

Report to the  
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and Students  
of

*University of Puerto Rico – Ponce  
Box 7186  
Santiago De Los Caballeros Avenue  
Ponce, PR 00732*

by  
A Team Representing the  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Prepared After a  
Follow-Up Visit to the Institution on:  
*April 6-7, 2011*

The Visitors:  
*Mr. Robert Albrecht, Chair  
Distinguished Professor  
SUNY Alfred, NY*

*Dr. Bronte Jones, Financial Reviewer  
Treasurer  
St. Johns, MD*

Working with the Visitors:  
*Dr. Ellie Fogarty, Vice President*

At the Time of the Visit:  
Chief Executive Officer:  
*Dr. Fernando Rodriguez  
Chancellor*

Chief Academic Officer:  
*Prof. Lizzette Roig  
Dean of Academic Affairs*

## **I. Institutional Overview**

The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce (UPR-Ponce) is one of the eleven campuses of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), a large publicly supported multi-campus, coeducational university system, each campus holding a separate accreditation. Established as Ponce Regional College in 1969 and accredited by Middle States since 1970, UPR-Ponce was originally authorized to offer associate degrees and transfer programs, but added a number of baccalaureate degree programs beginning in the 1980s. It is located in the city of Ponce in the southern coast of Puerto Rico, approximately 67 miles from the capital city of San Juan. At present, the institution offers twelve bachelor degrees, four associate degrees, and fifty-two articulated transfer programs to other UPR campuses. Total headcount enrollment for fall 2010-2011 was 3,233, approximately 2 per cent (2%) less than the average 3,313 for the previous five-year period. Approximately ninety percent (90%) of the student population studies full time, 79% receives some form of financial aid, and 60% is female. Seventy-three percent (73%) of the student body is enrolled in bachelor degree programs, 10% in technical programs, and 10% in transfer programs. The remainder is classified into other categories. The student body is served by approximately 208 faculty and 238 non-faculty staff members. On average, the student/faculty ratio is 16:1. The 2010-2011 faculty profile revealed that 70% of faculty teaches full-time, of whom 81% is tenured. Twenty-eight per cent (28%) has doctoral degrees. Seventeen per cent (17%) of faculty holds the rank of professor, 17% associate professor, 20% assistant professor and 46% instructor. UPR-Ponce has an operational budget of \$23,063,866 for academic year 2010-2011.

## **II. Nature and Conduct of the Visit**

Based on the 2010 Periodic Review Report (PRR) and the report of the September visiting team, the Commission requested a Monitoring Report due March 1, 2011, with evidence documenting that the institution has achieved and can sustain ongoing compliance with Standards 3 and 4.

On November 18, 2010, the Commission acted:

To note that the Commission liaison guidance visit took place. To document receipt of the monitoring report and to note the visit by the Commission's representatives. To document receipt of the Periodic Review Report and note that the report provided limited information on Standard 3. To continue the institution's probation due to a lack of evidence that the institution is in compliance with Standard 3 (Institutional Resources) and Standard 4 (Leadership and Governance). To request a monitoring report due by March 1, 2011, documenting evidence that the institution has achieved and can sustain ongoing compliance with Standards 3 and 4, including, but not limited to (1) five-year financial projections for the UPR System including information from audited financial statements for fiscal year 2010; (2) institutional pro-forma budgets that demonstrate the institution's ability to generate a balanced budget for fiscal years 2012 through 2015, including the personnel, compensation, and other assumptions on which these budgets are based (Standard 3); (3) evidence of implementation of clear institutional policies specifying the respective authority of the different governance bodies and their respective roles and responsibilities in shared governance; (4) evidence that the Board of Trustees assists in generating resources needed to sustain and improve the institution; (5) evidence of a procedure in place for the periodic objective assessment of the Board of Trustees in meeting stated governing body objectives and responsibilities; (6) evidence that steps

have been taken to assure continuity and stability of institutional leadership, particularly in times of governmental transition; (7) evidence that the UPR Action Plan is implemented, that it is assessed, and the data are used for continuous improvement of the institution's processes; (8) evidence that steps have been taken to improve shared governance, especially in documenting how campus input is solicited and considered in decision making at the System level; and (9) evidence that communication between the Central Administration and the institution and within the institution, is clear, timely, and accurate, and that the sources of such communications are clearly defined and made available to all constituents (Standard 4). An on-site evaluation will follow submission of the report. To note that the institution remains accredited while on probation.

### **III. Affirmation of Compliance with Requirements of Affiliation Under Review**

Not Applicable.

### **IV. Commendations and Summary of Institutional Strengths**

Included within Accreditation Standards Under Review.

### **V. Compliance with Accreditation Standard(s) Under Review**

#### **Standard 3: Institutional Resources**

Commission's Requirements:

1. Five-year financial projections for UPR System including information from audited financial statements for fiscal year 2010.
2. Institutional pro-forma budgets that demonstrate the institution's ability to generate balanced budgets for fiscal year 2012 through 2015, including the personnel, compensation, and other assumptions on which these budgets are based.

The visitors' judgment is that, at this time, the institution **is in compliance** with this standard.

#### **Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:**

##### *Commendations*

- The University has developed a Financial Plan that fairly presents the financial position of the University in an environment of limited financial resources, and establishes a five (5) year plan with goals and objectives to assure the ongoing academic and administrative excellence of the campus, and the efficient fulfillment of its mission and continual improvement.
- The University has developed a five year budget based on reasonable revenue and expense assumptions.

- The University has been very aggressive in pursuing additional federal, state and private grant opportunities. The University's current grant proposal activity is in excess of \$10M. (Note: historical grant "yield" rates were used to determine the appropriate totals to include in the five year budget models).
- The University's Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal (ECIR) that was originally convened in 2008 has been instrumental in developing cost savings strategies that have facilitated the University's ability to produce balanced budgets in spite of the challenges brought on by the current economic environment. This group is directed by the Chancellor and made up of institutional personnel with the required capability and decision-making power to examine data, identify strategic priorities, allocate resources, and assess the value of these activities in furthering UPR-Ponce's mission and goals.
- For the past five years, the University has achieved a perfect score of 100 during its annual evaluation by the Comptroller's Office of Puerto Rico. The Comptroller's Office evaluates all state agencies based on eleven criteria that include: accounting, bank reconciliations, debts to government agencies, strategic planning, personnel development and training plans, and compliance with state laws and regulations, corrective action plans, ethics committee, document filing and control system and information technology.

#### *Weaknesses*

- The UPR System does not have finalized audit results for FY10.
- The Central Administration has made limited progress on fully implementing the UFIS software.
- The Central Administration has not moved forward with posting and beginning a search process for the position of Chief Financial Officer.

#### ***Recommendations:***

- The visiting team recommends that UPR Ponce continue to monitor and analyze its quarterly budget projections to determine if additional financial strategies are required to achieve favorable year end financial results.
- The visiting team recommends that UPR Ponce further refine institutional pro-forma budgets for fiscal years 2012 through 2015 to take into account additional information such as enrollments, grant funding, and staffing changes.
- The visiting team expects the Central Administration to submit the FY10 financial audit by the revised deadline.
- The Central Administration should develop an action plan and timeline to ensure the timely completion of the FY11 financial audit.
- The Central Administration should move aggressively to begin a search for a Chief Financial Officer to provide full coordination and accountability for the institution's financial management initiatives.

#### **Standard 4: Leadership and Governance**

The visitors' judgment is that, at this time, the institution **is in compliance** with this standard.

Commission's Requirements:

1. Evidence of implementation of clear institutional policies specifying the respective authority of the different governance bodies and their respective roles and responsibilities in shared governance.
2. Evidence that the Board of Trustees assists in generating resources needed to sustain and improve the institution.
3. Evidence of a procedure in place for the periodic objective assessment of the Board of Trustees in meeting stated governing body objectives and responsibilities.
4. Evidence that steps have been taken to assure continuity and stability of institutional leadership, particularly in times of governmental transition.
5. Evidence that the UPR Action Plan is implemented, that it is assessed, and the data are used for continuous improvement of the institution's processes.
6. Evidence that steps have been taken to improve shared governance, especially in documenting how campus input is solicited and considered in decision making at the System level.
7. Evidence that communication between the Central Administration and the institution and within the institution, is clear, timely, and accurate, and that the sources of such communications are clearly defined and made available to all constituents.

#### **Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:**

##### *Commendations*

The team wishes to commend the University:

- For the quality of its monitoring report and supplementary materials. The report was thorough and well organized, with assertions supported by specific evidence and documents.
- For the University's effectiveness in distributing financial aid at the campus level;
- For the University's involvement of all constituencies including students and technical and other support staff in planning;
- For the willingness of the members of the faculty and indeed all UPR Ponce employees to put the welfare of the University campus above their own self interests, including subsidizing their own professional development activities with their own monies;
- For the University's change in culture as they vigorously seek external sources of funding for both academic programs and student life activities even when many of its academic programs are designed for transfer;

- For the University's long history of transparent and participatory budget development processes, a clear example of shared governance while maintaining all appropriate administrative authorities and responsibilities;
- For developing and maintaining open channels of communication in all directions with all parties. Every constituency including faculty and especially students praised the current administration's willingness to listen and -- when possible even in these difficult times -- to satisfy the legitimate requests of all.
- For the awareness of senior administration leaders that this generation of students is better informed, more aware of social issues, better connected to one another, and eager to participate appropriately in shared governance. At UPR Ponce, this participation in shared governance is seen as a fundamental right of a citizen in a free democracy, and students, faculty, and administration all clearly articulated this foundational principle to the team during its visit.
- For the recognition of the contributions from and positive outcomes of the recent unrest. Campus representatives mentioned the renewed sense of the power of a single system -- "11 campuses, 1 UPR"-- ,and the renewed alertness of university leadership at the campus and perhaps the system level.
- Finally the team commends all parts of the Ponce campus community for their commitment to the common good during recent tensions.
- UPR Ponce has a student body that is eager to learn but also to work within the system using existing student organizations and assemblies to have their clear advisory voice heard at the campus and system level.
- UPR Ponce has a faculty and support staff that sees their profession as not only a career but as a vocation. They go far, far beyond the minimum and are passionate about the success of their students and the changes their students will bring to Puerto Rico.
- The UPR Ponce administration is remarkable in its commitment to continuing to maintain forward movement of the college's strategic plan even in these very difficult economic times. This administration delivers 24/7 service in response to student needs.
- Finally, this team commends the chancellor of UPR Ponce. His commitment to listening, to genuinely hearing those who make up the Ponce community is exemplary. It is the chancellor who sets the standard for shared governance on this campus while preserving all of his legal authority. It is the chancellor who maintains peace on the Ponce campus and who offers by his very example hope for a better society.

### *Weaknesses*

Standard four, Leadership and Governance, lists criteria for good governance:

“The Commission on Higher Education expects a climate of shared collegial governance in which all constituencies (such as faculty, administration, staff, students, and governing board members as determined by each institution) involved in carrying out the institution’s mission and goals participate in the governance function in a manner appropriate to the institution. Institutions should seek to create a governance environment in which issues concerning mission, vision, program planning, resource allocation, and others as appropriate can be discussed openly by those who are responsible for each activity within any system of shared governance.”

- The team heard multiple reports from various constituencies that this environment of shared governance does not exist at the system level, that the voices of faculty and students is neither heard nor considered. This is a weakness that should not be ignored.

The Commission standard continues:

“Within any system of shared governance, each major constituency must carry out its separate but complementary roles and responsibilities. Each must contribute to an appropriate degree so that decision-makers and goal-setters consider information from all relevant constituencies.”

- The team believes that a statement such as “Professors teach, students learn, and administrators lead” violates both the spirit and the language of the Commission’s standard four and represents a position that is inconsistent with best practices in the academy. This too is a weakness that should not be ignored.

Standard four, Leadership and Governance, also speaks of timeliness of decisions:

“While reflecting institutional mission, perspective, and culture, collegial governance structures should acknowledge also the need for timely decision-making.”

- A delayed response or no response at all on the part of Central Administration or the Board of Trustees to the proposals of various constituents, especially faculty and students working within recognized and appropriate assemblies, is inconsistent with the language and spirit of the Commission’s standard four and represents a position that is inconsistent with best practices in the academy. This is a weakness that should not be ignored.

The Commission standard continues:

“The governance structure should provide for a governing body with sufficient independence and expertise to assure the academic integrity of the institution. . . .”

- The team heard multiple reports from many constituencies suggesting that the required confidence in the governing body, the Board of Trustees, has been severely undermined by various events in the past year, all raising questions about the independence of the board. The team believes that the Board of Trustees has both the responsibility and the opportunity to restore confidence in

the governing board itself in order to maintain the integrity of the institution. This is a weakness that should not be ignored.

Standard four continues:

“[The governing board] should not manage, micromanage, or interfere with the day-to-day operation of the institution. Always the advocate, and when necessary, the defender of the institution, the governing body is responsible for the institution’s integrity and quality.”

- The team heard multiple reports from multiple constituencies that there was a belief that too little evidence of the Board of Trustees serving as advocates of public higher education in Puerto Rico exists. Clearly there is an unmet need on the part of these constituencies for better communication from the Board regarding its advocacy for public higher education and a need perhaps for an actual organized and public advocacy program led by the Board. The Board of Trustees needs to decide if these reports are in any way legitimate and, if so, what an appropriate response might be.

**The team believes that the sum of the issues regarding the roles and practices of the UPR Central Administration and, perhaps more significantly, the Board of Trustees of UPR has put the accreditation of UPR campuses at risk. The observations of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education team should not be ignored.**

***Recommendations:***

- The visiting team recommends that the Board of Trustees, the Central Administration, and the campus review shared governance processes with a view to streamlining and improving the effectiveness of the independent, advisory voice of both students and faculty.
- The visiting team recommends that the Board of Trustees and campus and system leadership renew their shared commitment to the value and effectiveness of public higher education in society as expressed in the mission of the University.
- As stated under Standard 3, the Central Administration should develop an action plan and timeline to ensure the timely completion of the FY11 financial audit. In addition, the Central Administration should move aggressively to begin a search for a Chief Financial Officer to provide full coordination and accountability for the institution’s financial management initiatives.
- The visiting team recommends that the Board of Trustees further implement procedures for the periodic objective assessment of the Board of Trustees in meeting stated governing body objectives and responsibilities.
- The visiting team recommends that the Board of Trustees demonstrate further evidence that it assists in generating resources needed to sustain and improve the institution.

- As stated under Standard 3, the visiting team expects the Central Administration to submit the FY10 financial audit by the revised deadline.

## **VI. Summary of Compliance**

Based on a review of the follow-up report and appendices, interviews, and other documents reviewed during the visit, the team draws the following conclusions.

### ***All Recommendations:***

- The visiting team recommends that UPR Ponce continue to monitor and analyze its quarterly budget projections to determine if additional financial strategies are required to achieve favorable year end financial results.
- The visiting team recommends that UPR Ponce further refine institutional pro-forma budgets for fiscal years 2012 through 2015 to take into account additional information such as enrollments, grant funding, and staffing changes.
- The visiting team expects the Central Administration to submit the FY10 financial audit by the revised deadline.
- The Central Administration should develop an action plan and timeline to ensure the timely completion of the FY11 financial audit.
- The Central Administration should move aggressively to begin a search for a Chief Financial Officer to provide full coordination and accountability for the institution's financial management initiatives.
- The visiting team recommends that the Board of Trustees, the Central Administration, and the campus review shared governance processes with a view to streamlining and improving the effectiveness of the independent, advisory voice of both students and faculty.
- The visiting team recommends that the Board of Trustees and campus and system leadership renew their shared commitment to the value and effectiveness of public higher education in society as expressed in the mission of the University.
- The visiting team recommends that the Board of Trustees further implement procedures for the periodic objective assessment of the Board of Trustees in meeting stated governing body objectives and responsibilities.