

**Report to the  
Faculty, Administration, Staff, Students, Trustees  
of the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce – UPR-Ponce**

**Ponce, Puerto Rico  
by**

**An Evaluation Team Representing the  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education**

**Prepared after study of the institution's self-study report, and the visit to  
the campus on April 24 through April 27, 2016**

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#### AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

President/Chief Executive Officer:  
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Dean of Academic Affairs:  
Professor Jose Madera-Caban

Chair of the Governing Board:  
Mr. Jorge Sanchez Colon

## **Report of the Middle States Evaluation Team University of Puerto Rico - Ponce**

### **I. Institutional Overview**

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. The institution was originally established as the Ponce Regional College on June 27, 1969, and commenced its operations in August 1970. At that time, it began offering 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 the 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 offers twelve bachelor's degrees and four 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, 229 non-faculty staff and 203 faculty members served the student body. 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.

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

As stated in the institution's mission statement, the university is dedicated to the intellectual, humanistic, scientific, cultural and ethical growth of its students into citizens and professionals capable of contributing to a global society as critical, creative, and honest leaders. It fosters equal access, academic rigor, enriching educational activities, and quality support services to form graduates of academic excellence.

For its decennial review, the institution selected the comprehensive model, examining all 14 Standards, within seven chapters. The campus' self-study was candid and its preparation inclusive and

participatory.

The Middle States evaluation team conducted its site visit from April 23 to April 27, 2016. Team members found the visit to be professionally rewarding, and we are grateful for the hospitality and warmth of the University community. The team members appreciate the forthrightness of the self-study and the acknowledgement of areas needing attention. The visiting team encourages the University to continue its self-examination efforts routinely, maintaining a culture of planning, budgeting and evaluation intertwined to ensure the institution's future success.

### **III. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Requirements of Affiliation**

Based on a review of the institution's self-study and appendices, interviews, and other institutional documents, the team affirms that the institution continues to meet the Requirements of Affiliation in *Characteristics of Excellence*.

### **IV. Compliance with Federal Requirement; Issues Relative to State Regulatory or Other Accrediting Agency Requirements**

The team noted that the independent reviewer examining evidence regarding institutional compliance with federal requirements notice some areas of non compliance: transfer of credit policies and articulation agreements, standing with state and other accrediting agencies, and assignments of credit hours. The team requested appropriate information and was provided before the team visit for its review. Additionally, the team conducted focused interviews regarding the transfer of credit policies and articulation agreements, the standing with state and other accrediting agencies, and the assignment of credit hours. Based on the reviewed evidence and the results of the interviews conducted during the team visit, the team affirms that the institution meets all relevant and state regulations and verifies compliance.

### **V. Evaluation Overview**

The team reviewed the institutional self-study as well as numerous supporting documents. The team conducted interviews with a wide range of individuals representing all aspects of the institution.

The team found satisfactory evidence to believe that the institution is in compliance with all standards. The team has some recommendations and no requirements

## **VI. Compliance with Accreditation Standards**

On the basis of the self-study, supporting documents, interviews, and supplemental information, the teams draws the following conclusions with respect to the standards. The team has developed its reports following the self-study outline.

### **Chapter 2**

#### **Mission and Goals (Standard 1) and Integrity (Standard 6)**

The team's judgment is that the institution appears to be in compliance with both standards.

#### **Mission and Goals (Standard 1)**

##### **Summary of evidence and findings**

The University of Puerto Rico in Ponce has clearly stated goals and objectives, which are in accordance to the mission and vision of the University of Puerto Rico as a system. The institution's mission and goals were revised in 2014 after feedback from the PRR submitted by MSCHE in 2010. The institution's mission is aligned with the institutional goals, they are defined clearly in ways that guide faculty, staff, and administrators in making decisions related to planning, resource allocation, program and curriculum development, and definition of program outcomes.

Goals emphasize student learning and institutional improvement. Goals are assessed by various means such as the Annual Institutional Effectiveness

Report and the Institutional Assessment Report.

**Suggestions:** none

**Recommendations:** none

**Requirements:** none

### **Integrity (Standard 6)**

#### **Summary of evidence and findings**

The UPR-Ponce as a public institution has to conform to the Puerto Rico Commonwealth's Law of Government Ethics. The university has for such reason the necessary policies, procedures and documents in place to ensure the ethical behavior of faculty, administration, and students. UPR-Ponce promotes sound ethical practices and respect for its constituencies.

There is a fair and impartial process, published and widely available to address grievances and violations of institutional policies; as well as a climate of academic inquiry and engagement that is supported by widely disseminated policies.

Catalogs are available to be viewed, and there is factual information about the institution, including graduation, retention, and certification and licensing pass rates, etc. Student publications, both in print and online form, accurately present information about the campus.

The university has demonstrated honesty, transparency and truthfulness in its public relations announcements, advertisements, admission materials, etc. There are clear internal and external mechanisms of communication for students, faculty, and staff for grievances and violations to policy. The university follows the principles of UPR General By-laws.

**Suggestion:**

- The university should keep updating and sharing information about policies, practices, and procedures for students, faculty and staff.

**Recommendations:** none

**Requirements:** none

## **Chapter 3**

### **Planning, Resource Allocation and Institutional Renewal (Standard 2) and Institutional Resources (Standard 3)**

The team's judgment is that the institution appears to be in compliance with both standards.

#### **Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal (Standard 2)**

##### **Summary of evidence and findings**

An institution-wide strategic plan exists covering the period from 2006-2016. The Office of Planning and Institutional Research supports the plan. Planning takes place at the Vice Presidential, college, and department levels. The Planning office provides support to the process. The plan identifies ten main goals for the planning period aiming at developing the institution. Charts are presented linking the goals to the mission of the institution. The system is evaluated by a number of indicators, which are monitored to correct those areas with greater deviations from their targets. Operational plans have been developed for organizational units throughout the institution, which have resulted in developing goals linked to the mission. Assessment is done to some degree across the organization and the results are used to develop action plans for the departments. Key performance areas and key performance indicators are also developed to provide a means to monitor the attainment of strategies, objectives and the fulfillment of the mission. This process is well developed in the administrative and academic areas but not quite so in other areas. There are plans for technology integration, faculty development and assessment. The plans and goals are approved by the campus constituencies and sent to the Board of Trustees of the university system for approval. Strategic objectives for quality, growth and financial health were also developed to



react to the complex economic situation facing the country and the university.

The various committees meet periodically to ensure attainment, to take corrective action, and, when necessary, to review outcomes pertaining to the goals. The chancellor works with the vice presidents, deans, and other academic and administrative leaders to respond to threats and opportunities. The chancellor has appointed a strategic planning committee and held public hearings and surveys to start to work on a new plan as the existing plans ends. The draft of the strategic plan *Vision UPR Ponce 2021* was presented to the institutional communities and widely circulated. The final plan has just been approved.

The planning process is linked to budgeting by involving all departments in the annual budget cycle. Reports are submitted three times per year by the Budget Committee chair to attempt to correct budgeting problems and to generate reports to the Central Administration of UPR. An Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal allocates funds congruent with the goals and mission of the institution. Operational plans are used by chairpersons to make requests for funds and they are required to provide justification and alignment with operational plans. The Technology Committee is appointed by the chancellor and serves the role of evaluating requests from academic departments after the Dean of Academic Affairs vets them.

The fiscal needs determined by the process outlined above are submitted to the Administrative Board for final approval. Assessment information seems to be used for the preparation of the budget and decision-making in the administrative areas. The budget addresses the following areas: administration, academics, student services, institutional research and academic support. Growth and development can be managed most effectively by means of an ongoing, rational, and continuous self-evaluation. The current system seems to follow a participative planning model that can help the institution to become more proactive and creative.

Institutional planning covers a number of areas: finances, academics, enrollments, technology, and infrastructure. Each department and each of its programs have an academic plan; however, there is insufficient evidence that these plans are coordinated and interrelated. The academic plan should form the basis for all the other plans and should be driven by the assessment process. Assessment does not seem to be fully linked to the planning process. The decision-making process is done mostly from the top of the organization, although there seems to be sharing or delegation of authority for decisions at lower levels of the organization.

The fiscal planning and budgeting process is systematic and sustained, and decisions are made following the strategic goals and in consonance with the mission of the institution. The plan is revised and updated on a yearly basis according to the challenges and opportunities that present themselves to the institution. Internal controls are in place to protect the integrity of the fiscal system. There is evidence that the institution is well served by its fiscal planning in maintaining sustained improvements of services, facilities, equipment and upgrading the infrastructure. Resource allocation is handled efficiently by analyzing requests for funds, prioritizing the most promising ones and assigning the right amount of funds to ensure the completion of the project.

Audited financial statements were submitted prepared by a certified public accountant. The accountant's opinion was that the statements presented an accurate view of the fiscal position of the institution, its cash flows and revenues resulting from operations. The financial position of the institution seems to be shaky due to the economic situation of the commonwealth and the university. The audits are clean but the auditors point out material weaknesses that persisted over the two periods covered by the audits submitted.

**Commendation:**

- Planning is being integrated across the different areas of the institution. There is a growing understanding of the planning process on the academic side and the administrative side. The institution has prepared a new plan, *Vision UPR Ponce 2021*, which has been approved by the Administrative Council, as the existing plan ends this academic year.

**Suggestions:**

- The institution should work with the UPR Central Office to take corrective action to avoid repetitive audit findings of lack of internal controls.
- The institution should plan for improvements to function more effectively and to foster greater understanding of the process.
- The institution should take steps to ensure that academic plans are coordinated and interrelated.

**Recommendations:** none

**Requirements:** none

## Institutional Resources (Standard 3)

### Summary of evidence and findings

The human, financial, technical, facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve the institution's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

The institution has a financial plan, which provides funding for the strategic and divisional plans. The government of Puerto Rico provides sufficient funds to fulfill the human resources, financial obligations, facilities, equipment, supplies and technology to support the institution's mission. The allocation of funds is made on the basis of priorities and is connected to planning. The Financial Plan and the budget are aligned with the mission of the institution.

Internal controls seem to be in place to protect the assets of the institution. An annual independent audit is performed and material findings, if any, are followed-up.

The process of resource allocation is realistic but short term oriented. There was no evidence of strategic planning to allocate capital resources over the long term; this is due to the dependence on annual allocations of funds from the UPR Central Office. The allocation approach, although reduced and resulting in a reduction of full time faculty and staff, is adequate to sustain the mission and outcome expectations of the institution.

While the facilities are adequate for the programs offered and are well kept, planning for future growth and the acquisition of capital assets should be undertaken. The institution has built and renovated labs and other buildings, including the athletic facilities and the Library, and is currently constructing a faculty lounge.

Some of the classrooms and labs are equipped as presentation rooms and have access to the internet. The layout of the buildings is functional and attractive and the facilities are well ventilated. There is an equipment replacement policy, a maintenance policy, and a program to reduce energy costs. A student tech fee has provided the funds to upgrade student IT facilities and equipment. The faculty offices visited were comfortable, private, and well furnished.

There is an emergency plan with electronic notification of students and

faculty via email. The new telephone system is VOIP-capable and can also be used to notify the community in case of emergency.

Measures have been taken to store electronic data off the premises for security reasons and to restore the systems after they are down. Antivirus programs and a firewall have been put in place to prevent unauthorized access to the systems. To enhance security, separate servers are used for administrative data processing and some student records.

Computer labs are available for the use of students. The library is adequate to support the academic programs and faculty and student research. The library building is attractive and functional. There are computers and group study rooms available. The library staff is adequate for the size of the student body.

Human resources seem adequate for the size of the institution, although the size of the full time faculty has decreased.

**Commendation:**

- The institution has a comprehensive and ambitious master plan: *Marco de Desarrollo Físico y Programático.*

**Suggestions:**

- The institution should work with the UPR Central Office to develop more strategic allocation of capital funds over the long term.
- The institution should have periodic emergency drills to ensure all constituencies are ready for emergencies.

**Recommendations:** none

**Requirements:** none

## Chapter 4

### Leadership and Governance (Standard 4) and Administration (Standard 5)

The team's judgment is that the institution appears to be in compliance with both standards.

#### Leadership and Governance (Standard 4)

#### Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

UPR-Ponce is part of the University of Puerto Rico System, a large publicly supported multi-campus, coeducational university system, with a Central Administration (UPR-CA) overseeing the operations of all academic units, including UPR-Ponce.

The UPR System is guided by the UPR University Law, which delineates 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 institution is provided autonomy to govern its affairs.

The University Board of Governors is responsible for formulating policy for the system and appointing the president and chancellors of each campus. Members of the University Board of Governors are selected in terms of areas of expertise (finance, arts, science, and other professional areas), fulfilling a diverse representation, and represent internal and external constituents.

At UPR Ponce, the chancellor holds the maximum academic and administrative authority at the institution. The self-study indicates that 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. Currently, the position is held by Dr. Leonardo Morales.

UPR Ponce has a defined system of collegial governance as evidenced by having a well-established Academic Senate (AS) as the formal deliberative forum of the academic community; an Administrative Board that is advisory to the chancellor; three clearly delineated deanships that guide academic affairs, student affairs and administrative affairs; department chairpersons (directors) who hold faculty rank with administrative functions; and unit chairpersons. Of importance, the 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.

Faculty and student representation in UPR-Ponce governing bodies are guaranteed thorough the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate, UPR-Ponce Administrative Board, Student Council, student organizations among others, ensuring participation of all constituents in the decision-making process.

**Suggestion:**

- Given the frequent change in the position of UPR Ponce Chancellor in

the past five years, the institution should closely monitor the evaluation process utilized to assess Dr. Leonardo Morales and document its results.

**Recommendations:** none

**Requirements:** none

### **Administration (Standard 5)**

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

UPR Ponce has an administrative structure that supports, enables, and facilitates the learning process, research, and institutional improvement. Duties and responsibilities of administrators and academic leaders are established and published. The process for selecting the UPR-Ponce leadership is defined in the UPR General By-Laws.

Deans of Academic, Student, and Administrative Affairs are appointed by the chancellor, endorsed by the president and approved by the Governing Board. These officers have authority and accountability for policy development and decision-making. Additional chairpersons include Planning and Institutional Research, External Resources, Budget, and the Information Systems officers.

Administrative leaders traditionally come from the ranks of the institution and are selected and evaluated by established assessment processes for administrators, which are established in the UPR General By-Laws. The administration provides informational updates to all constituents using a variety of media, speaking to open communication and transparency. 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. However, it would be valuable to the institution to assess the rationale and reasoning of why 51% do not believe this is the case.

There is a clear assessment model including the use of a multiple-audit system, which is utilized for administrators, and the effectiveness of administrative structures and services at the institution. Based on findings, plans for improvement are generated to ensure the assessment loop is closed.

**Suggestion:**

- The institution should review and assess findings from the 2014 Self-Study perception survey, identify areas of opportunity, and ensure that a larger percentage of non-faculty staff have proper access to information to allow them to make recommendations about important issues pertaining to the institution.

**Recommendations:** none.

**Requirements:** none

## Chapter 5

### Student Admissions and Retention (Standard 8) and Student Support Services (Standard 9)

The team's judgment is that the institution appears to be in compliance with both standards.

#### Student Admissions and Retention (Standard 8)

##### Summary of evidence and findings

The admissions process is centralized for the eleven campuses of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) system; the admission criteria are clearly outlined and support and reflect the university's mission. The UPR-Ponce has developed and implemented admissions practices to assist students through the process. The admissions information is available to assist the prospective student in making informed decisions; for example, printed brochures are available, as well as an online tutorial that explains the online admission application and the process. The Admissions Office and the Office of Planning and Institutional Research monitor admission trends.

Information regarding criteria for admission to specific academic programs is available to students once their eligibility has been established by the centralized system. The Admissions Office follows up with students that have been admitted to UPR-Ponce and assists those who were placed on a waiting list in choosing alternate options.

The university has developed criteria to establish equivalencies between

courses taken at other institutions. The Registrar's Office maintains a table of equivalencies, which are updated as departments revise their curricula. The information is easily available to prospective transfer students.

The Admissions Office first communicates comprehensive information to prospective students regarding financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, and refunds. The Financial Aid Office then provides timely information and offers individualized advice where appropriate.

First-to-second-year retention rates are commensurate with those of other public institutions in Puerto Rico and above national averages. Academic departments have developed retention plans; on the other hand, graduation rates have remained flat.

The university uses results from the National Survey for Student Engagement and the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory to determine the extent to which students are satisfied with services. More direct assessment evidence is needed.

**Commendation:**

- There is high satisfaction with services and timely response to inquiries by the enrollment services offices: admissions, registrar, and financial aid.

**Suggestions:**

- The university should develop a university-wide retention and graduation plan, to include not just academic departments, but also support programs.
- The university should consider adding some direct measures going beyond the NSSE, the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, their Self-Study Perception Survey, and other student satisfaction surveys to determine whether their programs are having the desired impact on student retention and graduation.

**Recommendation:** none

**Requirements:** none

**Student Support Services (Standard 9)**



## Summary of evidence and findings

The Dean of Student Affairs supervises most student support services. The student support services include counseling services, health services, the quality of life office, veteran services, the student ombudsperson, and the student recreation center, whose work is designed to address the identified needs of the student population. Academic services include the Technological Assistance Office, which provides services for students with disabilities, as well as the Center of Academic Support for Students and Faculty. Opportunities for extracurricular activities and student leadership development are widely available. Personnel with the appropriate credentials and experience staff offices adequately.

The majority of the UPR Ponce student population is traditional age; most of them begin their college career at UPR Ponce, and come predominantly from the UPR Ponce's assigned geographical area. The office of the Dean of Student Affairs develops a profile of freshman students through a questionnaire that requests information regarding their interests, expectations, academic goals, educational background, and other relevant data.

The university has established policies and procedures to ensure that students' academic records are adequately safeguarded, as well as for maintenance and accuracy of records. Students are made aware of their right to confidentiality via brochures, website, and other publications. All students sign the consent form for disclosure of directory information as part of the EDFU 3005 course (Personal Development and College Success Orientation Seminar for new students). Some student records are maintained electronically, such as registration and financial aid information. However, student academic progress records are kept in paper form with no comprehensive, reliable back-up system.

Academic advisement is a responsibility of the faculty, as stated in Article 65.2 of the UPR General By-Laws. Students expressed satisfaction with advisement, whether the faculty, the program directors or the counselors provided it.

Students participating in athletic teams are regulated by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles, norms, and procedures that govern other institutional programs. They are given tuition waivers and provided support services, such as tutoring.

Students are informed of procedures for filing complaints and grievances and are provided assistance by the Student Ombudsperson, who reports directly to the chancellor. Information on rights, responsibilities, policies, and processes is provided via publications, class presentations, new student orientation, and in the EDFU 3005 course. Email is also a common medium for disseminating information about new or revised academic policies, discipline policies, and rules.

The university has established ongoing assessment of student support services via satisfaction surveys. The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) conducts surveys of alumni and graduating students' perceptions of all campus services. Each support service office has an assessment plan, which is implemented in a three-year cycle. Assessment methods rely primarily on indirect measures. Survey results show an overall satisfaction with support services. For example, according to the *2014 National Survey of Students Engagement (NSSE)* and the *2013-2014 Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey*, UPR-Ponce exceeded the national satisfaction level in many indicators. Some examples on the utilization of assessment results for improvement are available, but not prevalent.

**Suggestions:**

- The registrar and other key offices should utilize FERPA waiver forms.
- Student support service units should develop in-house assessment tools that can provide more specific information on the areas that need improvement, as well as develop action plans for using assessment results.

**Recommendations:** none

**Requirements:** none

**Chapter 6**  
**Faculty (standard 10)**

The team's judgment is that the institution appears to be in compliance with the standard.

## Summary of evidence and findings

The UPR-Ponce has a qualified and experienced faculty with responsibilities of teaching, research, and service to achieve the institutional mission. The total number of faculty has increased during the last five years, but the number of tenured faculty has decreased. Most faculty hold at least a master's degree, but those with a doctoral degree, although increased significantly in the last years, represent only 37%. The faculty-to-student ratio has been constant at 16:1, although it isn't consistent among different departments. The faculty profile is diverse in gender and age.

The UPR's General By-Laws have clear, defined and articulated policies on recruitment, retention, tenure, promotion, evaluation, professional development, roles and responsibilities of faculty, providing an efficient framework of expectations and guidelines. Academic freedom is declared and perceived as a right of every faculty member and there have been no filed claims in this regard.

The faculty participates in the decision-making process through many committees. The UPR-Ponce Academic Senate and the Board of Governors have defined structures for faculty participation in committees such as professional development, accreditation, curriculum, assessment, and personnel matters.

Faculty professional development is a priority for UPR-Ponce; however, progress in this area has been impeded by the financial situation. A plan adopted by the institution promotes faculty development in the areas of instruction, technology and research, to respond to students' needs. UPR-Ponce provides support to faculty for their participation in internal and external academic and cultural activities, professional leaves and sabbaticals for the completion of doctoral degrees, and publications and research activities, as well as off-campus professional development activities.

The Academic Support Center for Students and Faculty includes initiatives to bring pedagogical training to faculty, especially in the area of technology. The Institute of Educational and Thought Development and the Interuniversity Consortium of the Knowledge Society promote critical

thinking, communication, and collaboration among faculty and students from other higher education institutions for the continuous acquisition of knowledge and to support the growth of the community.

Faculty are regularly evaluated by peers, students, and the program directors, with the exception of tenured professors in the top rank. Additionally, rubrics utilized in faculty evaluations are extremely dated. In the Senior Exit Survey, 95% of alumni and graduating students rate the quality of teaching as excellent or good. On the other hand, interviews with current students suggest a perception that their opinions regarding teacher evaluation are not heard or used to generate change.

The NSSE suggests that UPR-Ponce faculty performance is below average in Student-Faculty Interaction and Effective Teaching Practices. Some faculty expressed the opinion that student dissatisfaction may be a problem of transition from high school to the university, the lack of knowledge about procedures, and hesitancy to seek help or advice early.

Currently, the faculty average teaching load is within the 18-21 credit-hour limit established by the UPR-Ponce Administrative Board. The workload has become onerous because of the many duties assigned to full-time faculty, mostly for service to the university.

#### **Commendation:**

- The faculty is to be congratulated for its commitment to the institution and the students it serves.

#### **Suggestions:**

- The university should balance the student-to-faculty ratio amongst the various degree programs.
- The university should investigate ways of supporting faculty working with first-year students.
- The university should identify funding sources to improve faculty development in new pedagogies, technology, and research.
- The university should work with the UPR Central Office to continue their efforts to increase the number of tenure-track faculty positions.

**Recommendation:**

- The university should update the faculty evaluation rubrics, consider increasing the weight of the student evaluations in the faculty evaluation process, and periodically evaluate top ranked professors.

**Requirements:** None

## Chapter 7

### **Educational Offerings (Standard 11), General Education (Standard 12) and Related Educational Activities (Standard 13)**

The team's judgment is that the institution appears to be in compliance with all three standards.

#### **Educational Offerings (Standard 11)**

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

The UPR-Ponce offers 12 baccalaureate and three associate programs. Four of the baccalaureate degrees account for approximately 50% of the enrollment. Articulated agreement programs, such as Land Surveying and Topography, (Liberal) Arts, and Education, are intended for transfer. In 2005, only one program enjoyed external accreditation; currently seven programs have such accreditation. Programs vary widely in the number of credits required to obtain the degree—from 125-138 for the baccalaureate and 69-72 for the associate. Communication to students regarding mission, learning objectives, and academic programs is provided through the website, brochures, and orientations. The self-study processes for professional accrediting agencies provide additional evidence of academic excellence.

Each major is divided into four components: general education, specialization, specialization-related, and electives. The self-study notes that this allows students to link intellectual ideas across a broad spectrum, although it is unclear how the general education program specifically and systematically functions across the university. Each program has a capstone course, which, together with additional departmental courses, appears to be the main source for assessing the programmatic student learning outcomes as well as the general education component.

The UPR-Ponce cites a full-time/part-time faculty ratio of 59/41, although this number appears to have declined since the publication of the self-study. The university is attempting to increase the proportion of faculty holding terminal degrees. Indications are that UPR-Ponce is equipped to deliver the academic program appropriately and to move forward.

The self-study discusses the several university committees that guide the curriculum process for both academic programs and general education. Faculty and departments play a primary role in the addition of new courses and the modification of the scope and sequence of existing curricula. Less activity is noted in the area of deleting courses that are infrequently offered or that have low enrollments. Programs that carry external accreditation are reviewed regularly in compliance with the expectations of the external accreditor.

UPR-Ponce's responsiveness to trends and community needs in terms of curriculum development is highly congruent with its mission. For example, an innovative emphasis area on rehabilitation services was recently added to the mental health and forensic psychology areas. The non-credit area is also very responsive in this vein, providing new courses annually as the need arises.

An examination of the curricular scope and sequence of the most highly enrolled majors reveals that academic programs demonstrate appropriate breadth, depth, and rigor. Program goals are stated in terms of student learning outcomes (SLO). Course syllabi incorporate SLOs and these are generally stated so as to be demonstrable and measurable. The UPR-Ponce has a highly detailed assessment plan for academic programs and the responsibility for assessment of programs and student learning outcomes falls to the department and to the Student Learning Assessment Committee.

Learning resources, facilities, instructional equipment, library services, and professional library staff appear to be adequate to support the institution's educational programs, and librarians take an active role in supporting instruction. There has been very modest growth in the number of titles in the last five years, but significant growth in the number of electronic resources. The significant remodeling of the library in 2008 appears to have greatly improved facilities and access to learning and instructional technology. The number of student downloads of articles is impressive when compared to other UPR institutions. Students surveyed in 2011 report general satisfaction with the library's services. There is positive evidence of collaboration among professional library staff, faculty, and administrators at UPR-Ponce. Programs in general promote student use of a variety of information and learning resources as is evidenced in a review of sample

syllabi.

In response to increasing demand for academic support services, there has been a recent effort to establish a tutoring center to address needs across disciplines and the dedicated space is closely tied to academic affairs. There are plans to expand this important learning resource and support. As there is no developmental education program *per se*, efforts are made through tutoring to provide academic support for students who may be underprepared for college-level work.

Information regarding the full range of articulation agreements that the university has is listed in detail in terms of recommended pathways in the catalog and UPR Ponce has 52 agreements, which appear to be very solid articulation and transfer agreements/contracts for its programs. Some agreements' pathways require that students complete a high number of credits per semester in order to be ready to transfer in two years. Interviews with students, faculty, and others revealed that some courses do not transfer seamlessly to receiving institutions. The appeal process appears to be decentralized in the departments, although it appears to occasionally rise to the level of the academic dean, and many students seem to be unaware that these decisions may be appealed or how to do it.

There are many training opportunities for adult learners, including literacy training, GED training, and enrichment classes. In addition, the UPR-Ponce offers an Evening Program through which most of the academic departments offer credit and professional improvement courses.

**Commendation:**

- The UPR-Ponce is very responsive in terms of program and course development to the needs of its students and its community.

**Suggestions:**

- The university should examine the minimum number of credits required for completion of each degree.
- The university should further implement the expansion of the academic Tutoring Center.

**Recommendation:**

- The university should work with the UPR Central Office to establish a mechanism to ensure that transfer agreements/contracts are being honored by UPR receiving institutions and communicate this broadly to students.

**Requirement:** None

## **General Education (Standard 12)**

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

UPR-Ponce's general education component, which is shared to varying extents by all majors, emphasizes nine competencies, as adopted by the Academic Senate in 2007-2008. The university has clearly aligned the competencies for the general education component with the university's mission and these are appropriate to the scope and purpose of general education as described in the *Characteristics of Excellence*.

The general education component incorporates both knowledge and skill areas and these are integrated with general disciplinary exposure. General education components are required to align with student transfer policies. Programs differ in the percentage of the curriculum that addresses the general education competencies, although all programs are required to incorporate these competencies.

While the self-study provides examples of how some departments report progress on certain competencies, the exact method of assessment of the general education competencies in all of the disciplines is not specified. Capstone and other courses do not appear to necessarily address all competencies in general education. The description of the general education program appears in the catalog in the section "Academic Programs"; however, it is not view as a holistic program. Consequently, it is unclear how the university assures that students are exposed to, develop, and are systematically assessed on general education competencies.

The UPR-Ponce has clearly given considerable thought to the design of its general education component and to the assessment of some of the articulated outcomes. Competencies have been mapped to courses; however, the exact method of assessment for each one is not included in the self-study, and general education does not appear to be presented nor assessed holistically as a program. Some of the assessment appears survey based, rather than course- or program-embedded direct assessment.



**Commendation:**

- The general education component is highly congruent with the university mission. The UPR-Ponce has taken seriously the earlier MSCHE guidance to develop a new general education component with appropriate competencies.

**Suggestions:**

- The university should systematically articulate and communicate to students the importance of general education and the reinforcement of its outcomes in the programs.
- The university should identify a nucleus of existing course options across all programs, as referred to in the description of the general education component, to satisfy specific general education competencies.

**Recommendation:**

- The university should strengthen the articulation of general education as a holistic program and assess its outcomes.

**Requirement:** none

### Related Educational Activities (Standard 13)

**Summary of Key Evidence and Developments**

Students who score below a 625 on the College Board Mathematics Achievement Test are encouraged, but not required, to take a diagnostic test to identify areas for improvement. The UPR-Ponce does not have a developmental education program *per se*, though it provides support services to help students to accomplish their educational goals with workshops and tutoring programs developed by the Academic Support Center for Students and Faculty (ASCSF). Three active math centers support students. No developmental program is in place for language or reading, although the recent initiative to enhance a nascent tutoring center may help address student needs in this area. Currently, individual professors assess students in their classes and many attempt to meet the varying developmental needs of the students in the class.

In accordance with the institutional mission, the Continuing Education and Professional Studies Division (CEPSD) of UPR-Ponce provides credit and non-credit academic offerings, as well as educational opportunities to create awareness about lifelong learning in accordance with the Strategic Plan. Non-credit offerings cover a wide range of options, from enrichment to industry workshops, to pre-college summer offerings, to test-prep courses, to courses for certification or recertification. The university strives to meet the needs of local organizations and industries for non-credit courses and trainings. Assessment for non-credit courses consists of student evaluation of courses. The assessment results show that students taking noncredit courses are satisfied. Division personnel are committed to providing appropriate services for their evening and weekend students.

ASCIENDE and CAP are programs designed for high school students. ASCIENDE is a dual-enrollment program that allows students to start college early by taking classes on campus before completing high school. CAP is a non-credit summer offering that facilitates students' transition to college life, helping them to define their careers.

The Evening University of the UPR-Ponce aligns with the institutional mission, providing educational opportunities and continuous learning for the community. The CEPSD enrollment evidences a general increase during the three years previous to the self-study. Credit offerings in the Evening University are staffed and evaluated by the individual departments. There is a tuition differential—the per-credit tuition is higher for evening students. Day students may pay the differential via their financial aid. The division is in the process of expanding offerings to Saturdays.

The Ponce Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (PRISE) evidences the commitment of the UPR-Ponce with its mission of providing out-of-class opportunities for intellectual growth, collaboration, respect and knowledge for their students.

The UPR-Ponce does not offer distance education courses or programs. Nevertheless, faculty are currently being trained through UPR-Aguadilla to be certified to teach courses at a distance and there are plans to institute distance offerings at UPR-Ponce.

**Suggestions:**

- The university should continue efforts to institute distance education offerings.
- The university should continue efforts to expand evening and weekend credit offerings to meet the changing needs of the student body and the community.

**Recommendations:** none**Requirements:** none

## Chapter 8

### **Institutional Assessment (Standard 7) and Assessment of Student Learning (Standard 14)**

The team's judgment is that the institution appears to be in compliance with both standards.

#### **Institutional Assessment (Standard 7)**

##### **Summary of evidence and findings**

The UPR-Ponce has developed and implemented a comprehensive yet sustainable assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards. The university began to focus on assessment 20 years ago, and, as a result, has created a culture of assessment that is evident throughout every chapter of their self-study report. Offices and departments across campus are all engaged in their own decentralized assessment efforts.

The institution has a formal committee and reporting structure that monitors and supervises the assessment functions, organized around seven committees, including the Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal, the Institutional Assessment Committee, the Student Learning Assessment Committee, the Student Services and Programs Assessment Committee, the Administrative Services Assessment Committee, the Chancellor's Offices Assessment Committee, and the General Education Assessment Committee. Offices generally submit their assessment reports, but, in several cases, have

failed to do so.

The university produces an annual Institutional Assessment Plan. The assessment done in the various offices follows a three-year plan and includes both direct and indirect data. They produce annual institutional effectiveness reports. Offices and departments complete their Closing the Assessment Cycle of the Previous Year form, in which they demonstrate how the assessment process, rooted in the institutional mission, informs institutional improvement. Indeed, they have many examples of how they have used assessment data to improve institutional effectiveness. The institutional assessment functions have sufficient resources and staffing to facilitate an ongoing and improving assessment process.

**Commendation:**

- The university should be commended on a sophisticated, complete, sustainable, and useful assessment process.

**Suggestions:**

- The university should continue to maintain its current level of support for assessment.
- The university should continue to use the Self-Study Perception Survey as a regular component of its assessment process.

**Recommendation:**

- The university should establish a mechanism to ensure that all required assessment reports are submitted as scheduled.

**Requirement:** none

**Assessment of Student Learning (Standard 14)**

**Summary of evidence and findings**

The UPR-Ponce has developed and implemented a comprehensive yet sustainable assessment of student learning that demonstrates student achievement of institutional, program, and course competencies. The

culture of assessment is evident throughout the academic departments.

A formal committee, the Student Learning Assessment Committee, monitors and provides support for the student learning assessment functions and processes for each academic department. The Student Learning Assessment Coordinator oversees the assessment of student learning throughout the academic programs and prepares an annual report documenting the assessment results of all academic departments.

The General Education Assessment Committee is relatively new. A pilot was begun in the current semester to assess some general education competencies and to determine a model for assessment of general education. Although this committee has begun to build upon the institutional structures, significant work is needed in this area.

Student learning assessment includes both direct and indirect measurements. The assessment includes sufficient benchmarking to enable the university to evaluate the quality of its academic programs. The institution holds annual assessment fora where assessment results are communicated and discussed.

Departments complete annual assessment reports, in which they demonstrate how the assessment process, rooted in the institutional mission, informs academic improvement. Indeed, many examples show how departments have used assessment data to improve their academic programs.

**Commendation:**

- The university should be commended for nurturing a culture of assessment that is evident at the departmental level.

**Suggestions:** none

**Recommendation:**

- The team supports the institution's own recommendation to firmly establish assessment of the General Education Competencies at the institutional level.

**Requirement: None**

## **VII. Summary of Recommendations for Continuing Compliance and Requirements**

The team has made 5 recommendations, as follow by chapters

**Chapter 6 – Faculty (standard 10)**

**Chapter 7 – Educational Offering (Standard 11) and General Education (standard 12)**

**Chapter 8 - Institutional Assessment (Standard 7) and Assessment of Student Learning (Standard 14)**

## **VI. Summary of Compliance**

Based on a review of the institution’s self-study and appendices, interviews, and other documents reviewed during the visit, the team draws the conclusion that the institution is in compliance.