research Seminar, all of the students that were assessed obtained 3 or higher on a 4 point-scale in ethical behavior and demonstrating professional responsibility.
- In the course EDPE 2007: Educational Practice, students obtained an average of 2.96 (on a 3-point scale) in development of critical thinking and information literacy skills.
- The Office Systems Department found that 74% of the students, who took a comprehensive exam of the English language, obtained 70% or higher on that exam. Also, the Department indicated that 99% of the students in the course SOFI 3505: Administrative Procedures for Office Professionals obtained 3 or 4 (in a 4-point scale) in the competence related to oral communication in Spanish.
- In TECI 2005: Surveying I, 82% of the students obtained excellent or good in oral and written communication in Spanish.

As evidenced in various Institutional Assessment Reports, the following are some of the changes that have occurred based on assessment results of the General Education Competencies throughout the different programs at UPR-Ponce:

- Syllabi revision such as English 3102: Basic English II, Spanish 3292: Spanish Grammar II, and Mathematics 3041: Introduction to Math I
- Creation of workshops to develop critical thinking in Spanish 3102: Basic Spanish II
- Reinforcement of information literacy skills in Spanish 3102: Basic Spanish II
- Major emphasis in the development of oral communication skills in Spanish in Business Administration courses
- Major emphasis in the development of writing skills in Spanish, Biology, and Education courses
- Inclusion of activities designed to develop reflexive, critical, and creative thinking in the Education Practicum
- Revision of various assessment rubrics such as the written communication skills and oral production in English
- Major emphasis on the interpretation of technological skills in Education Methodology course
- Integration of ethical concepts in Computer Sciences 3012: Introduction to Computer Science II and Computer Sciences 3015: Analysis and Design of Information Systems

According to information provided by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR), graduates surveyed in the *2008 Alumni Survey*, in the *2010 Graduating Students Survey*, and in the *2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students* considered communication skills in Spanish as excellent, in English those skills were considered good. In mathematics and sciences, the students' evaluation was good and also in values and ethics.

The *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE) of 2014 provides UPR-Ponce a summary of first-year and senior students' engagement results that represent two critical features of collegiate quality. One of these is how institutional resources, courses, and other learning opportunities facilitate student participation. Some of these indicators are within the General Education Component at the UPR-Ponce. The following table provides further information from the 2014 NSSE results.

Table 7.8
UPR-Ponce summary of student engagement results and their alignment
with the Institutional General Education Competencies

Theme	Engagement Indicator	GEC at UPR-Ponce	First Year	Senior year
Academic Challenge	High-Order Learning	3. Scientific Method 5. Critical Thinking	↔	↑↑
	Reflective and Integrative Learning	3. Scientific Method 5. Critical Thinking	↔	↑
	Quantitative Reasoning	2. Mathematical	↓↓	↑
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning	9. Social and Personal Sensitivity	↑	↑
	Discussions with Diverse Others	1. Oral and written communication	↑	↑
Experiences with Faculty	Quality of Interactions	1. Oral and written communication	↓	↑
	Supportive Environment	9. Social and Personal Sensitivity	↔	↑

Key: ↑↑ UPR-Ponce student's average was significantly higher (p <.05) with an effect size at least .3 in magnitude
  ↑ UPR-Ponce student's average was significantly higher (p <.05) with an effect size less than .3 in magnitude
  ↔ No significant difference
  ↓ UPR-Ponce student's average was significantly lower (p <.05) with an effect size less than .3 in magnitude
  ↓↓ UPR-Ponce student's average was significantly lower (p <.05) with an effect size at least .3 in magnitude

NSSE also indicated that 90% of UPR-Ponce's seniors surveyed consider their writing and speaking skills to be effective. The results in analytical and critical thinking were even better, 93% of the seniors were very satisfied with their proficiency in those skills. On the other hand, 73% of the students perceived their knowledge in the analysis of numbers and statistical information as effective.

Another favorable result of the 2014 NSSE is the overall High-Impact Participation of the first-year students and the seniors, especially when compared to the three comparison groups. This is clearly depicted in Table 7.9 below. The percentages were the highest for all the other results, both first-year and seniors. High-Impact Practices include participation in a learning community, service-learning, and research with faculty. It also includes internships, field experiences, study abroad, and culminating senior experience for seniors. High Impact Practices are activities that demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback.

Table 7.9
NSSE overall high-impact practices participation by comparison group

First Year	Two High-Impact Practices	One High-Impact Practice
UPR-Ponce	**10%**	**87%**
Comparison Group 1	7%	54%
Comparison Group 2	11%	63%
Comparison Group 3	7%	57%
Senior Year		
UPR-Ponce	**77%**	**93%**
Comparison Group 1	57%	85%
Comparison Group 2	66%	87%
Comparison Group 3	60%	86%

Source: National Survey of Student Engagement
* Comparison groups were based on same Carnegie Classification.

RELATED EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Developmental Education

As indicated in its Mission and Goals Statement, UPR-Ponce provides various means for students to overcome their academic deficiencies. To ensure that students master basic quantitative reasoning skills, the Mathematics Department has organized a series of basic math skills workshops. Using institutional enrollment information, freshman students whose scores fall under 625 on the College Board Mathematics Achievement Test (CBMAT) are encouraged to take a diagnostic test to identify areas for improvement. An assessment report presented to the Academic Senate on the effectiveness of these workshops revealed that they improved students' probability of passing the math course required by their program.

Tutoring programs are also in place to help underprepared students achieve their educational goals. The Academic Support Center for Students and Faculty (ASCSF) has contributed to student development of basic skills in Biology, Chemistry, English, Math, and Physics through the use of technology. Most academic departments provide additional tutoring services in their respective courses. According to the 2013-2014 *Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory,* students at UPR-Ponce show a 5.38 satisfaction with the tutoring services (on a scale of 7.0). These services have proven to increase the percentage of students completing basic skills courses.

Continuing Education and Professional Studies Division

The Continuing Education and Professional Studies Division (CEPSD) guides its offerings utilizing the Board of Trustees Certification 2000-2001-190. Also, institutional Strategic Plan goal number 7 leads its academic offerings. The objectives of the CEPSD are to:

- create awareness in students, alumni, and the community about the importance of continuous learning as a tool for personal and professional development geared to active participation in the social, cultural, and economic development of the country,
- improve the individual and collective quality of life, and

- provide a credit and non-credit academic offerings that are innovative, broad, dynamic, flexible, and that respond to the educational needs and training of non-traditional students in the different sectors of the Puerto Rican community.

The main objective of noncredit courses at the CEPSD is to provide education and retraining to professionals of industries or public and private agencies to help them complete their continuing education hours, renew their professional licenses, or improve professionally. Offerings are divided into the following categories:

- short noncredit courses for professional and personal improvement,
- workshops, seminars, and conferences,
- continuing education activities sponsored by professional organizations or other campuses of the university, and
- training programs designed according to specific needs of particular entities, companies, or agencies.

Organizations or industries request that the CEPSD offer the noncredit courses or seminars they need. The CEPSD prepares a proposal using institutional resources. The short noncredit courses, seminars, and workshops last 40 hours or fewer and are not part of the regular academic offerings. These courses are offered during the evening or on Saturdays. The programs are semester based, but the starting date of a course does not follow the academic calendar. The courses are conducted with nonrecurring funds and are subject to enrollment in order to be offered. The courses do not have a curricular sequence since the students select them according to their interests and needs. The courses are designed on various thematic areas and tailored to the needs of various audiences, professional groups, and communities. Appendix 7.12 presents the form used to design and create the courses.

CEPSD also offers two programs that had been designed for high school students: ASCIENDE and one for students who are enrolled in vocational high schools called College Articulated Program (CAP). ASCIENDE provides opportunities for academically outstanding students to start college before completing high school. Students can enroll in one or two previously designated courses up to a maximum of seven credits per semester as established in the Academic Senate Certification 2008-2009-13. During the last five years, ASCIENDE has had 25 students. On the other hand, CAP was created through a consortium between the University of Puerto Rico in Arecibo, the systemic Division of Continuing Education and Professional Studies, and the Assistant Secretary for Occupational Education Program and Technical Research Programs Unit of the Department of Education of Puerto Rico. This program facilitates students transition to college life, helps them to define their occupational career and to develop an optimal level in academic achievement. Students who participate in this program can obtain up to 9 college credits while studying at a vocational school. During the last five years, CAP has had 93 students enrolled.

Most of the academic departments of the UPR-Ponce offer credit and professional improvement courses through the Evening Program. These courses are given during the evening for working professionals, students who need to complete some requirements to get a professional license or to regular students that cannot take the courses during the day. Institutional or external human resources teach the courses. The CEPSD offers the courses required by the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) for those who wish to obtain a certification or license to work as teachers. The curricular sequence of the different specialization/certification courses is determined by the PRDE.

Figure 7.1 shows the enrollment pattern for CEPSD offerings. Total enrollment for the Division has shown a general increase during the past three years. The largest increase being in credit courses from approximately 800 enrolled students in 2010-2011 to around 2,000 annually from 2012 to 2015. Non-credit courses also rose from 500 (2010-2011) to approximately 900 (2014-2015). Funded proposals have also increased, although their highest enrollment was in 2012-2013. Workshops are the least significant area of the CEPSD during these five academic years. Appendix 7.13 shows the number of courses and enrollment in detailed.

Figure 7.1
CEPSD enrollment trend by type and total enrollment
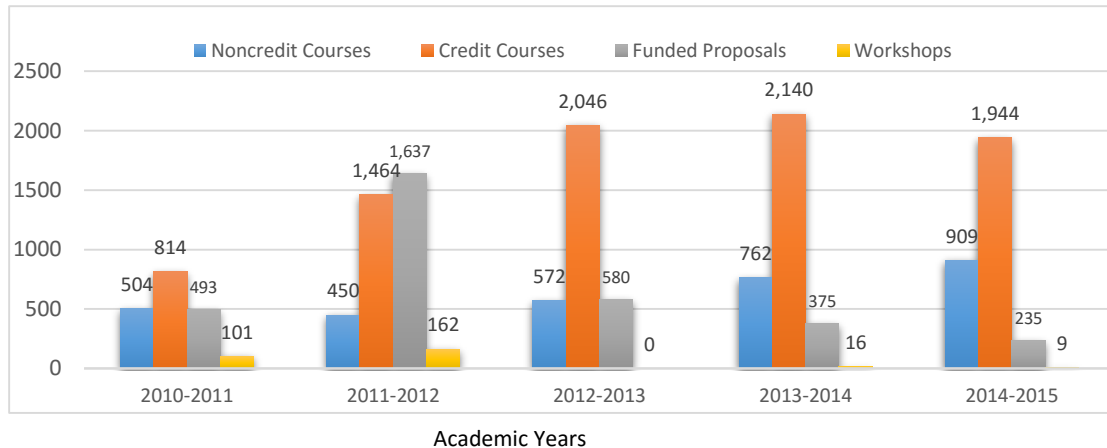
CEPSD publications set out registration processes, dates, and tuition fees. There is no specific admission policy for noncredit courses. The Evening Program has an application form for professional credit courses, especially for readmission or transfer students that explains the admissions process. Each semester a brochure containing the academic offerings is sent to the general community. Also, these offerings are published in southern newspapers, via web (e.g. UPR-Ponce webpage, Facebook, e-mail), and by postal mail.

Noncredit courses are assessed using different criteria. Evaluation criteria include aspects related to the Continuing Education Program in general, to the course, and to the professor. Appendix 7.14 presents the assessment form for the noncredit courses. In the spring semester 2013-2014, 95% of students taking Basic and Advanced Conversational English courses assessed them as either excellent or good. The Evening Program also conducts student evaluations and the Personnel Committees of the academic departments evaluate their professors in class. Data is shared with faculty to enhance the teaching-learning process. The institution provides students enrolled in the programs and courses offered by the CEPSD with library resources, technology, registration, counseling and orientation, financial aid, and bursar services out of regular business hours.

International Student Exchange Program and Experiential Learning

The UPR-Ponce promotes student's participation in out-of-class experiences to enrich their academic experience. The International Student Exchange Program was established in academic year 2002-2003 as part of a commitment to internationalize the University. Agreements were signed with several higher education institutions abroad to have students spend up to a year in an internationally accredited institution to experience a different cultural environment. A document has been prepared so students participating in the exchange program would know which courses offered at each institutions can be

transferred to UPR-Ponce. Requirements for participants include having 65 credits approved and having a GPA of 3.00 or higher. The UPR-Ponce completed the agreement with various institutions, such as: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Universidad de Salamanca, Universidad Carlos III, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Universidad de Palermo, and Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara. During the last five years, 5 students have participated of these experiences.

Another way for students to acquire out-of-class experience are internships. Among them are the *Córdova Congressional Internship (CCI)* and the *Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities* (HACU) Internship. The CCI is a program that provides college students the opportunity to experience a semester-long internship in an assigned congressional office of either chamber or in the Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration. On the other hand, HACU is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the success of Hispanics in higher education. During the last five years, more than 42 students have participated in these internships and exchange programs.

An additional way in which the institution provides its students out-of-class experiences is the project named *Ponce Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement* (PRISE). This project provides the opportunity to participate in Science research internships in and outside Puerto Rico. For example, from 2012-2013 to 2014-2015, 59 students developed research in Biomedical and Biology areas. Some of the programs or internships in which our students have participated are the following: Summer Internship Program at Johns Hopkins University, GEMS Summer Internship at University of Colorado, HERO Summer Research Program at Virginia Commonwealth University, Summer REU Program in the Life Sciences at Cornell University, Summer Program Center of Excellence in Infection Genomics at University of Texas, and Summer Internship Program at Ponce School of Medicine, among others.

As stated before, UPR-Ponce promotes different learning experiences. Cultural trips enable students to learn about the culture, geography, social organization and idiosyncrasies of different countries. In summer 2012 and 2013, the English Department offered the course English 3117: Study and Travel. The main objective of the course is to help students improve their English skills emphasizing the oral communication area. As part of this course in 2012, a group of students went to Washington, D.C. and in 2013, other students visited San Francisco and Los Angeles. Other academic departments also promote various academic experiences through their student's associations, such as internships outside Puerto Rico, community services, service learning, and others.

By Certification 2013-2014-123 from the Governing Board, UPR created the course INTD-4995: Internship Program-First Work Experience. The purpose of the course is to provide students the opportunity to immerse in the real work experience. The requirement for participants is to have approved 60% of the credits of their respective program curricula. For the academic year of 2014-2015, 90 students participated. From these 90 participants, 39 completed a satisfaction survey to assess the program. Ninety-nine percent of these students either agrees or totally agrees that they had an excellent experience in the program. Also, 100% would recommend the Internship Program-First Work Experience to other students.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the analysis of the findings, the following can be concluded:

1. The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission.
2. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.
3. The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills.
4. The institution's programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations derive from findings and conclusions:

1. Maintain the number of programs undergoing accreditation processes by external agencies.
2. Continue efforts towards the implementation of the recently approved General Education Component.
3. Increase the number of related educational activities at UPR-Ponce emphasizing extramural, professional, and research internships.

CHAPTER 8: INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT (STANDARD 14) AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING (STANDARD 7)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides evidence of the existence of a pertinent assessment plan and process at UPR-Ponce for periodic assessment of institutional effectiveness. In addition, it investigates the extent to which the information obtained from this process is used for institutional planning, resource allocation and institutional renewal. Also, this chapter analyzes the process by which the institution assesses student learning outcomes to determine the effectiveness of its courses and programs. It includes a documented review of this area and recommendations for improvement.

UPR-PONCE ASSESSMENT STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce (UPR-Ponce) recognizes the importance of program assessment in the pursuit of academic excellence, as evidenced in Certification 2002-2003-61 of the Academic Senate of the UPR-Ponce. This certification describes the assessment process as a continuous and collaborative one that should ensure the achievement of the UPR-Ponce mission and goals, and helps to determine its effectiveness. It has been disseminated on campus and reads as follows:

> *The assessment process at UPR-Ponce constitutes a continuous and collaborative effort among faculty, non-faculty staff, and the administration. Guided by the* Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*, published in 2002 by the Middle States Association Commission on Higher Education, and by the assessment model suggested by Dr. James O. Nichols, academic departments and administrative offices have developed their respective departmental plans in order to assess the achievement of their established educational goals and objectives. The UPR-Ponce is committed to assessment by using a decentralized focus to carry out the process, in which academic departments are responsible for the assessment of educational results; administrative and student services offices and departments are responsible for the assessment of the achievement of their objectives. The role of the UPR-Ponce administration is to coordinate and document assessment activities conducted at different levels. Administrative support is also offered by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research in carrying out surveys and submitting institutional statistical data. Furthermore, the Deanship of Academic Affairs coordinates the process for assessing educational outcomes.*

> *The ultimate goal of institutional assessment at UPR-Ponce must be the continuous improvement of its academic programs and teaching support services to ensure the achievement of its mission and goals. In order for assessment to be effective, units must give continuous follow-up to their assessment plans, documenting weaknesses as well as strengths, and using findings to improve academic programs and teaching support services. To ensure that assessment proceeds as stated, it is expected that deans, department* chairpersons*, and office supervisors encourage and involve faculty and personnel in formulating assessment plans as well as assessment activities.*

ASSESSMENT MODEL IN UPR-PONCE

The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce relies on a continuous and systematic institutional assessment process. The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) is responsible for coordinating the processes to assess the overall effectiveness of the institution in the achievement of its mission and goals. To monitor the process at the institutional level, an Institutional Assessment Coordinator, assigned to the OPIR, has been appointed since academic year 2005-2006. The Coordinator performs the following duties: counsel, coordinate, and document assessment activities based on the different reports provided by the offices and departments. Also, the Coordinator promotes, through effective planning, a continuous improvement of the academic programs and support services, with the purpose of assuring the institutional mission.

The institutional assessment framework was designed to create effective channels of communication to share and discuss the assessment results at all levels, thus facilitating decision making for institutional renewal, planning, and budget allocation. This framework consists of a series of committees organized in a pyramidal structure with well-defined membership roles and functions. Figure 8.1 shows the institutional assessment framework established since 2008.

Figure 8.1
UPR-Ponce Institutional Assessment Structure
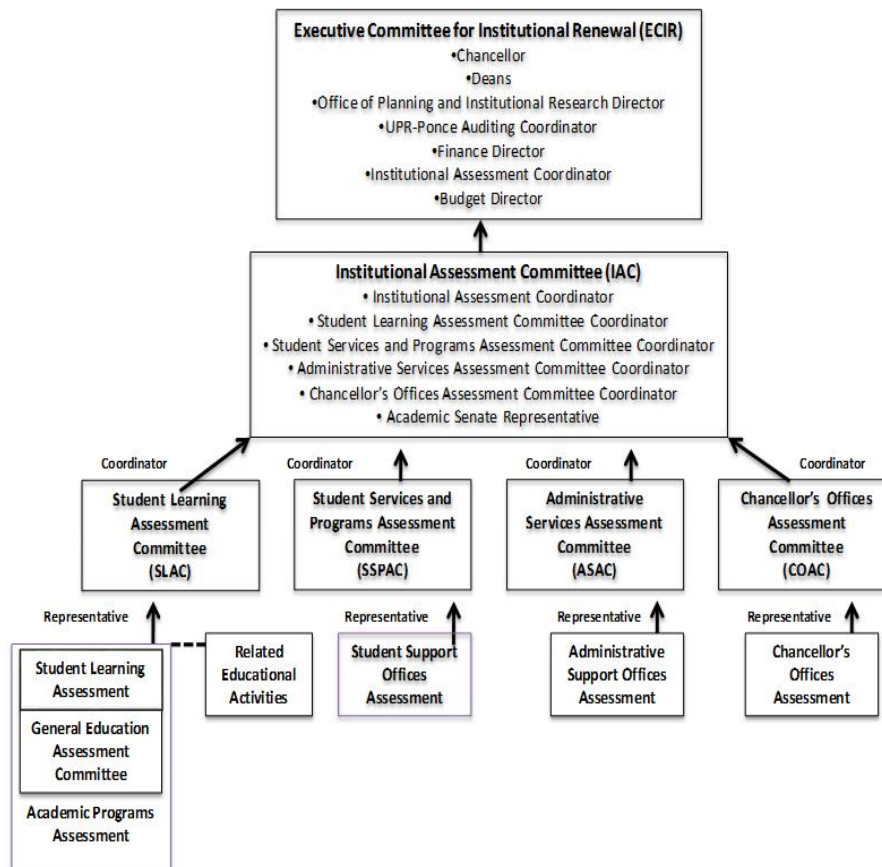
Each area of major institutional responsibility has a designated committee in charge of assessing their corresponding activities.
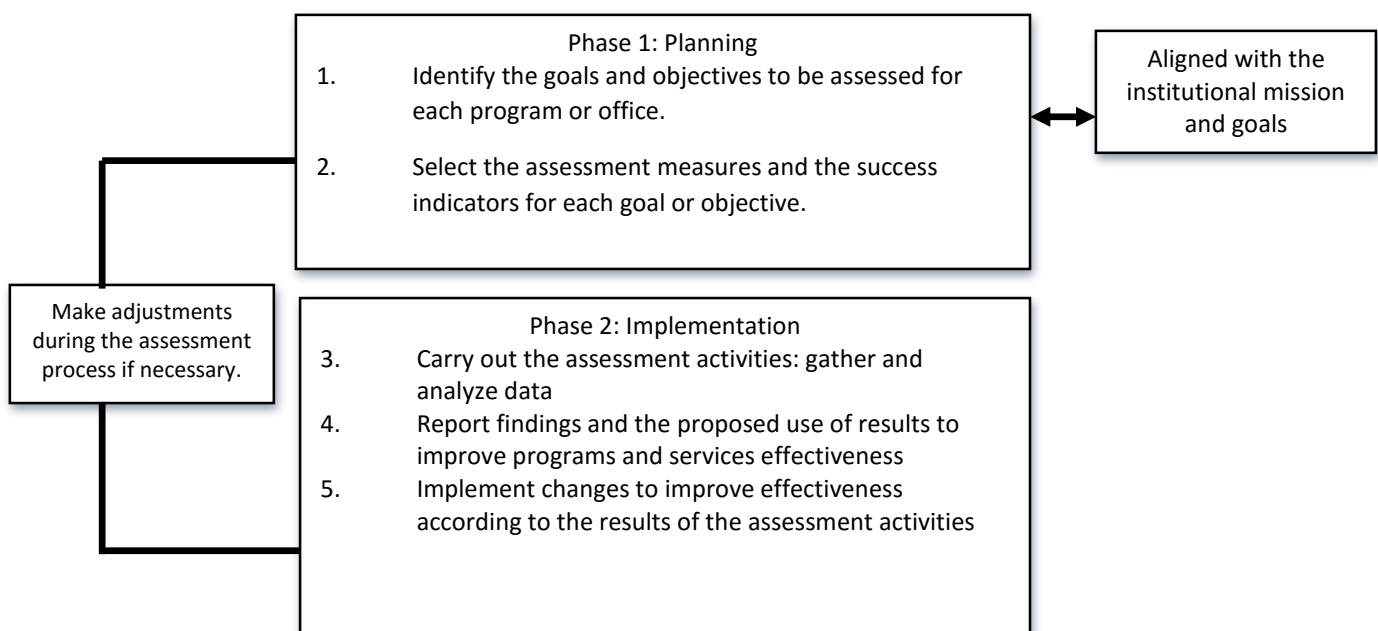
- Assessment of Educational Effectiveness (Student Learning)
- Assessment of Student Support Services and Programs
- Assessment of Administrative Support Services
- Assessment of Services and Processes Ascribed to the Chancellor's Office

The institutional assessment process is described in the Institutional Assessment Plan (IAP) (Exhibit 12), a document designed in 2008 and approved by the Academic Senate of the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce in December 2012 through Certification 2012-2013-34. The vision, mission, and goals statements serve as a framework for the institutional assessment in UPR-Ponce. The IAP is a tool that allows a formal and systematic assessment process, which guides the assessment activities in all departments, programs, and offices toward improving institutional effectiveness.

The assessment process engages the university community in the four major areas of institutional responsibility: Academic Affairs Deanship, Student Affairs Deanship, Administrative Affairs Deanship, and Chancellor's Office. The process is a shared commitment to gather, document, evaluate, and communicate the findings to all the institution's constituents which establishes a sustained assessment culture at the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce.

Nonetheless, each academic department and office that offers student or administrative services is responsible for the assessment of its goals and/or objectives. Figure 8.2 illustrates the current assessment model in UPR-Ponce.

Figure 8.2
UPR-Ponce Assessment Model

Phase 1: Planning 1. Identify the goals and objectives to be assessed for each program or office. 2. Select the assessment measures and the success indicators for each goal or objective.	Aligned with the institutional mission and goals

Make adjustments during the assessment process if necessary.

Phase 2: Implementation
3. Carry out the assessment activities: gather and analyze data
4. Report findings and the proposed use of results to improve programs and services effectiveness
5. Implement changes to improve effectiveness according to the results of the assessment activities

The Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal (ECIR) receives information on the results of the assessment of all areas through the Institutional Assessment Committee (IAC). This structure is designed

to ensure that programs, offices, departments, and committees inform and are informed about the decisions related to planning and resource allocation that affect them.

The formality and regularity of the assessment process permits a comprehensive and effective periodic evaluation. The IAC is in charge of the revision of the guidelines and procedures for assessment activities, the coordination of professional development activities and the collaboration in the implementation of the Institutional Assessment Plan.

Academic programs and administrative offices at UPR-Ponce are responsible for the development and implementation of an annual *Assessment Plan*. The elaboration of the plan is described in the IAP. Assessment plans should be carefully developed with the participation of faculty and office administrative personnel.   The instruments used for assessment are carefully selected and developed, and the established success indicators should be realistic and measureable.

To ensure a continuous, planned, and comprehensive assessment process, a *Three-Year Assessment Plan* was designed and implemented during academic year 2012-2013. This plan was designed with the recommendations made by the assessment expert, Linda Suskie, in her visit to UPR-Ponce. It is intended to gather the planning, *Phase 1* in the assessment model, of the next three years of each academic department and office that offers student or administrative services. The outcomes obtained from the implementation of the assessment process, *Phase 2* in the assessment model, is used to determine the continuation of activities or practices that work well, modify or change the ones that could function better or do not work well, or implement activities or practices that have not yet been used. These results provide the basis for future planning and directing institutional improvement. Table 8.1 shows the stages of the assessment process, the activities to be carried out, and the deadlines established for their implementation and enforcement.

Table 8.1
Phases, activities, and deadlines in the assessment process

Phase	Activity	Due date
1: Planning	Identify goals and objectives to be assessed for each program or office	October
	Select assessment measures and success indicators for each goal or objective	
2: Implementation	Carry out assessment activities: - collect and analyze data	October/ May
	Report findings and proposed use of the results to improve programs and effectiveness of services	June
	Implement changes to improve effectiveness using the assessment results	August and January

The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) periodically conducts students' perception surveys to determine their level of satisfaction with the university educational experience and its contribution to the achievement of their learning goals. Quantitative methods include statistical data on the academic success and performance of students such as course grades, institutional and program

graduation and retention rates, course passing rates, and withdrawal rates. This Office gathers different kinds of data and elaborates diverse reports such as:

- *The Annual Institutional Data Profile:* This is a document that contains a statistical compendium of relevant data on different aspects of the institution.
- *The 2010 Graduating Students Survey and the 2012 Exit Interview to Graduating Students*: These surveys measure the degree of satisfaction of graduating students with the academic programs and other services offered at the institution. They also analyze time taken to complete degrees and reasons for delays, reasons for changing programs, degree to which the institution helped students improve in certain areas, plans for the future, subjects of greatest difficulty, and other characteristics.
- *The 2004 and 2008 Alumni Surveys:* These surveys report on data collected from alumni surveys including the following information: gender; highest degree obtained; academic program; time taken to complete degree at UPR-Ponce; grade point average; graduate studies if applicable; reasons for continuing graduate studies in a different area; employment information; evaluation of preparation received at UPR- Ponce in relation to job; degree to which the institution contributed to development in areas such as responsibility, teamwork, general education skills, etc.; evaluation of different areas or aspects of UPR-Ponce; degree to which the institution improved quality of life; and overall satisfaction with the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce.
- *The 2014 Self-Study Perception Study* - This study reports the perceptions held by faculty, students and non-faculty staff on different academic and administrative aspects of the institution.
- *Annual Institutional Effectiveness Reports*: These reports are annual compilations of information about achievements and activities in academic, student and administrative affairs. They include many useful tables and graphs.
- *Annual Assessment Reports:* These reports are annual compilations of the assessment results of all the different Deanships and Offices ascribed to the Chancellor's Office.
- *Annual Assessment of Student Learning Reports:* These are annual reports of the assessment done by the different academic programs and departments, the Library and the Honor's Study Program.
- *Freshman Students' Profile*: This is a yearly profile of freshman students: gender, place of birth, age, civil status, high school attended, other institutions to which they applied for admission, place of residence while studying, degree which they hope to obtain, factors influencing their decision to study at UPR-Ponce, areas which they need to develop, and other characteristics.
- *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Reports*: The United States Department of Education requires all institutions of higher education to complete a series of annual reports that make up the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. The IPEDS reports cover seven main areas. The first area is institutional characteristics, which provides general information about the institution. The fall enrollment section includes full-and-part time enrollment by race/ethnic group, age, and gender. A section to complete gives statistics of degrees completed by type of degree, time taken, race/ethnic group, and gender. The graduation rate survey shows how many students in each cohort complete their degrees within the equivalent of 150% of the time stipulated for the degree, how many transfer to other institutions, the number of athletes in the cohort, and the number that complete their degrees in time and a half. Statistics are also given by race and age. Another section of the IPEDS provides information on full- time faculty by rank, gender, status, and length of contract. Financial statistics and financial aid data are also provided in the IPEDS reports. The last section is a

biennial report on the number of non-faculty staff members by occupation, full-or part-time, gender, and race/ethnic group.

In addition to these specific reports and documents, the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) keeps a database of statistics on enrollment, faculty, course and complete withdrawals, applications and admissions, degrees conferred, and others. The Office is also in charge of the logistics and the dissemination of other assessment tools such as NSSE and the 2013-2014 *Noel-Levitz Satisfaction Survey*.

To ensure the consideration and implementation of the recommendations suggested by previous assessment processes in future planning, each academic department and office should complete the *Closing the Assessment Cycle of the Previous Year* Form. This form was created as a recommendation of the IAC during academic year 2013-2014. Another activity that allows the periodic evaluation of the assessment processes is the *Assessment Forums*. These forums are open to both faculty and administration. One of the forums includes the participation of academic departments and offices ascribed to the Academic Affairs Deanship to discuss the results of student learning and outcomes. Another forum includes the discussion of the results related to Chancellor's Offices and Students and Administrative Services Deanship offices. Forums are performed annually, since academic year 2005-2006, in which academic departments and offices evidence and share their assessment processes and how results are being used to improve academia. Forums have taken an active and broad participation and have provided a space for sharing ideas and improving processes. Participants have rated these forums as excellent and good as evidenced by the results of the evaluation rubrics of the last five years. Appendix 8.1 shows the evaluation form used to rate the forums. In order to create and maintain a sustained assessment culture in the institution, the IAC coordinates professional development activities in benefit of all stakeholders at least twice a year. These activites have been evaluated as excellent and good by the participants. All of the above have helped to carry out a periodic evaluation of the institutional assessment process as shown in the Institutional Assessment Reports (Exhibit 27).

As established in the Institutional Assessment Plan (IAP), services provided by the Student and Administrative Support Offices are designed to assist the teaching-learning process. In order to determine how well services are rendered or how administrative processes are carried out, the offices prepare annual assessment plans, thereby contributing to and strengthening the assessment culture on campus. In fact, the different Offices of Student Support Services measure the quality of their services by assessing their goals and searching for ways to improve them. Every year, the Deanship Offices complete Phase 1 and 2 of the assessment cycle and submit their assessment plans and annual reports. Assessment results help determine the effectiveness of the institution based on student satisfaction and needs. The results are used to improve programs and services. This process is evidenced in the Institutional Assessment Reports, which have assessed student services for the past ten years. The following are some of the actions different offices have taken as direct results of the assessment process: changes in processes and procedures, remodeling and re-structuring spaces and offices, acquisition of computer programs, computers, and other technological equipment, service schedule, training for faculty and non-faculty staff, and the creation of new positions.

Historically, another instrument used by UPR-Ponce in assessing institutional effectiveness is its annual report, also prepared by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR). During the academic year 2008-2009, many indicators were identified with campus-wide participation to assess institutional effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals. They were derived from the system-wide planning agenda called *Ten for the Decade* and from the seven strategic goals that guide UPR-Ponce's 2006-2016 Strategic

Plan.   UPR-Ponce carries out a comprehensive institutional assessment process in which the entire university community participates. It enables the institution to respond effectively to diverse external agencies regarding progress and ability to provide students with significant educational experiences.

There are indicators organized by key areas which guide the assessment processes that allow UPR-Ponce to determine its institutional effectiveness.   These indicators are used to evaluate the institutional strategic plan through the annual report prepared by OPIR and discussed with the Executive Committee of Institutional Renewal.   Appendix 8.2 shows a table that contains the criteria for assessing institutional effectiveness. This Appendix shows institutional key areas, the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan's Goals, Success Indicators and the Units responsible for the assessment and attainment of these goals.

Another aspect that shows institutional effectiveness is the result of the Puerto Rico Teacher Certification Exams. During the last five years, an average of 99 percent of the students from UPR-Ponce who took the certification exam passed it. Also, during the same period, an average of 93 percent of students who took the Physical Therapist Assistant Revalidation Test passed it.

CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS RESULTING FROM THE INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In order to demonstrate accountability to its various constituents, a quality educational institution must be committed to assessing the outcomes of student learning and using the results of that assessment to improve the educational experiences of its students. Since the last Self-Study in 2005, UPR-Ponce has made notable advances in its efforts to assess its educational effectiveness. A significant amount of research has focused on assessing student learning expectations at all levels. During the last decade, UPR-Ponce has worked to set an assessment culture throughout all its deanships. Efforts have been directed towards ensuring that assessment results are used to close the loop and to plan for changes where necessary. The institution acknowledges the importance of using assessment results to improve and to preserve the quality of all institutional processes. Since 2008, the Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal (ECIR) has been responsible for leading institutional planning efforts by analyzing assessment information and results flowing from the Institutional Assessment Committee, and using these elements for planning and resource allocation.

Institutional assessment is performed in each major area through multiple, direct and indirect, qualitative, and quantitative methods. Institutional effectiveness assessment processes have been used to improve the quality of the planning processes, resource allocation, and institutional renewal. Some examples of changes and improvements attributed to assessment include the following:

Planning

- Development of the 2006-2016 and 2016-2021 UPR-Ponce Strategic Plans.
- Revision of UPR-Ponce mission.
- Revision of UPR-Ponce Graduating Student Profile.
- Development of UPR-Ponce five-year Financial Plan.
- Development of plans for improving physical installations and fostering a green campus.
- Use of assessment results in yearly enrollment planning and admissions criteria.
- Update technology infrastructure to continue improving the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process and to increase capacity and efficiency.

- Development of training and professional development plans for faculty and staff aimed at improving the quality of the teaching and services offered.

Resource Allocation

- The Chancellor together with the Budget Office designed the *Budget Request Documents (BRD).* This document was approved by the Administrative Board, the body that approves the distribution of UPR-Ponce's budget. The BRD is a mechanism used to establish priorities in the distribution of the portion of the annual institutional budget that is not committed to obligatory actions (3-5%), based on budget requests from all offices and departments. Budget priorities are based on strengthening academic programs and student services, and administrative areas which, in turn, are identified from assessment results and the corresponding planning. A full explanation of these processes is covered in Chapter 3.

Institutional Renewal

- Evaluation, revision, and program accreditation have continued to be an institutional priority. Table 7.4 in Chapter 7 shows the results of these efforts.
- The Academic Support Center for Students and Faculty (ASCSF) was created as part of the institutionalization of the Title V Project. This Center provides a structured tutoring program offered by departments using students as tutors in different subject areas. Also, it collaborates with the development of the faculty in diverse areas through workshops.
- The restoration of the Adelina Coppin Alvarado Library facilities was done to provide additional study area and to develop literacy skills, in part as a result of assessment outcomes.
- The services of the Preschool Center were extended to include students' children.
- A Parking Plan was developed in response to the results of various satisfaction surveys. This plan is in its final stage of implementation.
- Different offices were remodeled and relocated, such as the Deanship of Academic Affairs, the Division of Continuing Education, the bookstore, and Finance, among others.
- Different offices and facilities were constructed based on institutional needs: Technological Assistance Office, Urban Forest Research Area, and the Ponce Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement Center (PRISE), among others.
- Faculty evaluation policies and procedures were revised by the Academic Senate.
- The Counseling and Psychological Services Department expanded its offerings to serve the needs of students. This Department offers individual counseling and psychological services, group counseling, educational and vocational counseling, an Outreach Program, consultant services, support group, crisis intervention, and has a Career Center.
- The Annual Faculty Workshop, which has been celebrated since 1998, provides professional development activities.
- An Institutional Assessment Plan was developed and approved by the Academic Senate.
- A three-year assessment process was implemented to preserve continuity of the processes and to keep on working towards institutional, program, and service effectiveness.
- Project NEXT was institutionalized in order to provide technological tools to the entire college community. NEXT is a platform that updates the Student Information System (SIS) and aims to improve administrative and academic services such as: enrollment, attendance, and grading reports, among others.

- The Institute of Translational Research in Behavioral Sciences was created in order to give the students and faculty the opportunity to translate basic science knowledge to applied science research to improve psychological treatments for the community.

EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

Academic programs also develop their student learning assessment plans following the guidelines and timeline established at the institutional level for its development and implementation. The academic department chairpersons appoint departmental assessment committees. These committees produce and revise the departmental Three-year Assessment Plans, decide the goals that are going to be assessed, analyze results, give recommendations, and make sure that assessment results are used to make decisions. At meetings, the faculty determines which educational goals will be assessed, based on the institutional and program mission, goals, and learning goals. For each learning expectation included in the plan, direct and indirect means for assessment are identified. Examples of these are rubrics, exams, surveys, among others. Success indicators are also set by consensus among the department faculty. Accredited programs also consider the standards established by professional accreditation agencies. Coordinators of the departmental assessment committees submit their annual assessment plans to the Student Learning Assessment Coordinator, who together with the Institutional Assessment Coordinator (IAC), evaluate them and give the necessary recommendations. At the end of the academic year, the Coordinator of the Student Learning Assessment Committee submits a report with the implemented assessment plans of all academic departments and programs to the IAC, the Dean of Academic Affairs, and OPIR. The results are analyzed by the Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal in order to make informed decisions.

The assessment of student learning at the institutional level includes methods for qualitative and quantitative data gathering, with the objective of documenting students' educational experiences from their admission to the UPR-Ponce until they graduate. Quantitative methods include a series of questionnaires for active students, graduating students, and alumni. An analysis of various Institutional Assessment Reports revealed that multiple quantitative and qualitative means are used by the faculty for both the formative and summative assessment of student learning goals. These include tests, performances, portfolios, rubrics, reflective diaries, oral presentations, quizzes, written reports, surveys, and others.

Student learning goals are the core of a meaningful assessment process. Assessment activities must be focused on a clear statement of expected student learning outcomes that include knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals, which students will have achieved by graduation. UPR-Ponce's expectations of student learning at the institutional, program, and course levels are analyzed to determine their articulation and connection with the institutional mission, the standards of higher education, and departmental goals.

Institutional Level

At the institutional level, student learning expectations are found in the Institutional Mission (Academic Senate Certification 2013-2014-60) and Institutional Graduating Student Profile (Academic Senate Certification 2013-2014-59). These documents state UPR-Ponce's commitment to provide a challenging and comprehensive environment that promotes student learning and the achievement of academic goals. Among the set of goals established to achieve its mission, the following student learning goals can be identified in the Institutional Graduating Student Profile:

- Ability to formulate and solve problems that require the application of quantitative and qualitative analysis.
- Knowledge of research skills to gather, analyze, and interpret information from a variety of sources.
- Knowledge of information and communication technologies, ability to analyze, organize the information and the knowledge to apply them to problem solving.
- Knowledge of ethical, civic, and aesthetic values for the decision-making process.

The recently reviewed Institutional Graduating Student Profile is aligned with higher education's expectations and the institutional mission by including: values awareness, technology information analysis, research skills, and quantitative and qualitative reasoning to problem solving. Appendix 8.3 shows the alignment of the Student Profile of the Education and the Office System academic programs with the Institutional Graduating Student Profile. Table 7.1 shows how graduating students rated the contribution of the UPR-Ponce in the development of skills or knowledge acquisition.

Program Level

An important requirement for the creation of an academic program is that it responds to the mission and goals set by the UPR-Ponce (Board of Trustees Certification 2006-2007-43). This certification also states that student learning expectations have to be included in the program's graduating student profile. It also provides evaluation of each program and of its goals and objectives. These requirements help to ensure that program learning outcomes are clearly articulated and in agreement with the institution's mission and goals. Appendix 8.4 show examples of alignment between institutional goals and the ones of the following departments: Business Administration, English, and Biology.

Academic Senate Certification 2009-2010-38 states that academic departments must include in their course syllabi the alignment between the institutional goals and those of the department.   An analysis of the course syllabi from different programs, graduating student profiles, brochures, and other department documents revealed that the academic programs have clear and specific expectations for student learning. It also showed that they are aligned with the Mission and Goals Statement. Appendix 8.5 provides examples of syllabi with this alignment.

The academic programs analysis reflected that all of them include learning expectations related to general education such as oral and written communication in Spanish and English, logical and critical thinking, technological skills, and research skills. The increase in accredited programs, from 1 in 2005 to 7 in 2015, also confirmed that the learning expectations of most programs are aligned with the standards set for their disciplines, according to corresponding organizations or regulations.

There are numerous regulations and organizations that lead academic programs in the evaluation, revision, and accreditation processes. Also, departments modify their learning outcomes considering professional literature, government agencies, research reports, alumni surveys, employer surveys, and input from the professional and business community. Appendix 8.6 provides detailed information about these regulations and accrediting agencies.

Course Level

The institution has intensified its efforts towards the student learning assessment and has created greater awareness in the faculty about the need to establish explicit learning goals for all courses and to ensure that they are achieved. Certification 2014-2015-112 of the Governing Board requires that course syllabi include, in a clear and concise manner, the intended learning goals that students are expected to achieve as a result of the educational experiences within the course. These outcomes could include the acquisition of information, development of skills and intellectual capabilities, changes in attitudes, perceptions, interests or values, improvement of interpersonal relationships, or the development of motor skills. This certification also establishes that these goals must be student-centered.

Academic programs conducted an analysis to determine correspondence between the learning goals of the program and those of the courses. The analysis revealed that the learning outcomes of each program were clearly articulated with those of the curriculum. A review of a sample of the course syllabi within the departments also showed clearly articulated expectations of student learning. Appendixes 8.7 and 8.8 present an analysis of the correspondence between learning goals of the programs and those of the courses.

SUSTAINED CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT

A culture of assessment has been developed through the cooperative efforts of those at every level of the institution. According to Academic Senate Certification 2002-2003-61 which establishes the statement of purpose of the institutional assessment, the UPR-Ponce has established an ongoing process of assessment focused on institutional effectiveness through the academic programs and services to support teaching at student and administrative levels. The assessment process of the UPR-Ponce is a continuous and collaborative effort of the faculty, the non-faculty, and the administration. A decentralized approach has been used to perform this process. A comprehensive institutional assessment plan has been designed and implemented to assure the participation of all the components of the institution as described in the Certification 2012-2013-34 of the Academic Senate. The functions of the administration in the assessment process are to coordinate and document the assessment activities at the different levels that comprise the institution. Additional evidence of the administration support to the process was the designation of the Institutional Assessment Coordinator assigned to the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) as described in the Certification 2005-2006-14 of the Academic Senate.

Professional accreditation processes have also been vital to further enhance student learning outcomes assessment plans. Expected student learning outcomes have been revised by different assessment committees to ensure that they are clearly articulated and consistent with the institutional and program mission, the standards of higher education, and the requirements of the accrediting agencies of the different programs.

The institution has made an effort to ensure the use of student learning assessment results to improve the teaching and learning process. A revision of the use of these results, as shown *in Annual Institutional Effectiveness Reports* since 2008, indicates that each academic department has worked to achieve this objective. Examples of the use of student learning information to improve curricula, educational programs, and instructional activities are described below.

Program level

- All of the academic departments have incorporated the use of instructional technology platforms, like Blackboard and Moodle, into their courses. Reports submitted by the Academic Support Center for Students and Faculty evidenced that 563 courses have been created on Moodle (2013-2014 and 2014-2015) and 1,479 on Blackboard from 2010-2013.
- Most academic departments acquired new computers, data projectors or Smart TVs to equip teaching laboratories and classrooms.
- The Business Administration and the Computer Sciences Department revised the programs and activated 14 and 17 new specialization-related courses, respectively, to their curricula.
- The Business Administration collaborated with eight campuses of the University of Puerto Rico system in the design of a systemic assessment test to measure students' performance in ten specialty areas.
- The Office Systems Department revised its curricula and ten courses were created.
- The Office Systems Department revised its program and collaborated with eight campuses of the University of Puerto Rico system in the design of a systemic assessment test to measure students' performance in ten specialty areas.
- The programs ascribed to the Allied Health Studies Department acquired specialized equipment, renewed laboratories, recruited new centers for clinical practice, created a policy to identify students with specific needs, implemented strategies to reduce the percent of failed students in department courses, generated questionnaires to assess different evaluations, among others.
- The Biology Department acquired highly specialized lab equipment, such as an Autoclave Laboratory, a portable electrocardiograph blower, and a DNA Electrophoresis Lab Set.
- The Department of Social Sciences created an Emphasis in Rehabilitation Services for the Forensic Psychology Program and the Psychology and Mental Health Program. As part of these programs, new courses were added to the curriculum according to Circular Letter 09-07. Since academic year 2009-2010, 76 students have graduated from these programs.
- UPR-Ponce has activated 78 courses to expand the academic offerings.
- The Humanities Department performed a series of conferences about public health problems in Puerto Rico and offered forums about humanities and natural science themes.

Course level

- All of the academic departments made textbook changes and revised course syllabi to add new topics.
- Most academic departments created new assessment instruments and revised established means as evidenced by various Student Learning Assessment Reports (Exhibit 28).
- The Business Administration Department included the use of e-books as course textbooks, portfolios, research work using the internet and library data bases, discussion forums using the Moodle platform, analysis of real world problems, and community service.
- The Athletic Therapeutic Program included community service as part of several courses and performed an analysis of clinical cases as part of the TEFI 1037- Introduction to Physical Dysfunction and TEFI 2009- Application of Physical Therapy in Physical Dysfunction courses. Experts in the sports medicine area presented workshops to students in different courses. Changes in class schedules were made to facilitate the performing of clinical practice by students.

- The Biology Department incorporated field trips related to course content. Students are required to develop monographs. Individualized teaching in the use of specific instrumentation was also integrated.
- The Department of Social Sciences integrated several strategies such as analysis of articles in English, diagnostic tests and reviews of mathematical concepts, workshops about research concepts and writing educational objectives, portfolios, preparation of social intervention plans, and use of live internet in the classroom for specific courses, among others.
- The Education Department included the use of electronic portfolios and gave numerous workshops about technology to students in different courses.
- Some changes implemented by the Spanish Department were the use of blogs and workshops to reinforce writing skills, the integration of collaborative workshops given by students and the development of documents using Google Drive.
- The English Department implemented on-line activities in INCO 3005- Business English and most of the courses include community service and service learning.
- The Humanities Department produced a film in the courses FRAN 3191-3192- Intensive French. Also, the department incorporated film technology in most of its courses, established a communication workshop, and certified students on ethical principles in experimentation with human beings as part of the course FILO 4028- Bioethics course.
- The Chemistry and Physics Department integrated the submission of electronic reports in Physics' laboratories.
- The Office Systems Department implemented different workshops on specific themes to students from several courses. Some examples are: in SOFI 3217-Introduction to Spanish Transcription, the workshop theme was writing and style. In SOFI 3015-Office System Concepts and Technology, the workshop theme was searching for information on databases. In SOFI 3505 Administrative Procedures for Office Professionals, the workshop theme was etiquette. Specific computer programs were acquired for various courses.

The UPR-Ponce has promoted and maintained an ongoing institutional assessment culture which is centered on improving institutional effectiveness through its student academic and service programs. The effectiveness of this institution relies on the continuous follow up of academic planning, documenting its strengths and weaknesses and using assessment findings to enhance academic programs. As a result, student learning assessment information is used as part of the institutional assessment process to help the administration make informed decisions that may lead to (1) curriculum revisions, (2) professional accreditations, (3) program modifications, (4) financial and budget allocation (5) staff recruitment, and (6) instructional technology resources investment, all which contribute to student achievement of key program learning outcomes.

Finally, UPR-Ponce shares and discusses Institutional and Student Learning Assessment results with internal and external constituents. This is done through numerous means, as informed in various Annual Institutional Effectiveness Reports.   Some of these are: Students Learning Assessment Forums, Institutional Assessment Reports, Professional Accreditation Reports, Academic, Administrative, and Students' Affairs Deanship Reports, Departmental and Chairpersons Reports, Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal and Academic Senate Meetings, OPIR reports, bulletins, webpage, meetings, Research and Academic Creativity Congress, among others.

GENERAL EDUCATION

The General Education Competencies are embedded and assessed across the curriculum. Appendix 7.9 shows the General Education Competencies Matrix. They are communication skills in Spanish and English, analysis and quantitative skills as well as ethical and aesthetic competencies, among others. Academic departments trace General Education Competencies, conduct assessment activities, provide evidence on mastery of these competencies through progress indicators, and learning outcomes. These findings are then reported at institutional assessment forums and submitted to the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR). These assessment results are compiled in the annual Institutional Assessment Report which is available to faculty, administration, and student body through the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce official webpage and through numerous means mentioned before. Academic programs that go through accreditation processes and academic service programs evidence student achievement of key institutional and program learning outcomes through students display of knowledge, skills, and competencies upon successful completion of standardized testing, course assessment, practicums, and capstone courses.

Academic Senate Certification 2013-2014-67 establishes the four stages to assess the General Education Competencies. These stages are the following:

- Development and validation of the institutional assessment instruments.
- Application of the instruments and data recollection.
- Analysis of the results.
- Decision making by the Academic Affairs Deanship, the Institutional General Education Committee, and the academic departments.

The assessment of the General Education Competencies is the responsibility of the General Education Assessment Committee. This Committee was named by the Chancellor through Circular Letter 2014-2015-46. Chapter 7 presents evidence of the changes that have occurred based on the assessment results throughout the different programs at UPR-Ponce.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the analysis of the findings, the following can be concluded:

1. UPR-Ponce has a sustained assessment culture. The Institutional Assessment Plan gives direction to all assessment processes.
2. UPR-Ponce offices and departments have been actively involved in assessment practices and assessment of student learning has become the center of program assessment processes.
3. There has been a continuous process in disseminating assessment results to all constituents at different levels.
4. UPR-Ponce engages in different activities which contribute to the professional development pertaining to assessment.
5. The General Education Competencies are embedded and assessed across the curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations derive from findings and conclusions:

1. Preserve the current assessment structure within all the deanships to coordinate assessment activities and ensure that information regarding institutional effectiveness is used in ongoing and strategic and budget processes.
2. Keep the assessment culture that the institution has developed in the last years as a vehicle to improve educational programs, services, and operations.
3. Continue efforts to acknowledge existing assessment activities and to promote active participation by facilitating communication, encouraging discussion of results, and providing incentives.
4. Strengthen the assessment of the General Education Competencies at the institutional level.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS

This comprehensive self-study has provided UPR-Ponce with a unique opportunity to reflect on its multiple contributions to higher education. Through this process, the Institution has been successful in achieving the intended outcomes pursued and established in the Self-Study Design:

- To identify strengths and weaknesses in reference to Middle States higher education accreditation standards and to use findings to engage in a proactive strategic planning process.
- To document the scope and effectiveness of assessment efforts currently used.
- To produce an accurate self-study report that will provide Middle States with the information and analysis needed to make a decision about our institution's reaccreditation.
- To formulate recommendations that will set the agenda for institutional development in the next five years.
- To strengthen the use of qualitative and quantitative data to support the analysis of the institution's educational effectiveness.
- To make all constituents more knowledgeable about the Institution in order to encourage their ongoing commitment to its mission and goals.

UPR-Ponce constituents recognize that the institutional mission and goals have been useful in guiding institutional processes such as planning and institutional renewal, articulating its academic offerings, and providing essential student services.

The Institution has also been successful in using its assessment efforts to improve its effectiveness and to document its contribution to student learning. Examples of these contributions include: student achievement in licensure examinations, student perceptions of the institution's level of academic challenge and the value placed by the institution on active and collaborative learning, and its encouragement and support of the use of technology to enhance the teaching-learning process. They are the result of recruiting, retaining, and promoting a faculty committed to teaching excellence.

While the Institution recognizes that its budget places a strain on the allocation process, sound fiscal policies have made possible an effective distribution, thus, ensuring compliance with its mission and goals. Despite these limitations, the Institution has outperformed other public institutions of higher education by continuously receiving the highest scores on the evaluations performed by the Puerto Rico Comptroller's office. Multiple strengths have enabled UPR-Ponce to place itself in a prominent position among the public institutions of higher education.

Future efforts should be directed towards the following challenges:

- Strengthen efforts to obtain external funding through research proposals, grants, donations, and its auxiliary enterprises.
- Design and implement the new Strategic Plan to guide the institution for the 2016-2021 period.
- Implement an institutional plan to strengthen students' retention and graduation rates.
- Strengthen the assessment of the General Education Competencies at the institutional level.