

**Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students
of
University of Puerto Rico - Ponce
Ponce, PR 00732**

by

**An Evaluation Team representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
and the
Puerto Rico Council on Higher Education**

**Prepared after study of the institution's self-study report
and a visit to the campus on April 3-6, 2005**

The members of the Team:

Mr. Maximo Caballero
Higher Education Analyst
Puerto Rico Council on Higher Education
San Juan, PR 00918

Mr. Albert Casciero
Dean, Learning Resources Division
University of the District of Columbia
Washington, DC 20008

Dr. Ramon Claudio, Team Co-Chair
Professor, Graduate School of Education
InterAmerican University of Puerto Rico, Metropolitan Campus
San Juan, PR 00919

Dr. Carlos Gonzalez
Dean of Engineering College
Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico
San Juan, PR 00919

Dr. Michael Knight
Professor, Early Childhood Education and Family Studies
Kean University
Union, NJ 07083

Dr. Brian Lofman
Associate Professor, Marketing
Ramapo College of New Jersey
Mahwah, NJ 04730

Dr. Joseph Marchetti
Vice President for Student Affairs
Richard Stockton College of New Jersey
Pomona, NJ 08240

Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, Team Chair
President
Middlesex Community College
Middletown, CT 06457

Mr. Gilberto Olivo Cruz
Dean of Administration
University College of San Juan
San Juan, PR 00918

Dr. Sherri Ondrus
Director of Assessment and Institutional Research
New York City College of Technology-CUNY
Brooklyn, NY 11201

This report represents the views of the evaluation team as interpreted by the Chair; it goes directly to the institution before being considered by the Commission. It is a confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution. All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist the University of Puerto Rico - Ponce. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and of the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.

AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Date when instruction began: 1970

First students graduated: 1972

Chancellor: Prof. Jaime C. Marrero

Chief Academic Officer: Prof. Lizzette Roig Lama

Chair of the Board of Trustees: Mr. Segundo Cardona

Introduction

On behalf of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and the Puerto Rico Council on Higher Education the evaluation team would like to thank the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce (UPRP) for the opportunity to be part of its review, the accreditation and licensure process, and the excitement of learning at the UPRP. This collaborative visit has been an excellent experience for all the members of the team.

The visiting team has had an extraordinarily warm welcome from all members of the campus and university community. There was candor, assistance to the team in its exploration, and a spirit of collegiality that made the visit both enjoyable and productive. Members of the community who spoke with team members were familiar with the self-study report and eager to see that the university derive full benefit from the accreditation and licensure processes. The Trustees, President, Chancellor, the College's Steering and Sub-Committees, staff members who provided logistical assistance, and the many faculty, staff, and students who shared information and personal insights with the team are all thanked for their commitment to the institution and to this intensive process.

The principle purpose of the process of having an institution do a thorough self analysis followed by a visit of peers is to assist the institution to improve its programs and services and achievement of its mission. Following a preliminary visit by the team chair, the team reviewed the self-study report and the many documents provided; visited UPRP, where members met with many members of the college and university community. The workroom contained supporting documents and materials, supporting the self-study report, which were reviewed as well. The team's findings are based upon these data sources. The university is to be commended for a comprehensive well written analysis that is detailed and will serve it well as it continues to position itself for continued success and future opportunities.

The self-study process was carried out in earnest at UPRP with excellent participation of all sectors of the campus community. Many recommendations made in the report were under implementation by the time the team arrived on campus. This is evidence of good administrative leadership, the dedication of the Steering Committee, and the at-large commitment of faculty, students, and staff.

This report implements the spirit outlined in the *Characteristics of Excellence* and is based on the team visit, the written materials provided by the college, and on the interaction between the team and various college constituencies. The team report comments focus on items that it believes need added commendation and emphasis for the campuses further growth and development. The fact that some items of the self-study are not elaborated in this report merely means that the team agrees with the college's self-analysis and recommends that the college follow its own analysis and recommendations as well as those outlined in this report.

The Ponce campus was established as Ponce Regional College in 1969 and received initial accreditation in 1970. The institution has grown, evolved, and became an autonomous unit of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) in 1998. In 2000 it was named the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce. The university awards bachelor and associate degrees. The last full self-study and Middle States' team visit was in 1995. We believe that UPRP is a fine institution which has a strong

reputation within the community it serves, particularly the southern part of Puerto Rico. The college continues to enhance and refine its mission and is supported by the central office of the system and the board, the faculty, staff and administration. It should be noted that the students and community are proud of and well served by the college. The comments and recommendations which follow support and amplify the recommendations outlined by the college in its comprehensive self-study report and are intended to help the college continue to grow, improve and succeed to the best possible degree.

Mission, Goals, and Objectives

Interviews with faculty, staff, and students show that individuals are aware of and are able to discuss the university's mission. The data from college surveys presented in the self-study report, supporting materials, and discussions with the members of the college community indicate that the educational offerings correspond to the institution's mission and goals and that the current goals and objectives are consistent with the outlined mission. The discussions with administration, faculty, staff, and students at the college demonstrate that there is an understanding of the elements of the mission and support for it. The team recognizes and strongly notes that the institution has remained steadfast in its commitment to providing access and opportunity for students within its service region.

While elements of the mission are clear, it could be strengthened and developed further to be less generic. The team's review of the mission indicates that it needs to better describe where the institution is today and how it will serve its students and community in the future. A revision of the goals in more general terms would clarify what is being achieved and better connect with the assessment efforts underway. Some of the goals are more objectives and activities rather than goals. They should be reduced in number.

The institution has identified the need to revise its mission and has developed a process (Circular Letter 05-05) for its review. This process is inclusive of all sectors of the college community, identifies resources, and outlines a work plan. This model will provide the opportunity for involvement and the dialogue necessary for an outcome that will provide direction and guide the university as it strives to address the needs of the communities it serves in preparation for a diverse and changing world.

Recommendation:

The team believes that the granting of autonomy to UPRP provides the opportunity for it to build upon its history and strength as it conceptualizes who it wants to be and more effectively address the needs of the individuals and region the university serves and make a major impact on the development going on in Ponce and the region. It is recommended that the university revise its vision, mission, and institutional goals to more clearly demonstrate what it is accomplishing and where it sees itself as part of the UPR system with its focus providing educational services to the southern part of the island of Puerto Rico.

Institutional Resources

The team's review of UPRP included an examination of how well the resources of the institution are deployed to achieve its institutional objectives and how effectively assessment is used to change and/or improve processes and outcomes. Based on statements presented in the self-study report and other supporting materials, issues concerning the condition of the physical facilities-including the library, the financial resources and their disbursement, and the integration of technology to support instruction were investigated. The information received in advance as well as the information gathered during the onsite interviews was clear, concise, and accurate. The personnel interviewed were well informed and readily provided supporting evidence. It is clear that there is a communal understanding that processes are in place to attend to concerns and amend shortcomings. Corrective actions are planned or are already under implementation.

The last three years of audits performed by outside reviewers present documented information and certify that the UPRP is in good financial condition. In general, the university has resources to support its mission and those resources are deployed effectively and efficiently. The institution has made serious efforts on surveying students, faculty, and staff in this assessment and the results show general consensus. It allocates resources following established procedures in response to the needs of individual programmatic units, the priorities identified by the Institutional Effectiveness Plan and ultimately approved by the Administrative Executive Committee. There is general agreement that there is community participation in the process. There are clear human resource procedures for the recruitment and appointment of faculty as well as of other support personnel. Assessment of administrative effectiveness is at the developmental stages. Although the Ponce campus has been autonomous since 1998, it is still an integrated part of the structure of the University of Puerto Rico.

Information technology as well as information literacy are well integrated in the teaching and learning processes and supported by the efforts of the Library, Title V, several academic programs, and individual faculty. The university has adopted the Blackboard Learning System as a platform for distance learning and online support and high utilization is already evident. The institution recently adopted a graduate student profile that includes several elements of information literacy.

The library staff is commended for maintaining a level of commitment and service to students and faculty under very adverse conditions. Their dedication is recognized by faculty and students and surveys that indicate satisfaction with services. The library administration has spearheaded efforts to maximize its allocations by controlling costs and actively participating in collection development with other units of the university system to strengthen information access supported by a central collection database.

The library participates in "consortium-like" agreements in the acquisition of materials, periodical literature, and online databases to contain rising costs. The institution has very successfully strengthened its grant and fund raising activities to supplement internal resources. Efficient library services continue to be provided locally and supported by interlibrary loans from other campuses with excellent response time. Students and faculty are satisfied with the quality of the services provided and there is documented evidence.

We commend the contributions made by the Title V Project. Not only was new technology introduced to facilitate and improve teaching and learning, but also faculty and staff have been

provided professional development. The Title V Project has information widely available on the Web helping enhance the good image of the university in the community. The project has a good plan to extend support and development in new program areas, if continued funding is received. Based on the experience and the accomplishments, the institution would greatly benefit from renewed funding. Together with the library and other faculty, it has contributed in the introduction of information literacy in the curriculum.

An issue that demands immediate attention is the reopening of the Library. It is regrettable that the library building was neglected to the point that it needed to be closed and that services were temporarily dispersed throughout the campus. This has imposed a serious hardship on patrons and staff. Although the institution has a plan for correcting this deficiency and financial resources have been committed to address the problem, administrative constraints have prevented speedy implementation and correction. In addition to disrupting service support functions, this situation has deprived patrons of the appropriate dedicated spaces to foster teaching and learning. There is inadequate space for bibliographic instruction, insufficient computer laboratories, and virtually no study space.

Suggestions:

To continue enhancing the incorporation of information literacy in the curriculum, consideration should be given to incorporate it in the Freshmen Orientation activities and/or courses.

The progress made by the support of Title V in the academic life of the institution should be continued and extended beyond the life of the grant. The institution should continue the process it has started in order to institutionalize this program when federal support ends and thus provide for a seamless transition. Since the function and services of this project supplement or overlap similar ones in already established programs at UPRP, an organizational relationship that would further strengthen academic support services might be considered.

Recognizing that funding at the institution is limited while expenditures for the university's collection development should be maximized, one option is to optimize expenditures in this area. Participation of the teaching faculty in the selection process should be encouraged.

The university should consider preserving those unique historic materials in the library collection that were affected by fungus and are in eminent danger of destruction.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the university consider establishing priorities in providing adequate study spaces for students and also to support the information literacy support efforts of the library for the next academic semester. A review of space utilization may reveal that there are appropriate spaces as well as laboratories that may be shared until the library building is renovated and open to the public once again. Expedient implementation of the library renovation is also recommended.

Administration, Leadership, and Governance

The *Characteristics of Excellence* expect the organization and administration of a college to facilitate teaching and learning and to foster their improvement. UPRP's organization and administration are oriented towards the teaching-learning process. This orientation is supported

by a participatory philosophy and broadly based governance system. Great pride is felt college-wide, by employees and students, about the quality of the college's academic programs and student services and the institution's student-centered focus. The college works toward a shared leadership where contributions are made in different ways by various officers, groups, and organizations within the college. This is in keeping with the collegial atmosphere at the college and speaks well to the structure and sense of shared responsibility that exists.

UPRP is one of eleven units governed by the Board of Trustees of the University of Puerto Rico. The Board of Trustees sets the overall mission of the units, with each unit providing a yearly plan which amplifies the system's goals and objectives. The documents reviewed and discussions with administrative staff and the University president and members of his staff verified the expressed authority, responsibility, and relationship between UPRP and the central office. UPRP administrators have been empowered and committed to execute the UPRP strategic plan to facilitate the growth of the institution. The administrative staff consists of experienced competent and involved professionals. The institution at Ponce has a well-defined organizational structure with clear lines of authority that are well understood by the constituents. The duties and responsibilities of university administrators are clearly established. The job descriptions of the administrative positions well document their responsibilities, authority, and accountability helping the decision making process. The academic credentials and professional qualifications of the current chancellor, deans, academic department heads, and other institutional administrators fulfill the requirements necessary to carry out the duties and responsibilities of their positions and are well documented. It should be noted that the recruiting procedure for the administrative positions, such as the chancellor and the deans, is clearly established and uses a democratic consultation process with the community.

A strength of the institution is its clear rules, regulations, and policies for providing appropriate direction and facilitating effective governance functioning of the institution. Governing bodies, by-laws, and policies provide different means of ensuring that the institution keeps itself focused on accomplishing its mission and goals. There is ample evidence that the institution has written policies regarding teaching and non teaching personnel, administration, and student responsibilities. Members of these groups are able to access these guidelines and documents in a variety of ways. The institution receives feedback from its students in different ways. Faculty members have the opportunity to participate in many institutional decisions. An analysis of the constituent's participation in the decision making process at the institutional level revealed an adequate balance. There is evidence of participation of the personnel, both academic and non academic, in the formulation of the strategic and assessment plans.

A noteworthy accomplishment by the UPRP was the recognition by the Office of the Comptroller of Puerto Rico for the best scores for the entire university system in the annual audits performed to evaluate the effectiveness of the administrative processes, institutional management, and fiscal operations. These audits were carried out in February 2003, in October 2003, and in October 2004.

Due to changes in UPRP's administration, at all levels, there is a concern that the strategic planning process at the unit may not have the required continuity, stability, and effectiveness. Most administrative positions are at the pleasure of the chancellor, and the chancellor itself has

varied with the political affiliation of the Puerto Rico's elected government. As a result, the stability of the university administration is susceptible to the political variations.

Suggestions:

Administrative decisions should be more effectively consulted and communicated with the community. Better methods of communication need to be established between administration and university constituents in order to improve their understanding of the decision-making process.

Efforts should be made to reduce administrative turnover at the university in order to provide more certainty and stability to the planning process.

Institutional Assessment

Since the 1995 Middle States review, the faculty and staff at UPRP have made great progress in the implementation of institutional assessment. The institution has engaged in professional development activities around assessment and has stressed the importance of making data-driven decisions. As one indication of the institutional commitment to assessment, the Title V project was designed to focus on the topic of assessment in order to further strengthen the creation of a culture of assessment at the Ponce campus. The team saw evidence of a formal written assessment plan, strategic plan, and an overarching institutional effectiveness plan designed to assess the previous two plans. It was less clear what the timeline was, and who specifically was responsible for conducting these assessments.

The unit has adopted the Nichol's five element model of assessment. Currently departments and non-academic units share the results of their assessment with the administration in annual reports; academic programs are evaluated on a three-year cycle. In talking to faculty and staff it was apparent to the team that the institution has made an effort to include constituencies from all sectors of the campus in institutional assessment efforts. Chairs of departmental assessment committees were articulate about the various types of assessment they engaged in at the course- and program-level. They acknowledged the desire to incorporate more direct measures into their assessment activities. These conversations provided additional evidence that the college has successfully addressed Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning. In addition to the activities carried out in the academic areas, there are efforts to conduct assessment in the student services area as well.

Examples of instruments and activities undertaken in preparation for the self-study include surveys to obtain the perceptions of faculty, non-faculty personnel, and students on a variety of issues outlined by the *Characteristics of Excellence*. The institution has incorporated a variety of assessment measures in their ongoing activities, including but not limited to, alumni surveys, a graduating student survey, a withdrawal study, a physical facilities needs assessment, student satisfaction surveys, and longitudinal studies of various student cohorts.

The self-study report provided a thorough and candid analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the status of institutional assessment on the campus. Rather than try to disguise areas of concern, the university chose to highlight these areas and provided critical analyses that in the long-term will

lead to institutional improvement. In doing so, the campus simultaneously provided evidence of meeting Standard 6: Institutional Integrity and Standard 7: Institutional Assessment.

The institution is to be commended for stressing the importance of using their data for decision-making rather than merely spending their energy on creating planning documents and collecting data for its own sake. There appears to be a culture of assessment that is encouraged at the course level, program level, and institutional level. A noteworthy aspect of the assessment process at UPRP is the consistent inclusion of changes or other decisions made as a result of the assessment findings. The faculty and staff seem to have a clear understanding that the use of the data is the most important aspect of the process. The adoption of an institutional assessment model shows leadership and commitment to maintain and document effectiveness. A culture of assessment has been embraced by all sectors of the community and there are already results that indicate that the university “is closing the loop” in many actions.

The university community makes good use of the small staff of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research. Currently there is one director (a faculty member at .75 release time), one statistics officer, and two secretaries to manage a large research load. Because of changes that have occurred in the leadership of the office, there has been some difficulty in maintaining continuity. This lack of continuity seems to be reflected in the strategic planning process. The institution relies on the office to support many assessment activities, and although by all accounts the staff performs at an exceptional level, the staffing of the office may not be sufficient to sustain long-term assessment activities. It is possible that staffing the office with a faculty member with partial release time may be contributing to the high turnover rate because faculty expect to return to their teaching responsibilities in a short timeframe.

Suggestions:

Because there are so many separate assessment activities occurring simultaneously, and there does not seem to be one coordinated means for organizing and communicating about these activities, there may be duplication of effort. The institution does maintain some communication with the college community about institutional data and various research studies via the Office of Planning and Institutional Research website (www.uprp.edu/opei.htm). We encourage the institution to create additional channels of communication to further dissemination of information so that all areas of the institution can share assessment findings and decisions made as a result of the data.

Given the large number of forms produced and reports written in the process of conducting the various assessment activities, the institution may wish to consider streamlining the process by using electronic forms and submissions. The institution may consider creating one central location (such as a website) where all the necessary documentation can be stored for easy retrieval for faculty and staff, and for sharing assessment results and initiatives with the university community.

The evaluation team encourages the institution to continue to integrate its processes and to pursue its stated intention of relying less on indirect measures such as student perception and incorporating more direct measures into its assessment processes.

Recommendations:

The institution needs to consider what additional resources it will allocate to the assessment activities it has worked so hard to establish. Although the institution provides the opportunity for faculty to apply for research funds – including assessment projects - through a mini-proposal application process, there does not seem to be a clear system for allocating resources to both conducting assessment and funding the necessary changes that have been identified as needs and actions the institution indicated it would like to pursue.

The small planning and institutional research staff does not appear to have sufficient resources to coordinate all of the proposed assessment activities. It is important to provide the necessary resources to support this office so it can support the many campus activities underway and also those planned for the future. The team believes it is important to reiterate that responsibility for assessment activities is college-wide and should not fall on any one office.

In order to tie the assessment process to planning and budget, the institution should assign the responsibility of using assessment findings to personnel who have the ability to allocate resources. The institution should continue to strive to tie together the assessment, planning, and budgeting processes rather than allow each to proceed without an explicit connection. By integrating this process, the institution should become more efficient possibly by reducing duplicative efforts. Providing a clear, well-communicated timetable for each step should assist the campus in meeting this objective. For example, the assessment cycle should coincide with the budget cycle in some manner so the assessment findings can inform the budget requests.

The evaluation team recommends that the institution reevaluate its strategic planning process and that it use its assessment results for prioritizing goals.

Student Admissions and Support Services

This section of the Self-Study Report dealing with admissions and student services was concise, informative, and germane to student life at the institution. It is evident that care was taken to obtain views from all constituencies. Likewise, the materials that were prepared for review were comprehensive and impressive, particularly in the area of recruitment and marketing.

The Ponce Campus of the UPR has a strong commitment to its students. In the words of a student, “They care about our dreams.” This philosophy is consistent with the mission of ‘service excellence’ and was evidenced in the strong student centered environment provided to the diverse student body. The goal of student services is to provide services and activities that contribute to the development of the academic, social, and cultural aspects. The division is responsible for a great deal of the specialized support services necessary to meet the needs of the student population. Overall satisfaction survey data for offices directly impacting enrollment of students, i.e. Registrar, Admissions, Bursar, Academic Departments, and Academic Affairs, suggest students are generally pleased with the quality of service provided and the quality of marketing and informational materials.

The university has experienced significant enrollment increases in evening programs (96%) over the last five years. Also, a five year shift in enrollment from technical programs (36% decline) to baccalaureate programs (10% increase) may be attributable to the addition of programs in the

Social Sciences and Natural Sciences. The monitoring of student retention rates at both institutional and program levels is highlighted. Five year retention data suggest first to second year retention rates have been steadily increasing, and support programs and services are in place to assist with these increases. Data indicates that the overall graduation rate for the college for the 1997 cohort (33.9%) exceeds all other UPR campuses, with the exception of two.

Responsive counseling and guidance programs appear to be in place and are generally carried out through competent and trained professional staff. A considerable effort is made to assist students in career guidance from their freshmen year, particularly utilizing a special seminar designed to assist students with adjustment to university life.

Efforts to improve the transfer enrollment process, particularly related to acceptance of program credit, are in the process of being addressed. Course equivalencies with other private institutions in Puerto Rico were recently undertaken by the Deanship of Academic Affairs. This will ultimately prove to be valuable to transfer students and ease the enrollment process. The supportive working relationship between the Dean of Students and Dean of Academic Affairs helps strengthen the coordination of admissions with academic programs.

Significant assessment within the student support services area is evident. Student interests and perceptions remain a priority beginning with the deanship and extending throughout the division. Included in this assessment process are alumni and graduating students. The National Survey of Student Engagement results show UPRP scoring higher than Baccalaureate-General and all institutions in three of four criteria, helping students cope with nonacademic responsibilities, providing support students need to thrive socially, and attending campus events and activities. The area of “providing support students need to help them succeed academically” was one criterion the institution’s students scored significantly lower in. The data suggest students are generally satisfied with the programs and services provided. The illustration of an increase in the percent of students voting in student council elections and the establishment of a Quality of Life Office supports the linkage between assessment findings and implementation.

It is noteworthy that the commitment and dedication of student services staff, faculty, and students interviewed was palpable. Students who were interviewed were simply nothing less than exceptional. Students, faculty, and staff shared a genuine passion for UPRP and impressed team members with their overall engagement with the institution.

The institution is to be commended for responding to previous concerns regarding the availability of data and accountability regarding ongoing student services programs and activities. The assessment of the student learning outcomes process and resulting documentation clearly articulates the nexus between student achievement and satisfaction with services. This document will serve as an excellent template for future planning initiatives.

Suggestions:

The team noted that total enrollment has declined (9%) from 1999-2000 to 2003-2004. While this may be attributed to enrollment management strategies and budgetary constraints, this decline, particularly of full-time students (a 16% decline), needs to be further analyzed and options identified to minimize overall enrollment declines. There also has been a (22%) drop in

freshmen enrollment from 1999-2000 to 2003-2004. While the drop in percent occupancy seems to have stabilized for the most recent year of data, efforts to assess the reasons for declining enrollments and the potential impact on future enrollment goals should be undertaken.

Ninety-seven percent of the users surveyed felt recreation areas need to be expanded. This finding was further re-enforced through student interviews during the process. Perhaps a feasibility study might be undertaken to assess the impact this issue has on student success and retention.

Evidence of student outcomes would be strengthened through the establishment of a shared database tracking students transferring to other colleges, entering the job market, or continuing with graduate school. This tool would also prove useful for expanding alumni and fundraising efforts.

The institution should consider strengthening the external student transfer process to ensure that students learn at the earliest possible time those courses for which they will receive transfer credit.

The institution may want to consider a strategic marketing study to assess new and emerging programs and supportive recruitment strategies. The institution's application base should be examined as part of this study to identify new markets and the possibility of expanded academic program offerings relevant to the needs of regional development that have been identified in the community.

While students noted in interviews that they had a voice in institutional decision making through established student governance structures, efforts to ensure that communication and feedback occurs with students as part of the decision making process should be enhanced. Current plans for renovation of the Library was cited as one example of students feeling they have not been kept adequately informed of the process. The lack of designated quiet study areas was cited several times in student interviews and the institution should consider making additional quiet study space available.

The team suggests the student and academic affairs staff review the document "Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience" put out through the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and the American College Personnel Association as a source guide for collaborative learning outcomes for students both within and outside the formal classroom.

Recommendation:

While efforts to improve assessment of student learning and satisfaction with services are noted, the institution should strengthen the linkage of assessment results and findings with ongoing strategic planning and budgeting. It is critical that all offices view themselves as "stakeholders" in the total student learning experience. It can be advantageous to have student satisfaction results inform the decision-making process regarding priority programs, expenditures, and staff assignment.

Faculty

Teaching is the faculty's primary responsibility, and faculty members collectively demonstrate excellence in teaching as independently evaluated by peers, students, and department heads. The full time faculty are dedicated individuals who are student centered, enthusiastic, and aware of the institution's mission. The faculty are very accessible to students and are very supportive of them, assisting them with personal, as well as academic concerns. Faculty have the appropriate credentials. A growing number of faculty members either have obtained their doctorate or are in the process of completing their doctoral studies. The institution has shown support for individual faculty members who choose to pursue a doctoral degree in their area of specialization, which in turn serves to enhance the overall currency and capabilities of the faculty.

The collective faculty is to be commended for its overall high level of institutional commitment and deep interest in student learning. An outcome measure that exemplifies this is the outstanding pass rates of students on the Teacher Certification Examination; the faculty is commended for this success. Faculty members take their responsibilities seriously and are strongly supportive of the principles of academic freedom. Their dedication is demonstrated through their concern for students, their active participation on committees, and their propensity to take on administrative roles even while expressing a strong desire to return to the classroom. In all these regards, faculty members serve as exemplary role models for their students. They are truly focused on teaching and student learning and it shows in their willingness to do extra in order to benefit the student.

Teaching consumes the greatest proportion of faculty members' overall efforts, though faculty members are also expected to undertake research, scholarship, and/or creative endeavors; to engage in professional development activities; to participate in committees at the departmental and university-wide levels; and to serve the community. The amount of time that the average faculty member voluntarily spends on teaching activities substantially exceeds the minimum 12-credit hour limit, which can create an imbalance by potentially limiting contributions in the other required areas, particularly research and scholarship.

Policies and procedures for recommending promotion of faculty members are clear as evidenced by utilization of a detailed point system. Some faculty members, however, perceive that a gap exists between practice and established policies and procedures.

Suggestions:

Whereas faculty members are considerably involved in curricular review and revision processes, they could pay greater attention to external considerations, such as how the needs and concerns of prospective employers might be infused into coursework, or how curricula might otherwise be updated and remain current.

An appropriate balance in the fulfillment of faculty responsibilities could be enhanced by providing greater access to established and possibly new sources of funding for research, scholarship, and professional development.

Efforts could be made to clear up any confusion or misperceptions that faculty members may have concerning the promotion evaluation and decision making process.

Educational Offerings and General Education

According to the *Characteristics of Excellence*, “there must be a demonstrable relationship between the stated mission of the institution and the goals and objectives of the educational program.” The academic offerings of UPRP reflect and promote its mission and goals. The curricular sequences of the academic programs foster coherent learning experiences and promote the learning process. Program assessment revealed that, in general, academic programs are effective in providing skills building, attitude development, and presenting clear student learning outcomes. An analysis of the self-study, document analysis (syllables, academic programs), and interviews with faculty members and with students reveal that the goals and objectives of academic offerings are consistent with the mission and goals of the institution. Course content and their outlined objectives reveal that there are rigorous academic levels according to the sequence of the curriculum.

An examination of the syllabi shows that the courses analyzed specify knowledge, skills, and attitudes that the students should develop in order to satisfy the expectations set in the graduating or transfer student profile. Information outlined in course syllabi also indicates that students are required to utilize different technological resources that support their learning and develop skills in information resources and related areas. This is supported through the collaborative relationships between faculty and library personnel that results in student achievement.

There is strong faculty involvement in curriculum development and revision. Information provided in the additional support data reveals that there is written policy for the systematic revision of academic programs.

Program effectiveness was analyzed by using retention data for the 2000, and 2001 cohorts. Results of the analysis showed that the institution retention rate is fairly consistent (60 to 63%) for the cohorts analyzed. Graduation rates are also indicators of programs and effectiveness. At the baccalaureate level, the six years graduation rates for Elementary Education, Accounting, Psychology and Mental Health, and Forensic Psychology programs consistently surpassed the institutional rate. Data such as this serves as evidence that the institution responds to society and student needs. The courses of Psychology and Biomedical Sciences are good examples of this affirmation. Evidence of written policies regarding the transfer of credits to other accredited institutions, especially to other units of the university system, is also a measure of success. Graduating students and alumni interviewed shown high level of satisfaction with both academic and professional skills development received through the curricula. These results also support the successful use of assessment results in the revision of the courses and program. From the information analyzed it can be concluded that the assessment process at UPRP is embedded in departmental concerns about how students are acquiring skills and that it takes different forms.

A primary strength of the General Education Program is the administrative leadership that has created an educational program and an assessment program which requires individual programs, departments, and offices to have responsibility for the planning and implementation of these programs subject to committee and administrative review. This process invites the crossing of organizational lines or boundaries, creates high levels of involvement of all groups, including students, and enables the activities of General Education to support the educational, assessment,

and affective goals of the program. Interviews with students strongly supported several conclusions. The students know that the faculty is concerned with their personal well being along with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required not only for success while attending the university, but throughout their lives. It is clear that this program provides not only the fundamental elements of general education, but goes well beyond these elements.

The structure of General Education and the associated assessment plan requires a high degree of collaboration among the many departments, programs, and offices across the campus and beyond. This collaboration is commended.

The focus of teaching, learning, and assessment is clearly on program improvement. This focus is commended. The institution has developed a strong commitment to a culture of assessment and this commitment is commended.

Suggestions:

Attention to the consistency among mission, planning, budgeting, and assessment should be reviewed on a regular schedule.

The institution has begun having the conversation about how it expects its students to perform with respect to general education competencies and how it can assess it effectively and efficiently. It is suggested that the institution capitalize upon the wealth of information provided by its current assessment activities at the course-level. The assessment activities conducted in the service departments may be an ideal starting point for an initial examination of whether or not students are meeting the General Education outcomes recently approved. By using those findings to address the General Education competencies, the institution may be able to continue its decentralized assessment process that seems to be working so well currently.

A clear statement of purpose which defines a curricular structure for the General Education Program should be developed.

Assessment of Student Learning

UPRP has developed each of the fundamental elements of assessment of student learning. A culture of assessment has been created through the cooperative efforts of those at every level of the institution. Particular attention should be paid to the significant progress that has been made by the faculty and staff in the use of both direct and indirect measures to improve teaching and learning across all domains and the documented use of student assessment information as part of institutional assessment.

Faculty, staff, students, and administrators have been given the opportunity to provide leadership to this effort in a great variety of ways and this has created a campus that is extremely well versed in the language of assessment along with extensive knowledge of the tools and methods of this area. This knowledge has enabled the programs to improve curricula and instructional activities, focus professional development activities, and expedite further the sequence of assessment, planning, and budgeting.

The leadership of this effort has been exemplary, and as a result, the level of involvement of the university's personnel has been extremely impressive. In addition, the support and guidance provided by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research and the model of assessment provided by the Title V Project deserve commendation. Every effort should be made to continue the activities of this project.

Suggestion:

The Office of Planning and Institutional Research will need additional human and financial resources to support the programs as they evolve. There may be some need for the programs to be provided additional resources.

Integrity

The institution subscribes to high ethical standards, both in the classroom and in the management of its affairs. Truthfulness was evident throughout the site visit; faculty, staff, and students were forthright in describing what they like and what they believe should be improved at the college. UPRP is committed to the free pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. This extends to academic freedom in the classroom, as well as to fiscal policies and practices. Truthfulness characterizes the institution's relations with internal and external constituencies.

Promotional materials, written policies, and other documents developed and distributed by UPRP corroborate the existence of an organization climate conducive to the achievement of the institutional mission with a high level of satisfaction among all constituent groups.

Summary

The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce is an exciting place that values students and places learning first. It has demonstrated much progress since its last accreditation team visit and is poised to take on new challenges. The university has an able and committed chancellor and a devoted and committed faculty and staff that place students at the center of their effort and concern. The institution is supported by the university system. It is valued and recognized for its many economic, cultural, and educational contributions to the region it serves. As the public university in the southern part of Puerto Rico located in Ponce, it has the opportunity to be a leader in the growth and development of the city and the region.

New initiatives are underway and there is open dialogue about issues that will impact its progress in the coming years. The university has evidenced its ability to accomplish a great deal with creativity, energy, and commitment. To continue to move forward, it will need to further its planning and development giving emphasis to refining its purpose and setting priorities that will further focus its direction and its position.

Finally, the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce is addressing the elements outlined in the *Characteristics of Excellence* and fulfilling its requirements as an excellent institution of higher education. UPRP has much to be proud of and much to share.