

University of Puerto Rico at Ponce



SELF-STUDY REPORT

Submitted to:

Middle States Commission on Higher Education



2025

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ACRONYMS

AIDP-Annual Institutional Data Profile

AS-Academic Senate

BUSO-Bonafide Union of Security Officers

CA-Central Administration

COL SPACE-Computer-Oriented Learning Space

COPA-Council on Post-Secondary Accreditation

DCPS-Department of Counseling and Psychological Services

DCEPS- Division of Continuing Education and Professional Studies

EAP-Employee Assistance Program

EC-Executive Committee

ECIR-Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal

EDA-Economic Development Administration

EEO-Equal Employment Opportunity

EPA-Environmental Protection Agency

FAAFA-Financial Advisory Authority and Fiscal Agency

FERPA-Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

GB-Governing Board

GEC-General Education Competencies

GPA-Grade Point Average

HEERF-Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund

HIPAA-Health Insurance Portability and Accountability

HSP- Honor Study Program

IAC-Institutional Assessment Coordinator

INTASC-Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium

IPEDS-Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System Reports

ISO-Information System Office

LSC-Learning Skills Center

MSEIP-Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program

NIFA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture

NIH-National Institute of Health

NSF-National Science Foundation

NSSE-National Survey of Student Engagement

OEG-Office of Government Ethics

OPIR-Office of Planning and Institutional Research

OSD-Office for Students with Disabilities

OSHA-Occupational Safety and Health Administration

PASEAS-Pathway for Achieving Students Engagement and Academic Success

PI-Principal Investigators

PIB- Postsecondary Institutions Board

PRCHE-Puerto Rico Council on Higher Education

UPR-Ponce Self-Study Report

PRISE-Ponce Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement

PROMESA-Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act

PD-Project Directors

PRDCED-Puerto Rico's Department of Commerce and Economic Development

PR-INBRE- PR IDEA Network Biomedical Excellence

RISC-Rehabilitation and Integrated Services Center

RSC-Research Support Center

SARA-State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements

SWE-Society of Women Engineers

SIS-Student Information System

UPR-Ponce-University of Puerto Rico at Ponce

UPR-University of Puerto Rico

USDA-United States Department of Agriculture

USDE-United States Department of Education

USO-University Student Ombudsperson

VEDC-Virtual Education Development Center

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Executive Summary



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early in 2021, a Self-Study Executive Committee, a Steering Committee, and seven working groups with broad constituent participation were named. Their goal was to examine the extent to which UPR-Ponce is meeting the accreditation standards and the requirements of affiliation, within the context of the institutional mission and goals. Institutional priorities and federal regulations were also considered in the analysis. The following is a brief summary of some of the major findings of the report, organized by the seven standards established by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE).

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

UPR-Ponce has been consistent in using its institutional mission and goals to guide departmental and program missions and goals and in ensuring that its institutional policies and procedures are consistent with them. UPR-Ponce's mission and vision are in accordance with the mission and vision of the University of Puerto Rico as a system. There is evidence that the institutional goals are realistic, appropriate to higher education, and consistent with the mission. UPR-Ponce conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and uses the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal.

Standard 2: Ethics and Integrity

As stated in its By-Laws, UPR-Ponce promotes sound ethical practices and respect for individuals through its teaching, research, service, use of technology, administrative practices, and labor relations. Evidence indicates that the UPR-Ponce promotes a climate that fosters respect among all members of the university community. The institution is committed to practicing fairness in dealing with its individual members and to ensuring that their rights are protected. The standards and procedures for faculty and non-faculty appointments, promotions, and tenure are fair, impartial and clearly articulated, and the institution provides multiple means for the advancement and development of its faculty.

Standard 3: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience

The educational offerings of UPR-Ponce reflect and promote its mission and goals, and are of sufficient content, breadth, length, and academic rigor for college level programs. The curricular sequences of the academic programs foster coherent learning experiences, enhance development of research and independent thinking, and promote a synthesis of learning. UPR-Ponce offers a wide variety of programs to satisfy the needs of the southern region in the areas of arts and sciences. All instructional programs at UPR-Ponce are offered in fields of study consistent with the institution's mission. UPR-Ponce undergraduate curricula are organized to enable students to develop their intellectual abilities and obtain professional training. Retention and graduation rates at the institutional level are similar to those reported nationally and compare favorably to other UPR units. UPR-Ponce has a General Education Component (GEC). It

promotes the development of critical thinking, scientific skills, and ethical values, among others. These competencies are integrated across the curriculum. Assessment of the effectiveness of programs is constantly done. Professionally accredited programs have completed their reaccreditation or periodic review processes maintaining the good standing status from their respective accrediting agencies.

Standard 4: Support of the Student Experience

The institution provides support services to help students be successful in their educational goals. Evidence indicates that UPR-Ponce has clearly stated ethical policies and processes to admit, retain, and facilitate the students' success. The Office of Information Systems provides the university community with efficient and effective information systems technologies. This office guarantees their proper use and management according to institutional policies and manages technical support, data storage, telecommunications, servers, and email accounts. Policies and procedures regarding evaluation and acceptance of transfer credits are clearly stated and informed. Assessment results of student satisfaction of support services are used for their continued improvement.

Standard 5: Educational Effectiveness Assessment

The UPR-Ponce has a strong assessment culture and relies on a continuous and systematic institutional assessment process. The institution has an assessment framework designed to create effective channels of communication to share and discuss the assessment results at all levels, thus facilitating decision making for institutional renewal, planning, and budget allocation. The Institutional Assessment Plan guides the assessment activities in all departments, programs, and offices toward improving institutional effectiveness. Assessment Forums are used to share results of the different academic departments and offices. Institutional assessment is performed in each major area through multiple, direct and indirect, qualitative, and quantitative methods. The institution adheres to a structured protocol to periodically assess the efficacy of its evaluation methodologies, deeply rooted in its Institutional Assessment Plan. The institutional approach to planning and budgeting is assessment-driven and results in tangible improvements across academic and administrative areas.

Standard 6: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement

UPR-Ponce has demonstrated success in the execution of its strategic and operational plans, aligning effectively with its mission. In spite of budget reductions, by implementing sound management and cost control policies, the institution has been able to fulfill its mission and goals by offering quality services to its constituents. UPR-Ponce consistently produces financial reports that adhere meticulously to the law and all applicable regulations, ensuring a high level of compliance and transparency. Evidence indicates that the institution has clearly documented and communicated planning and improvement processes that provide for constituent participation. Curricular, technological, and infrastructural improvements have been attained through strategic planning based on assessment results and environmental scanning.

Standard 7: Governance, Leadership, and Administration

UPR University Law and established policies offer a well-defined structure that effectively guides and governs the institution, with clear lines of authority being adhered to. They play a vital role in directing and facilitating effective governance and institution functioning. These guidelines are shared with the community through both print and electronic media. Members of governing bodies possess the necessary expertise to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities. Examination of constituent participation in institutional-level decision-making reveals a satisfactory balance, with representation from faculty, non-faculty, and students across various decision-making levels. The university's administrative structure provides stability, even in the face of administrative changes at higher levels. Evidence indicates that the administrative structures and services undergo periodic assessments to enhance their effectiveness and performance within the university community.



Introduction



INTRODUCTION

The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce (UPR-Ponce) is one of the eleven campuses of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) and the only public institution of higher education in the southern part of the island. It is located in the city of Ponce, Puerto Rico, approximately 67 miles from the capital city of San Juan. UPR-Ponce is headed by a Chancellor who presides over the Academic Senate, the Administrative Board, and faculty meetings and holds the maximum academic and administrative authority of the institution. Dr. Tessie Cruz-Rivera was appointed Chancellor on July 1, 2019. She is a Professional Counselor at the Counseling and Psychological Services Department and prior to being appointed Chancellor, she was the Chancellor's Special Assistant.

Established in 1969 and first accredited by Middle States in 1970, UPR- Ponce was originally authorized to offer associate degrees and transfer programs. This campus was founded to bring the state university closer to the southern region, offering quality education at an affordable cost to its inhabitants, and promoting the social and economic development of this zone. Nevertheless, students from all around the island select UPR-Ponce to continue higher education studies.

In 1982, the institution 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 170-1981-1982 of the PRCHE changed the institution's name to Ponce Technological University College.

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 through Certification 151-1997-1998. This autonomy meant the separation of the institution from the Administration of Regional Colleges and led to the creation of the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board, deliberative and representative bodies of the university community.

In 2000, the Puerto Rico Council on Higher Education authorized a change of name for the institution to University of Puerto Rico at Ponce. In 2002, the former President of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), Antonio García Padilla, Esq., designated the chancellors for the different campuses of the UPR System. This action allowed the beginning of a new administrative cycle, and, at the same time, the implementation of the work plans that the chancellors presented in the selection process.

The original academic offer consisted of the following technical programs: Accounting, Computer Sciences, Drafting, Commercial Management, Industrial Management, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning, Industrial Engineering Technology, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, as well as transfer programs in Arts and Sciences. One of the most important educational projects in Puerto Rico began with an enrollment of 361 students coming from different municipalities of the southern region and a faculty composed of 24 professors.

STATISTICAL INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

At present, the institution offers twelve bachelor's degrees, five associate degrees (technical programs), and 36 articulated transfer programs to other UPR campuses. These transfer programs provide students the opportunity to study during their first two years in UPR-Ponce and then move to another unit from the UPR System. Being located in an economically underdeveloped zone, UPR-Ponce promotes the economic and social development of the southern region by educating competent professionals in different disciplines aimed at fulfilling its stakeholders' needs. These circumstances fostered the development of new and unique academic offerings, such as Athletic Therapeutic, Psychology and Mental Health, Forensic Psychology, Biomedical Sciences, and Civil Engineering Technology in Architectural Drafting. It is important to mention that the current most subscribed academic programs are:

- Biomedical Sciences
- Athletic Therapeutic
- Biology
- Business Administration- Accounting
- Psychology and Mental Health

The emphasis of the academic programs is on undergraduate education to meet the needs of the community.

Total headcount enrollment for academic year 2022-2023 was 2,221. Ninety-one percent (91%) of the student population is enrolled full time. Approximately eighty-six percent (86%) receives financial aid, and fifty-five percent (55%) is female. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the student body is enrolled in bachelor's degree programs, seven percent (7%) in technical programs, and twelve percent (12%) in transfer programs. The remainder four percent (4%) was classified into other categories, such as professional studies.

For the academic year 2022-2023, the retention rate was seventy-seven percent (77%). The first to second year retention rates for the last five years average eighty percent (80%). The institutional graduation rate average for the last five years has reached forty-six percent (46%), which is similar to those reported nationally and compares favorably to other UPR units.

The institution has a legacy of over 50 years in which over 30,000 students have graduated. These students are now part of the labor force of Puerto Rico, United States, and many other countries around the world. In addition, around fifteen percent (15%) of the students admitted at the institution during the last three academic years were first-generation college students. UPR-Ponce is helping them to achieve progress for their whole family. That has positive results not only for their immediate family but for their entire communities. Consequently, it stimulates the economy of the island while forming well-cultured and wise citizens. In the academic year 2022-2023, 291 students graduated from UPR-Ponce.

The student body is served by 187 faculty and 207 non-faculty members. On average, the student/faculty ratio is 12:1. The 2022-2023 faculty profile revealed that 58 of the 80 full-time faculty were tenured, which represents 73%. Fifty-five percent (55%) percent held a doctoral

degree. Twenty percent (20%) of faculty were classified in the rank of full professor, ten percent (10%) associate professor, thirty-six percent (36%) assistant professor, and thirty-four percent (34%) instructor. Students and faculty have active participation in deliberative university bodies, such as Academic Senate, Administrative Board, University Board, and Governing Board.

Of the 394 employees, almost sixty percent (60%) are proud alumni of the institution. This is significant to mention because it demonstrates the important role UPR-Ponce has in its staff. Having been part of the university as students and now as employees has had a positive impact on their lives. In different interviews, they had expressed their feelings of gratitude and sense of high commitment to work and serve “our university”.

UPR-Ponce has been vital for the socio-economic development of the region. According to the Financial Student Aid standards, approximately fifty percent (50%) of UPR-Ponce students fall under poverty levels. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of students receive some kind of financial aid.

According to the Federal Reserve, public universities provide relief to students’ debt because they are more affordable and accessible than private ones. As part of the public system, UPR offers an additional benefit to the population since its tuition is under the National Public System costs. In addition, UPR-Ponce’s default rate for FY 2018 is 7.5%, which is lower than the average in Puerto Rico (10.0%).

Major Challenges

In recent years government fiscal problems have caused reductions in the budget assigned to the institution. As a countermeasure tuition fees, which have been very low during decades, have been raised and now are almost equal to those in private institutions. Additionally, recent catastrophic events like hurricanes María (2017) and Fiona (2022), a series of earthquakes (2019), and the COVID-19 pandemic have provoked many challenges to the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce. But despite difficult times, the institution has demonstrated a great deal of resilience and continues to fulfill its mission providing top quality higher education.

To improve retention, the institution has been strengthening its student support services and promoting additional extracurricular and co-curricular experiences that foster commitment to the learning process such as:

- Tutoring program
- Institutional Retention and Student Success Committee
- Digitalized reasonable accommodations processes
- Hybrid academic counselling process
- Math and Spanish remedial courses
- Emotional and psychological aid
- Continuous education to staff related to topics such as assertive communication, conflict management, and anxiety management

Providing high quality services is crucial to recruit, enroll, and retain students. A continuous improvement process is in place assessing all academic and supporting services annually which helps the decision-making process to be informed.

Furthermore, to face the decline in the K-12 population on the island, UPR-Ponce has created new academic programs in traditional and distance learning modalities to attract non-traditional students, therefore increasing institutional enrollment. These strategies have been outlined in the UPR-Ponce’s Strategic Plan entitled “Vision 2026”.

ABOUT THE SELF-STUDY

During the academic year of 2021-2022 and in preparation for the reaccreditation process, meetings and training workshops for administrators, faculty, and non-faculty were provided by the Institutional Accreditation Coordinator. In February 2022, the Chancellor appointed the Executive Committee (EC) to lead the reaccreditation process. All the EC members participated in the MSCHE Self-Study Institute held in October and November 2022. Table 1 shows the composition of this committee.

Table 1
Executive Committee

Member	Title
Dr. Jennifer Alicea, Chair	Full Professor, Social Sciences Chairperson, Acting English Department Chairperson, Institutional Accreditation Coordinator, and MSCHE Liaison
Mr. Pedro I. Martínez, Co-chair	MBA, Sub-Director Finance Office
Ms. Anayarí Batista, Executive Assistant	MA. Ed., Admissions Office Chairperson

Also, the Steering Committee was named, and it is composed by the following members (Table 2):

Table 2
Steering Committee

Member	Title
Dr. Jennifer Alicea, Chair	Full Professor, Social Sciences Chairperson, Acting English Department Chairperson, Institutional Accreditation Coordinator, and MSCHE Liaison
Mr. Pedro I. Martínez, Co-chair	MBA, Finance Office Sub-Director
Ms. Anayarí Batista, Executive Assistant	MA. Ed., Admissions Office Chairperson
Dr. José V. Madera, Standard I Chair	Assistant Professor, Spanish Department
Dr. Michele Beauchamp, Standard II Chair	Associate Professor, Humanities Department
Dr. Wilfredo Ayala, Standard III Chair	Full Professor, Biology Department
Prof. Dalmid Correa, Standard IV Chair	Assistant Professor, Business Administration and Computer Sciences Department Acting Chairperson
Dr. Neyla Rivera, Standard V Chair	Associate Professor, Education Department, and Institutional Assessment Coordinator
Dr. Diana López, Standard VI Chair	Associate Professor, Computer Science Department, and Office of Planning and Institutional Research Chairperson
Dr. Milton Rivera, Standard VII Chair	Full Professor, Chemistry-Physics Department Chairperson
Dr. Michelle Méndez, Editor	Assistant Professor, English Department

Following a training session, the Steering Committee set to work on the Self-Study Design, which was completed in March 2023. On April 11, 2023, Dr. Melisa Hardin, MSCHE liaison, visited UPR-Ponce. She met with different university groups and commended the Steering Committee for the Self-Study Design.

During the self-study process, additional meetings were held as needed. Dr. Suzan Harkness, Chair of the MSCHE Evaluation Team, visited the UPR-Ponce and met with different university groups in anticipation of the Self-Study visit.

Self-Study Organization

UPR-Ponce used a standards-based approach to evidence the alignment between institution's mission and the MSCHE requirements of affiliation and standards. The main goal was to carry out an integrated review of the institution's standing in relation to the seven standards that guide the MSCHE community. To that end, the following outcomes were established:

1. Provide evidence on how UPR-Ponce meets each of the 15 requirements of affiliation and seven MSCHE standards and achieve reaffirmation of accreditation.
2. Address areas that have opportunities for continuous improvement and innovation.

3. Engage the university community in an inclusive and transparent process that actively and deliberately seeks to involve members from all its sectors.

The chapters of the self-study are organized by standard and the corresponding requirements of affiliation are identified. The information in each standard is presented in accordance with the order of the criteria. To facilitate analysis, the narrative was divided into subtopics. At the end of each chapter, conclusions and recommendations are presented.

Seven working groups, based on the seven MSCHE standards, were appointed to address the charges set for them. Forty-nine members representing UPR-Ponce's faculty, student, and non-faculty constituted these working groups. Each one was chaired by a Steering Committee member chosen for his/her proven expertise or interests. A roster of members of each of the working groups follows.

Working Group 1: Mission and Goals

- José V. Madera-chair, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Spanish Department
- Geoffrey Vega, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Engineering Department
- Hernando Valero, M.S., Full Professor, Business Administration and Computer Sciences Department
- Frances Torres, M.Ed., Assistant Professor, English Department
- Carmen Bracero, M.A., Full Professor, Chancellor's Special Assistant
- Enid Vidal, M.Ed., Administrative Secretary, Allied Health Sciences Department
- Paola Vargas, Elementary Education student

Working Group 2: Ethics and Integrity

- Michele Beauchamp-chair, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Humanities Department
- David Forestier, M.S., Full Professor, Biology Department
- Ana Nadal, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Spanish and Humanities Departments Chairperson
- Ericka Rodríguez, Ed. D., Human Resources Office Chairperson
- Maisie Pagán, B.A., Administrative Secretary V, Chancellor's Office
- Alejandro Ruiz, Biology student

Working Group 3: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience

- Wilfredo Ayala-chair, Ph.D., Full Professor, Biology Department
- Marilia Villafañe, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Education Department Chairperson
- Edda Rodríguez, Ed.D., Associate Professor, English Department
- José López, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Math Department
- Arline Torres, MBA, Moodle Functional Administrator, Center for Academic Support for Students and Faculty
- Anayará Batista, M.Ed., Admissions Office Chairperson
- Robert Torres, Business Administration student

Working Group 4: Support of the Student Experience

- Dalmid Correa-chair, MBA, Assistant Professor, Business Administration and Computer Sciences Department Acting Chairperson
- Marya Santiago, M.A., Registrar
- Emily Matos, M.A., Admissions Officer
- Mariel Nazario, M.A., Professional Counselor, Counseling and Psychological Services Department
- Jay Soto, Ed. D., Adelina Coppin Library Acting Chairperson
- Marisel Ramírez, Ed. D., Counseling and Psychological Services Department Chairperson
- Camelia Torres, Elementary Education student

Working Group 5: Educational Effectiveness Assessment

- Neyla Rivera-chair, Ed. D., Associate Professor, Education Department, and Institutional Assessment Coordinator
- Carmen Soto, Ed.D., PT, MA, DPT, Full Professor, Allied Health Sciences Department
- Maritza Rodríguez, MBA, Assistant Professor, Business Administration and Computer Sciences Department
- Jennifer Alicea, Ed. D., Full Professor, Social Sciences Chairperson, Acting English Department Chairperson, Institutional Accreditation Coordinator, and MSCHE Liaison
- Eunice Mercado, Ph.D., Full Professor, Chemistry and Physics Department
- Karimarie Díaz, B.A., Administrative Secretary IV, Pre School Center
- Sofía Robles, Social Sciences student

Working Group 6: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement

- Diana López-chair, DBA, Associate Professor, Computer Science Department, and Office of Planning and Institutional Research Chairperson
- Carlos Franceschi, BBA, Budget Office Chairperson
- Pedro I. Martínez, MBA, Sub-Director Finance Office
- Leisha Martínez, Ph.D., External Resources and Development Office Chairperson
- Eva Cabán, DBA, Continuing Education and Professional Studies Division Chairperson
- Romarie Mesa, MBA, Finance Office Chairperson
- Dalerys Feliciano, Social Sciences student

Working Group 7: Governance, Leadership, and Administration

- Milton Rivera-chair, Ph.D., Full Professor, Chemistry-Physics Department Chairperson
- Yannira Rodríguez, Ed.D., Full Professor, Office Systems Department
- Mayra Montero, Psy.D., Full Professor, Social Sciences Department
- Lourdes Ortíz, Ed.D., Associate Professor, English Department
- Celeida Vega, B.A., Administrative Secretary, Counseling and Psychological Services Department
- Gabriel Rodríguez, Physical Therapy student

Dr. Michelle Méndez, Assistant Professor from the English Department, was the editor of this document.

Methodology

UPR-Ponce has identified four institutional priorities that align with the Requirements of Affiliation and Standards for Accreditation: Innovation, Student Success and Satisfaction, Sustainability, and Service. These were selected based on the institutional mission and vision, current strategic plan, and the UPR System Strategic Plan to which the four of them are aligned. UPR-Ponce's constituents were presented with these priorities through an open process to encourage their participation in the review and presentation of recommendations, which strengthened this Self-Study Report.

Also, the priorities are framed within the present reality, that of the island, its southern region, and the institution: hurricanes, earthquakes, pandemic, demographic changes, and financial recession, among many other factors which have had a significant impact. Finally, these priorities will help to lead the institution towards the future. Following are the priorities and their definitions:

- **Innovation:** UPR-Ponce fosters academic and administrative innovation in this priority. Innovation refers to the renewal of academic offerings and the diversification of instructional delivery methods. These will allow greater institutional development and impact beyond geographical limitations, reaching traditional, non-traditional, and international students. Innovation of its academic offerings also includes the creation of new programs, professional certifications, double majors and minors, and a continuous curricular review. In terms of administrative innovation, it involves looking at existing processes with new eyes to make them more agile and effective. The implementation of new technologies and virtualization processes are key to achieving this endeavor. Institutional technological resources need to be continuously updated to effectively serve the institutional academic and operational needs.
- **Student Success and Satisfaction:** Increasing enrollment is extremely important. As a result, a new admission policy with recruitment strategies directed towards non-traditional students has been incorporated. Also, new media strategies targeting prospect students and a retention plan supported by student support services, academic counseling, tutoring, mentoring, and reviewing traditional teaching methodologies to address students' needs must be included into the institutional mindset and its regular processes. These services are being reinforced to enrich the student's college experience. Finally, retention, persistence, and graduation rates are considered as key student success indicators.

- **Sustainability:** The fiscal situation of the government has been affecting the University for many years. Therefore, initiatives and efforts to identify and implement external sources of income through institutional enterprises, philanthropy, grant proposals, and research are an institutional priority. UPR-Ponce is committed to achieving sustainability and to diversify its financial base. The sustainability priority leads every effort directed towards keeping institutional finances solid by obtaining revenues additional to the regular budget assigned by the UPR Central Administration. Other efforts to diversify institutional funding include expanding online education offerings and creating networks and alliances with public and private sectors to provide training and professional certificates, and to develop new opportunities for proposals and research.
- **Service:** Total involvement with the internal and external community and Puerto Rico at large has always, and will continue to be, one of the main institutional priorities. As a matter of fact, the service component is part of the institutional mission. Most UPR-Ponce students are not only required, but also encouraged, to give back to the community through service. This involvement means that the institution recognizes that the students need to prepare themselves to be professionals in their selected fields to meet the needs of the community in which they live and to which they will serve. UPR-Ponce also recognizes the importance of having community leaders, alumni, and other constituents directly providing input and ideas through academic programs advisory boards. These boards have provided sound recommendations that have enabled the institution to face different challenges as it moves forward fostering continuous improvement and academic excellence.

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

Even though the institution has its own assessment instruments that are annually used, UPR-Ponce has highly benefited from its participation in the 2023 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This is a study designed to obtain information about student participation in programs and activities that the institution provides for their learning and personal development that UPR-Ponce invests in for every accreditation cycle. Three hundred and two (302) UPR-Ponce students participated of which 176 (58%) were freshmen and 126 (42%) seniors.

Working groups' reports were submitted to the Executive Committee and revised based on recommendations made. After the Executive Committee examined the first draft of the Self-

Study Report, the revised edition was analyzed and reviewed by the Steering Committee. Recommendations were given and incorporated into the document. Then, the final draft was posted on the webpage and sent to the university community through the institutional email. All constituents were encouraged to respond with suggestions and corrections. The Executive Committee presented a summary of major findings and recommendations to various groups: faculty, students, non-faculty, and the Academic Senate. An open forum was also held to provide an additional opportunity for participation. Recommendations were vetted and selected for inclusion in the final Self-Study Report by the Executive Committee. Nonetheless, all the recommendations derived from the consultation process were informed to the Executive Committee of Institutional Renewal (ECIR). It is composed of the Chancellor, Deans, Office of Planning and Institutional Research Director, Finance Director, Budget Director, Institutional Assessment Coordinator, and the Audits Coordinator.



Standard 1: Mission and Goals



STANDARD 1: MISSION AND GOALS

The institution's mission defines its purpose within the context of higher education, the students it serves, and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals are clearly linked to its mission and specify how the institution fulfills its mission.

Requirement of Affiliation: 7

Institutional Priority: Service

Clearly defined mission and goals that are developed through appropriate collaborative participation by all who facilitate or are otherwise responsible for institutional development and improvement; are approved and supported by the governing body (Sub Criteria 1.a, 1.b, 1.c)

The mission of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce (UPR-Ponce) was developed in a collaborative manner with people who contribute to institutional development and renewal. The university community and constituents participate, collaborate, and express themselves in the governing bodies through faculty and staff meetings, the Academic Senate, Administrative Board, and the General Student Council, among others.

The official mission was approved by the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate through Certification 49-2013-2014 (Certification 60-2013-2014, for its English version) (Appendix 1.1.1). The mission statement is in accordance with the systemic UPR's mission and vision. The Academic Senate considered the university community recommendations submitted in both public hearings and written communications and devised the following mission statement:

“The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce is a teaching institution dedicated to the intellectual, humanistic, scientific, cultural, and ethical growth of its students. It is devoted to the integral development of citizens and professionals capable of contributing to a global society as critical, creative, and honest leaders committed to continuous learning and community service. It fosters equal access, academic rigor, enriching educational activities, and quality support services which contribute to the formation of graduates with a profile of academic excellence.

In all its undertakings, the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce promotes a democratic environment supportive of academic freedom, excellence, integrity, respect, tolerance, creativity, and research.”

The academic programs and the administrative offices approved their mission and goals based on the institutional one. The Academic, Student, and Administrative Affairs Deans collaborated with faculty and staff in this endeavor.

Address external as well as internal contexts and constituencies; Institutional goals that are realistic, appropriate to higher education, and consistent with mission; Goals that focus on student learning and related outcomes and on institutional improvement; are supported by administrative, educational, and student support programs and services (Sub criterion 1.b and Criteria 2 and 3)

To achieve its mission, UPR-Ponce has issued Certification 59-2008-2009 Academic Senate (Appendix 1.1.2) which set the following goals as indicated on Table 1.1. Institutional Goals are focused on student learning and institutional improvement.

Table 1.1
UPR-Ponce Institutional Goals

Focus	Institutional Goals
Student Learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To develop professionals who possess the knowledge, skills, and necessary disposition to contribute responsibly to their social, cultural, and environmental surroundings. 2. To offer and develop baccalaureate, associate, and transfer programs and other enriching educational experiences in response to the needs of society. 3. To cultivate knowledge through creative activities, research, and dissemination. 4. To strengthen support services in order to create an optimal environment for teaching and learning.
Institutional Improvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. To provide professional development opportunities to faculty and administrative personnel so that they may contribute to the enhancement of institutional quality. 6. To offer student support services that facilitate their adjustment to university life, enrich the educational experience, and contribute to their academic success. 7. To sustain effective articulation of university endeavors among the administration, students, faculty, administrative personnel, and the external community for the optimal development of its academic offerings. 8. To promote an effective planning process and resource allocations based on institutional mission and goals and use the results of institutional assessment for continuous improvement.

Source: Certification 59-2008-2009 AS

The mission and goals are aligned, and both respond to the institutional context and constituencies. Such alignment enables the UPR-Ponce’s governing bodies to use these goals as guidelines to develop new programs, to update their current ones and practices, and to evaluate institutional effectiveness. This can be evidenced by the diverse learning experiences that

provide the students with the knowledge, skills, and commitment to contribute to the island’s development as well-prepared professionals. Table 1.2 shows how the mission and goals are aligned and how they respond to the internal and external constituents.

Table 1.2
Mission, Goals, and Response to Context and Constituencies

Mission	Alignment with Institutional Goals	Response to the External and Institutional Context and Constituencies
<p>The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce is a teaching institution dedicated to the intellectual, humanistic, scientific, cultural, and ethical growth of its students.</p>	<p>1. To develop professionals who possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to contribute responsibly to their social, cultural, and environmental surroundings.</p>	<p>Courses provide transformative learning experiences that engage students in a broad range of programs, services, and opportunities.</p>
<p>It is devoted to the integral development of citizens and professionals capable of contributing to a global society as critical, creative, and honest leaders committed to continuous learning and community service.</p>	<p>2. To offer and develop baccalaureate, associate, and transfer programs and other enriching educational experiences in response to the needs of society. 3. To cultivate knowledge through creative activities, research, and dissemination. 4. To provide professional development opportunities to faculty and administrative personnel so that they may contribute to the enhancement of institutional quality.</p>	<p>Professors have integrated in their courses activities where students do research and apply classroom learning to real life situations in the community and in-service learning (Appendix 1.2.1).</p> <p>UPR-Ponce fosters students’ participation in community services projects as part of the courses’ objectives to help those who need it most by improving their quality of life of identified groups or organizations. The Academic Senate approved the Proposal for the Operationalization of the Community Service Component (Certification 32-2022-2023 AS) to guide the academic programs in the development of these projects (Appendix 1.2.2).</p> <p>The institution offers seminars and workshops for the professional development of its personnel (Appendix 1.3.1).</p>
<p>It fosters equal access, academic rigor, enriching educational activities, and quality support services which contribute</p>	<p>5. To strengthen support services in order to create an optimal environment for teaching and learning.</p>	<p>The institution has developed unique academic offerings, such as Athletic Therapeutic, Psychology and Mental Health, Forensic Psychology, Biomedical</p>

Mission	Alignment with Institutional Goals	Response to the External and Institutional Context and Constituencies
<p>to the formation of graduates with a profile of academic excellence.</p>	<p>6. To offer student support services that facilitate their adjustment to university life, enrich the educational experience, and contribute to their academic success.</p>	<p>Sciences, and Civil Engineering Technology in Architectural Drafting.</p> <p>Proposals for new academic programs have been submitted to governing bodies.</p> <p>Academic programs, such as Biology, Biomedical Sciences, Business Administration, Education, and Social Sciences have updated their curricular sequences.</p> <p>The Honor Study Program (HSP) enriches the students' collegial experience by providing them with a curriculum that fosters leadership, social responsibility, self-learning, and collaborative work.</p> <p>The Academic Senate Certification 58-2020-2021 approved the Distance Education Institutional Policy. UPR-Ponce offers a variety of course delivery methods, such as face-to-face, hybrid, and online (Appendix 1.2.3).</p> <p>Most of the faculty members are certified to teach on-line courses. Table 3.3 presents the specific numbers.</p> <p>The Virtual Education Development Center (VEDC) was established to provide services for the development of new online and hybrid courses.</p> <p>UPR-Ponce has dedicated efforts to increase the number of research programs and internships. The Ponce Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (PRISE) provides research experiences for students and opportunities to participate in science</p>

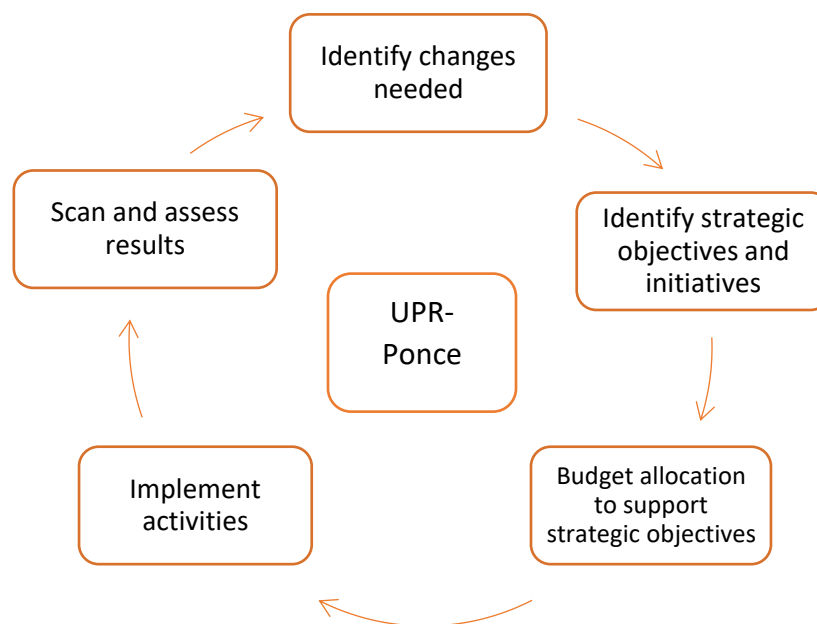
Mission	Alignment with Institutional Goals	Response to the External and Institutional Context and Constituencies
<p>In all its undertakings, the UPR-Ponce promotes a democratic environment supportive of academic freedom, excellence, integrity, respect, tolerance, creativity, and research.</p>	<p>6. To sustain effective articulation of university endeavors among the administration, students, faculty, administrative personnel, and the external community for the optimal development of its academic offerings.</p> <p>8. To promote an effective planning process and resource allocations based on institutional mission and goals and use the results of institutional assessment for continual improvement.</p>	<p>research internships, mainly in biomedical and biology areas.</p> <p>University policies on academic freedom support an open student/faculty learning environment and allow for honest dialogues both in and out of the classroom, thus enhancing student learning.</p> <p>Ten of UPR-Ponce’s academic programs obtained their professional reaccreditation affirmation demonstrating full compliance with all accreditation standards of their respective agency. https://www.uprp.edu/articulos/licencia-acreditacion/</p> <p>Three flagship projects are being developed in the institution as the Smart Hub that will enable UPR-Ponce to develop new lines of research, generate patents, and foster entrepreneurial ideas and emerging businesses; the Rehabilitation Center and Integrated Services, a unique interdisciplinary center for health-related fields in the southern region of Puerto Rico; and the Learning Skills Center, a practicum and tutoring center for different disciplines and services to external community. These projects are further explained in Standard 6.</p> <p>The Institutional Assessment Committee played a key role in the preparation of UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled “Vision 2026” and oversees the monitoring of the student learning outcomes articulated in the mission statement in a formal institution-wide assessment plan.</p>

UPR-Ponce has been constant in implementing its institutional mission and goals to guide departmental and program missions and goals and in ensuring that its institutional policies and procedures are consistent with them.

Guide faculty, administration, staff, and governing structures in making decisions related to planning, resource allocation, program and curricular development, and the definition of institutional and educational outcomes (Sub criterion 1.d)

The institution’s annual budgeting cycle links the mission, planning, budgeting, and allocation resource processes. The UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled “Vision 2026” provides the necessary guidelines to allow the ongoing processes. All these processes are mission centered and are used to develop and update programs and practices, and to evaluate institutional effectiveness. Figure 1.1 depicts the UPR-Ponce budget, planning, and resource allocation process.

Figure 1.1
UPR-Ponce Budget, Planning, and Resource Allocation Process



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

To justify allocation of funds, department chairpersons must align their requests to operational plans, assessment results, and the strategic goals of both UPR-Ponce and the UPR System strategic plans. This process is detailed in Standard 7.

Three times a year, the budget chairperson assesses institutional resources and submits reports, including current expenditures and account balances, to the Central Administration. This official works with the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) which coordinates and foresees the assessment processes of all the institutional units. Subsequently, these assessment results are used by the UPR-Ponce administration and the Executive Committee of Institutional Renewal (ECIR) to determine policies and budget allocations that ensure both the fulfillment of the institutional mission and continuous improvement of academic and administrative operations. Operational plans and budget requests are supplemented with assessment data compared against previous results and performance indicators to set continuous improvement practices. The Institutional Assessment Committee, under the direction of OPIR, coordinates and foresees the assessment processes of all institutional units. The assessment process is further explained in Standard 5.

It can be attested that the budget supports UPR-Ponce’s mission and goals considering five main categories as shown on Table 1.3. This division ensures that all areas are funded with the existing budget.

Table 1.3
Budget Categories that Support UPR-Ponce’s Mission and Goals

Category	Services Supported
Administrative areas	Administrative, operational, maintenance expenses, institutional expenses, and fringe benefits
Academic programs	Transfer, baccalaureate, and technical programs, summer sessions, continuing education, Honor Program, and strengthening research
Student services	Registrar’s office, extracurricular activities, the athletic program, and the Office for Students with Disabilities
Institutional research	Institutional studies, research, and academic activities
Academic support programs	Library, Academic Support Center for Students and Faculty, and the Academic Affairs Deanship

Source: Budget Office

Appendix 1.1.3 presents the institutional mission, vision, goals, and values for more clarity.

Are publicized and widely known by the institution’s internal stakeholders; are periodically evaluated (Sub criterion 1.f and 1.g)

The institution offers many options to spread its mission, vision, goals, and values to all constituents. Students are exposed to the mission statement as early as the recruitment process. During the first semester of study, the institutional mission is discussed in the course EDFU 3005: Personal Development and College Success Orientation Seminar, which is a requisite for all registered students. Other modalities include: the [UPR-Ponce website](#), the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) link, and other electronic documents. In addition, the Institutional

Academic Catalog and all institutional courses syllabi include the institution's mission, vision, and institutional goals (Appendix 1.1.4).

The academic departments reviewed their mission and goals to ensure their alignment with the institution's mission statement and current goals. Updated institutional brochures, including key institutional information, have been distributed electronically to the university community. Posters have been placed on campus so that constituents are reminded of the mission and the goals and keep themselves well-informed of these important documents. Also, the accredited student organizations help to promote the institutional mission in their activities.

Institutional goals are disclosed via various reports, such as the Annual Institutional Effectiveness Report and the Institutional Assessment Report. For such purposes, both are aligned with the mission and the institutional goals. The assessment process will be further explained in Standard 5.

Also, the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board, as UPR-Ponce governing bodies, assess the effectiveness of the institution in its responsibility to comply with the mission. Assessment results are used to determine policies and strategic plans that ensure both the fulfillment of the institutional mission and continuous improvement of academic and administrative operations. The Annual Institutional Effectiveness Reports indicate that the UPR-Ponce conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and uses the results of its assessment activities for continual institutional renewal.

UPR-Ponce has been able to fulfill its mission and goals by offering quality services to its constituents. As shown in the 2023 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) report (Appendix 1.1.5), the institution shows competitive levels of campus environment compared with other universities like UPR-Ponce. Students are more satisfied in supportive settings that cultivate positive relationships among students, faculty, and non-faculty. Two Engagement Indicators investigate this theme: Quality of Interactions and Supportive Environment. Regarding Quality of Interactions student services UPR-Ponce scored 44.6 surpassing the 43.0 national mean of similar institutions, and on Supportive Environment the institution scored 36.4, surpassing the 32.0 national mean.

Periodic assessment of mission and goals to ensure they are relevant and achievable (Criterion 4)

As part of the institutional assessment, each academic component, student services, and administrative offices carry out their internal assessment processes. These results are disseminated in various ways including presentation sessions to peers to enrich future cycles and inform about possible changes that seek to improve the areas of weakness identified. The format of this process is aligned not only with the mission and institutional goals but also with the institutional operational plans. According to the results of the assessment plan, all institutional components are adapted to the findings. This includes curriculum development, resource allocation, and support service strategies for both students and employees. This will be further explained in Standard 5.

It is important to highlight that the decision making to assign resources allocation to the different institutional components is aligned both with the mission and goals and with the institutional assessment process. Appendix 1.4.1 shows the alignment in the budgetary process.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. The essential components of academic, student, and administrative activity are aligned with the mission of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce.
2. The budgetary resources to fulfill the mission are distributed based on an institutional assessment process that addresses the three components.
3. The institution fulfills its mission in all areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Maintain the current institutional assessment structure to examine which areas comply with the mission and how to distribute budget resources to maintain current compliance.
2. Ensure that the mission is reviewed and updated considering stakeholders' needs, current and foreseeable trends, environmental elements and other relevant factors.
3. Review and strengthen the learning component in the academic offering through community service.



Standard 2: Ethics and Integrity



STANDARD 2: ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions. In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully.

Requirements of Affiliation: 5, 6, and 8 Institutional Priority: Innovation

A commitment to academic freedom, intellectual freedom, freedom of expression, and respect for intellectual property rights (Criterion 1)

UPR-Ponce upholds three core institutional values: academic freedom, communication and participation, and respect. These principles encompass intellectual freedom, freedom of expression, faculty and student participation in the institutional governing bodies, and a dedication to honoring intellectual property rights (Certification 50-2007-2008 Academic Senate) as outlined in Appendix 2.1.1. The university demonstrates its commitment to these values and criteria through its policies, regulations, policy letters, certifications, and processes. The UPR System is currently asking all academic senates to review and state their opinion on the drafts for the new policies on academic freedom and on accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion. The academic senate assigned the revision of the first policy draft to the Faculty Affairs Committee and the second to an Ad Hoc Committee.

The UPR General By-Laws (Certification 55-2022-2023, Art. 11, sec. 11.1 and sec. 11.2 Governing Board) define academic and research freedom as a right of each faculty member to impart their knowledge and search for the truth in their works ruled by the highest professional and ethical practices based on objectivity, integrity, and intellectual and moral responsibilities (Appendix 2.1.2). The General By-Laws also outline regulations to protect intellectual property rights, in case of lack of intellectual integrity, such as plagiarism or fraud (Art. 35., sec. 35.2.3) (Appendix 2.1.2). In addition, the Institutional Policy on Copyright (Certification 140-1992-1993) guides its employees and students on how to protect author copyrights. Also, UPR-Ponce continually fosters freedom of expression through student associations, assemblies, and any extracurricular activity that take place “freely and responsibly” in accordance with the University of Puerto Rico Act and University Regulations as stipulated in the UPR General By-Laws (Art. 32, sec. 32.1) (Appendix 2.1.2).

To protect the interest of the students with justice and equity, there is a Student Ombudsperson Office (Certification 119-2014-2015 Governing Board) to get advice or to search for mediation and solutions for any kind of conflict in the university context whenever they need advice (Appendix 2.1.3). This office was created in consonance with the UPR Student General By-Laws that establishes: “Any student who understands that any of their rights has been affected or violated may file a complaint with the competent authority within their institutional unit. In presenting it, you can count on the student ombudsperson’s help and advice. Each unit will set

both the deadline for filing a complaint and for responding to and resolving it.” (Certification 70-2016-2017, UPR Student General By-Laws, Part F., Art. 2.36) (Appendix 2.1.4).

A climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives (Criterion 2)

UPR-Ponce Mission Statement establishes that “(it) is a teaching institution dedicated to the intellectual, humanistic, scientific, cultural, and ethical growth of its students. It is devoted to the integral development of citizens and professionals capable of contributing to a global society as critical, creative, and honest leaders committed to continuous learning and community service. It fosters equal access, academic rigor, enriching educational activities, and quality support services which contribute to the formation of graduates with a profile of academic excellence. In all its undertakings, the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce promotes a democratic environment supportive of academic freedom, excellence, integrity, respect, tolerance, creativity, and research.” (Appendix 1.1.1).

As stated in the UPR-Ponce Vision Statement, “The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce aspires to be the institution which most effectively promotes the development of its students’ potentials so that they make significant contributions to the well-being of Puerto Rico.” (Appendix 2.2.1). Therefore, the UPR-Ponce’s Mission, as well as its Vision, provide the ground rules for an environment of inclusion, diversity, tolerance, equity, and respect among community members.

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

- Article 11 of the UPR General By-Laws indicates that academic freedom is the right of faculty members to teach their courses with objectivity and integrity, without other restrictions than those imposed by the moral and intellectual responsibilities to cover all the indispensable elements of the course subject, as approved by the corresponding authorities. This Article also states that there will be respect for different opinions and educational methods.
- Article 32 states the right to freely express, formulate petitions, and sponsor and organize activities that comply with the institution’s laws.
- Article 35 of the UPR General By-Laws encourages administrators to adopt measures that support an environment of harmony, respect, and unity in the institution. To this purpose, several institutional labor unions, the Brotherhood of Exempt Non-Faculty Employees, the UPR Workers Union, and the Bonafide Union of Security Officers (BUSO) represent non-faculty at the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce. The Puerto Rican College Professors Association represents faculty members as a bonafide union.

Another important document that guides the institution is the UPR Anti-Discrimination Policy (Certification 58-2004-2005 Governing Board). It states that the institution does not discriminate for reasons of race, color, sex, age, mental or physical impediments, social condition, politics, or religion. In addition, with Certification 107-2021-2022, the Governing Board updated and

approved the Policy and Procedures for the Management of Situations of Discrimination due to Sex or Gender.

Furthermore, the institution complies with Title IX, protecting college students and applicants, employees and job seekers, and other constituents from all forms of sex discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity. This Act protects the entire university community, including students, regardless of their sex, affective orientation, gender identity, full-time or part-time status, disability, race or national origin in all educational programs and activities of the institution to which they belong or aspire to belong. In compliance with federal law requirements, UPR-Ponce has a Title IX Officer that handles complaints and coordinates activities about harassment or discrimination regarding sex or gender and aimed to comply with institutional and federal policies with the objective of motivating the university community to join forces in favor of a better environment (Appendix 2.2.2).

Likewise, UPR-Ponce promotes sound ethical practices and respect for its constituents as evidenced by the institutional values approved by the Academic Senate (Certification 50-2007-2008) (Appendix 2.1.1). These values are academic freedom, excellence, respect, integrity, communication and participation, commitment, and fairness. The Academic Senate also approved Certification 26-2022-2023: The Non-Confrontation Policy of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce to address conflicting situations among members of the university community. It is the set of principles, criteria, measures, and provisions that promote attitudes of tolerance, good sense, and respect at UPR-Ponce, guaranteeing the university community the right to free expression and the search for peaceful solutions in conflict situations (Appendix 2.2.3).

Also, student organizations at UPR-Ponce help to foster a hospitable college environment. They promote harmony and a welcoming and inclusive community for all students. UPR-Ponce supports students and their desire to engage in extracurricular activities, social justice, and activism about issues affecting the community. There are 28 accredited student organizations for the academic year 2023-2024 that help to promote the institutional mission throughout their activities. Examples of student organizations that promote tolerance and equity are the Student Coalition in Search of Equity and the Association of Pro-Deaf University Students. The Office of Extracurricular Activities is currently conducting the 2023-2024 Assessment Plan using a student questionnaire to evaluate the incorporation of values related to equity, diversity, and inclusion within the extracurricular programs.

UPR-Ponce nurtures its students' global perspectives and experiences through the International Studies and Student Exchange Program, along with summer research internships. Those who participate not only represent the university internationally, but also acquire valuable global experiences, expand their networks, share insights with peers, and serve as inspirational figures for others.

Similarly, UPR-Ponce promotes fairness and impartiality and abides with UPR Student General By-Laws, which were revised in 2022-2023. Chapter 2 delineates the rights and responsibilities within student-student and student-faculty relationships, ensuring the student's freedom of expression within an environment of harmony and respect (Appendix 2.1.4). It also provides

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

The Disciplinary Board is a crucial body that helps the institution by providing mechanisms to deal fairly with students' academic assessment, their conduct, and any alleged disciplinary violations in a prompt, appropriate, and equitable manner. The Board was established by Chapter VI Article 6.8: Disciplinary Norms and Procedures of the UPR Student By-Laws. It is composed of two faculty members appointed by the Academic Senate, two students appointed by the General Student Council, and a member of the university community appointed by the Chancellor (Appendix 2.1.4).

A grievance policy that is documented and disseminated to address complaints or grievances raised by students, faculty, or staff. The institution's policies and procedures are fair and impartial, and assure that grievances are addressed promptly, appropriately, and equitably (Criterion 3)

The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce upholds a policy of absolute intolerance towards any instances of harassment or discrimination. Institutional dedication extends beyond mere adherence to state or federal regulations; there is a firm attention in fostering an environment characterized by tolerance, justice, and equity in addressing all matters concerning harassment or discrimination. To achieve this, the University of Puerto Rico and the UPR-Ponce have instituted comprehensive policies and procedures specifically tailored to, aimed at promptly and effectively addressing concerns and complaints from students, faculty, and staff members alike.

To protect the interest of the students with justice and equity, there is a University Student Ombudsperson (USO) Office, (Certification 119-2014-2015 Governing Board), a safe environment where they can go whenever they want, to get advice or to search for mediation and solutions for any kind of conflict in the university context whenever they need advice (Appendix 2.1.3). This office was created in consonance with the UPR Student General By-Laws that establishes that, "Any student who understands that any of their rights has been affected or violated may file a complaint with the competent authority within their institutional unit. In presenting it, you can count on the student ombudsperson's help and advice. Each unit will set both the deadline for filing a complaint and for responding to and resolving it." (Certification 70-2016-2017 Governing Board, UPR Student General By-Laws, Part F., Art. 2.36) (Appendix 2.1.4). The USO independently reviews student grievances that have not been resolved by the faculty or the department. This person ensures that students receive fair treatment in their dealings with staff and educates the college community about their rights and responsibilities. The USO may also recommend changes in university practices to prevent recurrences of similar complaints and grievances.

Also, the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) plays a crucial role in handling grievances. This Office ensures compliance with the Executive Order of the President of the United States of America 11246 and Law No. 212 of August 3, 1999, that created the "Act to Ensure Equal Employment Opportunity by Gender" and to impose sanctions. This office is aimed at safeguarding equal opportunities for consideration and conditions of employment for all applicants and employees of UPR-Ponce.

It also informs employers of their obligation not to discriminate against any person. The EEO works with federal and state reports that evaluate the representation of women by departments and offices. It promotes activities and the faithful observance of institutional policies and non-discrimination based on sex, race, color, origin, nationality, age, political or religious beliefs, marital status, physical or mental impairments and social status is ensured. The EEO also takes into consideration the American with Disabilities Act – 1990 (ADA), the U.S. Constitution (Fourteenth Amendment) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in 2008. Through the official website of the University, a space has been allocated for the EEO, which contains the regulations in force for the purposes indicated.

There is also the Policy and Procedures for the Management of Situations of Discrimination by Sex or Gender at the University of Puerto Rico (Certification 107-2021-2022 of the Governing Board). It establishes protocols for the management of situations related to discrimination based on sex, sexual violence, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking in the work and study environment. In addition, it has the purpose of informing and guiding the university community on prevention measures, intervention, support, aid, counseling for victims, handling of complaints and disciplinary processes, among other matters.

At the beginning of the academic year, a communication is sent to all constituents informing about the zero tolerance of the UPR on sexual harassment, and the existing means available to channel their complaints. All this information is included in all course syllabi as mandated by Certification 33-2020-2021 of the Governing Board. As a result of these guidelines, the Dean of Academic Affairs at UPR-Ponce has instructed all faculty members to comply with this requirement (Appendix 2.3.1).

In addition, the General Student By-Laws of the University of Puerto Rico (Certification 70-2016-2017 of the Board of Trustees) describes students' duties regarding their academic performance, the different channels that are available to them, and the grievance procedures established to protect their rights (Appendix 2.3.2). Also, UPR-Ponce adheres to the Student Grade Change Process (Certification 46-2017-2018), which delineates the protocols for evaluating final grades of courses and outlines the composition and procedures of the grade appeal committee specific to UPR-Ponce.

All members of the UPR-Ponce community can access information regarding these policies. At the institutional home page, there is a tab titled Institutional Policies and Regulations and Policies where students, faculty and non-faculty can obtain information on the institutions and systemic policies and regulations that aim to protect their rights and provide a safe environment. The information available includes a description of the complaint procedures and the steps through which UPR- Ponce should assure an objective and just investigation.

The avoidance of conflict of interest or the appearance of such conflict in all activities and among all constituents (Criterion 4)

One of the first steps the UPR-Ponce takes to avoid conflict of interest among its constituents is to ensure that its employees comply with the Governmental Ethics Law (Law 1-2012), that states that all employees must be constantly oriented toward following a code of ethics and standards of professional conduct (Appendix 2.4.1).

UPR-Ponce complies with the Anti-Corruption Code for the New Puerto Rico, Law 2 (2018, Art. 3.2 (h) (n), pp. 9-10) (Appendix 2.4.2), that establishes that no person may have a contract with the executive agencies if there is any conflict of interest. To comply with these laws, the institution issues an annual policy letter notification on activities for profit out of business hours. Article 64 (64.7 and 64.7.1) states what are the obligations of teaching faculty if they have a job outside of the university. This also avoids conflicts of interest.

The Board of Trustees, whose name was changed to Governing Board in 2013, also dictates institutional policies with the Certification 8-2012-2013, amended by Certification 12-2015-2016, Policy and Guidelines for Financial Conflicts of Interest and Commitments in Research and Sponsored Programs of the UPR (Appendix 2.4.3). The objective of this policy is to identify, eliminate, or manage any possible threat to the integrity of the research and sponsored programs conducted at the University of Puerto Rico. “These Policy and Guidelines set forth policy and procedures that are to be followed by the University in resolving or managing actual and potential faculty conflicts of interest and commitment pertaining to all research projects, independently of their source of funding”. According to the Governing Board Internal Regulations, its members must sign a conflict-of-interest form annually. In the event of a conflict of interest, it must be notified as soon as the situation arises using the aforementioned form (Appendix 2.4.4). Moreover, the University of Puerto Rico requires researchers who receive funds for their research projects to fill out several forms: University of Puerto Rico Disclosure of Investigator’s Significant Financial Interest Form 1A – 1B and University of Puerto Rico Financial Conflict of Interest Annual Disclosure Form 2.A – 2.B (Appendices 2.4.5 and 2.4.6).

The Board of Trustees, now known as Governing Board, formed an Institution Auction Board, “whose purpose is to establish the rules and procedures through the University of Puerto Rico, in accordance with the Regulations on the Acquisition of Equipment, Materials and Non-Personal Services of the University of Puerto Rico”, Certification 30-2008-2009 (Appendix 2.4.7). This certification aims to protect the institution's best interests by streamlining the procedures for

acquiring non-professional goods and services and ensuring they fulfill the institutional best interest.

UPR-Ponce asserts fair and impartial practices in hiring, evaluating, and dismissing as established in the UPR General By-Laws, Certification 55-2022-2023 (Appendix 2.1.2). The institution announces employment opportunities via institutional e-mail, through the Human Resources Office, and, in the case of faculty, in newspapers of general circulation. The published statement of the selection criteria clearly describes the qualifications, knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience required to occupy the position, so the applicant is well-informed. Article 31 of the UPR General By-Laws states that the UPR is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate for reasons of race, color, sex, age, mental or physical impediments, social condition, politics, or religion.

Non-faculty recruitment criteria are detailed in their labor collective bargaining agreements renewed every three years and aligned with the UPR General By-Laws. When hiring non-faculty, the Human Resources Office gives each candidate the Compliance Certification with Rules on Kinship to avoid a conflict of interest. The candidate must notify if a family member occupies any position within the institution. After this, the Human Resources Office personnel evaluate the information provided. In addition, the Government Ethics Committee provides training and educational material on areas related to the law. To continue with the fulfillment of providing educational material to employees on current laws and ethical aspects of public employees, the information and instructions can be found on the Government Ethics Office website.

As required by law, UPR-Ponce presents reports to the Comptroller's Office. This agency supervises the transactions of property and public funds and verifies that there is no misappropriation of funds. They independently and objectively determine whether the use of public funds has been made in accordance with the law. This agency checks that the government agencies use their resources effectively and efficiently for the people's benefit. In addition, Act No. 18 of October 30, 1975, Registration of Contracts, as amended, requires that every government entity, including UPR-Ponce, keep a record of the contracts it grants, including the amendments thereto, to the Comptroller's Office (Appendix 2.4.8).

Fair and impartial practices in the hiring, evaluation, promotion, discipline, and separation of employees (Criterion 5)

The institution announces employment opportunities via institutional e-mail, newspapers, a webpage called *convocatorias.upr*, and the Human Resources Office website. Also, anyone interested in working at the UPR System can access the Office of Human Resources Management and Transformation of the Government of Puerto Rico.

The published statement of the selection criteria clearly describes the qualifications, knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience required to occupy the position, so the applicant is well-informed. Likewise, the UPR-Ponce has the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) to safeguard

equal opportunities for consideration and conditions of employment for all applicants and employees of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce. Appendix 2.5.1 shows examples of institutional documents that express that UPR-Ponce is an EEO job place.

In the case of non-faculty, a set of Recruitment Rules details the minimum requirements for each position, as well as the nature of the exam, tie-breaking criteria for the class, probationary periods, among other details. The Human Resources Office oversees Recruitment Standards for each position for non-faculty. Similarly, in the Classification and Remuneration Plan for Non-faculty of the University System (1998-2022), there is a list of classified positions, with the coding of each position, category, remuneration scale, and probationary period. In accordance with this Plan, the Rules for the Implementation and Administration of the Classification Plan for Non-faculty of the University of Puerto Rico (Certification 70-1981-1982) detail relevant aspects related to fair and impartial procedures for recruiting non-faculty.

The recruitment process for non-faculty is determined through labor collective bargaining agreements, renewed every three years, and aligned with the UPR General By-Laws (Article 3 and 5). Chapter V of the UPR General By-Laws presents the provisions applicable to teaching and non-faculty, specifically Article 29 (p. 39) which presents the principle of merit as a fundamental rule so that the hiring and promotion is based on the skills, education, and experiences of its candidates (Appendix 2.1.2). Article 83 (p. 118) also establishes the principle of merit for non-faculty, being specific regarding the criterion of considering the most capable and efficient people within the UPR system. Any candidate interested in being part of the pool of faculty and non-faculty may submit their application through the Employment Application Form published for this purpose in this link: <https://www.uprp.edu/articulos/administracion/recursos-humanos/solicitud-de-empleo/>.

The UPR General By-Laws also stipulate the evaluation processes for non-faculty whose evaluation must be carried out by the immediate supervisor as stipulated in Article 80, Section 80.3 and 80.3.1 (p. 116). This describes the process to be followed by the employee's supervisor for the evaluation and how it should be processed administratively. To carry out the evaluation of non-faculty, the OCRH-001 form, Evaluation of Non-Faculty Exempt Personal Performance, is used, which has evaluation factors, such as: knowledge of the work, quality of work, planning/organization, productivity, and reliability, among others. Likewise, it has evaluation factors, such as: leadership, delegation, and compliance with legislation and institutional standards, among others. It also has a section to indicate the overall evaluation obtained, comments to support the evaluation, and future plans or actions. This evaluation also allows for feedback from the employee who has been evaluated.

Non-faculty may aspire to occupy higher ranked positions through the promotion mechanism, as stipulated in Article 75 (pp. 111-12) of the UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2) in order to have the best candidates to fill positions in different units of the university system. Candidates must meet the corresponding eligibility requirements, including exams designed for these purposes and according to the position that needs to be filled.

To respond to a rigorous selection based on academic preparation, experience, and skills, a Candidate Qualification Form is used in the hiring processes. The UPR-Ponce Faculty Handbook, chap. 7, E, pp. 29-31 (Appendix 2.5.2) also establish the criteria for each academic department together with its Personnel Committee to conduct the recruitment processes in accordance with the law, needs of the program and qualifications required of teaching candidates. These must meet a level of prominence in the teaching, research, creation, and practice of their profession. In addition, the Norms and Procedures for the Hiring and Appointment of Faculty (Certification 11-2015-2016) establishes rules which promote impartiality and fair process in the selection of personnel. These norms and procedures are currently under revision by the Academic Senate. Regarding non-faculty, Chapter VIII, Article 75 (pp. 111-12) of the UPR General By-Laws also establishes rules to be followed for the recruitment of trusted or career non-faculty.

In accordance with Article 30 (p. 40) of the UPR General By-Laws and after the regulatory processes of probationary and evaluation periods established for faculty and non-faculty, any employee may aspire to a position with a tenure classification in the university system in those cases whose initial appointment by budgetary measure and by its definition so provides. Likewise, Article 46 (p. 64) presents in detail the considerations to be followed in all the processes of tenure of the teaching personnel. The UPR-Ponce Faculty Handbook, p. 32 (Appendix 2.5.2) also establishes the guidelines for granting a professor's tenure. Certification 15-2004-2005 of the Academic Senate, Procedure for Granting Tenure to Faculty Staff effective January 1, 2005, establishes the procedure to request teaching tenure (Appendix 2.5.3).

The procedure established by the UPR General By-Laws for the promotion in rank of its faculty is very rigorous and meets the academic excellence expected of a first-rate college institution. The candidate for promotion must meet the criteria specified in Article 47 (pp. 67-71) to qualify for any promotion in rank. Some of these criteria are years of service, academic preparation, research, publications, workshops, community service, and peer and student evaluations, among others. In addition, these criteria are included in the UPR-Ponce Faculty Handbook (p. 31) (Appendix 2.5.2) and on the Outline to Accompany the Summary of Score for Promotion in Rank. It is important to highlight that the Outline emphasizes the significant evaluation role of the Departmental and Faculty Personnel Committees. Based on the recommendations of these entities, the Administrative Board and the Chancellor grant or deny any request for promotion, according to the merits of the professor in an impartial and fair way. The candidate must present his/her portfolio for promotion in accordance with the Instruction Guide for the Score Summary for Promotion in Rank.

Moreover, Article 45 (p. 63) of the UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2) establishes the factors to be considered for the evaluation process of the faculty staff, including quality of teaching, research, or dissemination; dedication to university work and service; fulfillment of teaching duties and professional improvement. In addition, the UPR-Ponce Faculty Handbook (pp. 32-33) (Appendix 2.5.2) establishes the forms approved by the Academic Senate for the evaluation of its faculty by the Departmental Personnel Committee, the student evaluations, and the evaluation inherent to teaching carried out by the department chairpersons. The Departmental

Personnel Committee is responsible for maintaining an evaluation plan for each member of the faculty regarding teaching and the department’s chairperson for the tasks inherent to teaching.

Every disciplinary process related to faculty and non-faculty is strictly regulated by the UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2) ensuring that the due processes of law are followed impartially, fairly, and free from prejudice or discrimination. As an example, Article 35 (pp. 46-49) of the General By-Laws of the UPR outlines the procedure that governs disclosing complaints at the time of executing any disciplinary action applicable to all personnel. It includes the purpose, time frame, and firmness of disciplinary actions, types of conduct that are subject to disciplinary actions, and sanctions. Article 46, Section 46.6 (p. 65) specifies how to proceed in those cases where it is necessary to terminate the probationary status of a professor. Regarding non-faculty, Article 81 (p. 117) of the By-Laws outline the procedures for the dismissal of an employee during the probationary period. Furthermore, Article 84, Section 84.3 (p. 118) mandates that transferring an employee will not be used as a disciplinary measure.

In addition, Systemic Policy Letter R-2021-38 (June 8, 2021), applies Uniform Hiring Rules to all professional and non-professional services contracting processes at the University of Puerto Rico, taking into consideration that the contracting of professional and advisory services, as well as non-professional or personal services, must be subject to rigorous examination. The purpose is to respond to the best interests of the public service provided by the University of Puerto Rico. According to this statement, the University, as a government entity, is responsible for ensuring that its hiring practices align with reasonable and adequate planning, addressing the institution's needs and fiscal resources consistently (Appendix 2.5.4).

The following table presents tenure positions and ranking promotions obtained by professors during the last five years and the non-faculty positions and reclassifications during the same period.

Table 2.1
Faculty and Non-Faculty Promotions

Category	Amount	Distribution by gender	
		Female	Male
Tenure positions	7	4	3
Ranking promotions	29	18	11
Non-faculty awarded positions	4	1	3
Non-faculty reclassifications	25	19	6

Source: Human Resources

Honesty and truthfulness in public relations announcements, advertisements, recruiting and admissions materials and practices, as well as in internal communications (Criterion 6)

At UPR-Ponce, transparent and truthful communication is upheld with both the internal and external communities. The university ensures that its community stays well-informed through

official channels like institutional emails and the regularly updated website. *Cartero.ponce*, the official email account, produces an average of 85 mails weekly keeping all personnel and students informed about institutional procedures, events, and news. Additionally, various communication channels, such as press releases, radio, television, open houses, group and one-on-one orientations, and numerous other activities are employed to disseminate information within the community.

In the NSSE 2023 Engagement Indicators on page 12, specifically in the Campus Environment section, the Quality of Interactions for first-year students highlighted certain aspects. Forty-nine percent (49%) of first-year students and fifty-four percent (54%) of seniors rated their interactions with student services staff good or excellent. Similarly, fifty-six percent (56%) of first-year students and fifty percent (50%) of the seniors rated their interactions with other administrative staff and offices (such as registrar, financial aid, etc.) good or excellent. These findings position the institution above college averages for Public-HIS and Carnegie, indicating a dedicated commitment to improving the quality of communication and information provided to students (Appendix 1.1.5).

The institution also maintains an active presence across diverse social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms serve as means to engage with the community and establish connections with the younger student demographic, ensuring the institution remains pertinent and accessible in the digital age. Also, these allow engagement with the alumni. The following table shows the links to the official pages on social networks and the official UPR-Ponce channel on YouTube:

Table 2.2
Institutional Official Pages

Page	Links
Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/uprponceoficial
Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/admisionesuprponce/?hl=en
TikTok	https://www.tiktok.com/@admisionesuprponce
YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/@universidaddepuertoricoenp6395/featured

Through these social media platforms UPR-Ponce effectively displays its academic programs, emphasize competitive tuition rates, share campus activities, and communicate the latest developments. This approach enables the institution to maintain public relations, deliver announcements, and target disclosing initiatives effectively.

One of the essential elements of the community public relations strategy involves the recruitment process. Open houses, career days, and academic fairs serve as opportunities to invite students and their parents to participate in academic orientations. These orientations are jointly organized by the Admissions Office, department chairpersons, faculty members, the Chancellor and the Deans of Academic and Student Affairs.

The Office of the Chancellor annually appoints an Open House Committee to organize several in-campus orientations. Students, parents, counselors, teachers, and school principals from public and private high schools from the towns near the campus are invited. They receive guidance on how to fill out admission applications, information about financial aid opportunities to pay for studies, and academic offerings, in addition to touring the campus. An electronic registry is established to collect information from students and visitors to gather their academic interests and other relevant data. This information is given to the department chairpersons to establish contact with the students and clarify their doubts.

Every year UPR-Ponce organizes various academic orientations, conducting sessions in shopping centers, private and public schools, visits to underrepresented municipalities within the student body (such as towns in the island's interior), and customized virtual orientations for communities with specific needs or mobility constraints. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the open houses in 2021 and 2022 were drive-thru events enabling students to secure participation slots through a provided link. A video about the 2022 Drive Thru Open House can be watched in the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=439578521246551>.

To improve the recruitment and admission processes, UPR-Ponce created the Institutional Recruitment Committee. As stated in the Policy Letter 08-2021-2022, "This committee will be in charge of identifying strategies to increase student recruitment." The Institutional Recruitment Committee Report for the 2020-2021 period (Appendix 2.6.1) outlines the recruitment initiatives undertaken, such as conducting Facebook Live broadcasts, creating and publishing videos, and engaging with 300 students who took in the College Board exams on campus.

Also, the UPR System Strategic Plan 2017-2022: A New Era of Innovation and Transformation for Student Success (Certification 50-2016-2017) enacted by the Governing Board stipulates in Goal 2 (Objective 2.a) to "Develop university projects with the country's public and private schools in order to foster the best practices in services and programs intended to increase student recruitment and diversity" (Appendix 2.6.2). Examples of meeting this goal can be found in the Institutional Effectiveness Report of 2021-2022 (Appendix 2.6.3). The Summary of Achievements of Academic Year 2021-2022 (p. 19, Goal 2) shows that UPR-Ponce has obtained approval from the Board of Postsecondary Institutions for the offering of binary programs: BS/PharmD, BS/MD and BS/PhD for the Biomedical Baccalaureate Program in agreement with Nova Southeastern University and Ponce Health Sciences University. The agreement was implemented in August 2022. Also, a collaborative alliance was agreed with UPR-Mayaguez to offer a master's in Business Administration program in UPR-Ponce.

The UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled "Vision 2026" (Certification 18-2021-2022 Administrative Board) stipulates in Goal 4: diversifying and increasing university enrollment by twelve percent (12%) and increasing the number of new students through four activities and processes: implementation of the rolling admission process; strengthen recruitment processes in public and private schools at the national and international level; develop a tailored marketing plan for Spanish-speaking populations in the United States and Latin America, as well as to appeal non-

traditional students; meet the requirements to sign the affiliation with the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) (Appendix 2.6.4).

The Admission Office also offers information and links to access the Application for New Admissions, the Admissions Information Brochure, and the General Admission Index (GAI) Calculator, so the students have all the information they need when applying for admission to the academic programs they want. It also provides information for students with special abilities (Athletics, Choir, and Band Programs) and foreign students as part of the effort to diversify recruitment.

The Financial Aid Office has published a variety of video tutorials where the staff explains step-by-step the procedures to obtaining financial aid: Guide to Creating an FSA ID; Guide to Completing the FAFSA (Updated Annually); Steps to perform the Loan Exit Counseling; Steps to upload a document to institutional portal. The Financial Aid office website section also contains information about tuition costs and other types of financial aid available.

Institutional email (cartero.upr) is used as the main method for internal communications. This allows students, faculty, and non-faculty to become aware of the work carried out academically and administratively by the Chancellor's Office and the Academic, Student Affairs, and Administrative Deanships as well as activities and community functions.

The UPR-Ponce Office of Information Systems has the mission to provide the entire university community with efficient and effective information systems technologies. This office guarantees their proper use and management according to institutional policies and manages technical support, data storage, telecommunications, servers, and email accounts.

The Office of Information Systems complies, applies, and educates the population about the different certifications that govern ethical behavior in the face of Information Systems. Two of the most important regulations about ethical behavior regarding information systems are the Institutional Policy on the Use and Access to Information Technology Resources at the University of Puerto Rico and the Data Classification Policy of the University of Puerto Rico (Certifications from the Governing Board 85-2022-2023 and 86-2022-2023, respectively). The first establishes the rules and guidelines for the use and access to information technology resources at the University. The latter establishes an institutional reference framework to classify information based on its value and sensitivity, ensuring reliable computing and risk assessment performance (Appendices 2.6.5 and 2.6.6).

Furthermore, the By-Laws and Procedures for Electronic Communications of UPR for the Office of Information Systems aims to provide principles, rules, and procedures for the efficient, effective, and secure use of electronic resources used to exchange or publish information, such as electronic mail, instant message services (chats), forums and institutional electronic groups, electronic notifications, social networks and web pages, among others. This regulation is based on the provisions established in Certification 85-2022-2023, Institutional Policy on the Use and Access to Information Technology Resources at the UPR (Appendix 2.6.5). All these policies and

by-laws in addition to other guidelines and procedures, promote truthful and safe communication within an ethical framework.

As appropriate to its mission, services or programs in place: to promote affordability and accessibility and to enable students to understand funding sources and options, value received for cost, and methods to make informed decisions about incurring debt (Criterion 7)

The UPR-Ponce is committed to offering continuous guidance and promoting affordability and accessibility. For this reason, the Office of Financial Aid established its mission: "To provide suitable services to students so that they can receive and enjoy the different financial aid programs."

Also, the university has established several mechanisms other than the traditional admission based on the General Admission Index to guarantee a greater degree of accessibility: scholarships for special abilities (sports and music), non-traditional admission, Rolling Admission (Certification 16-2020-2021 of the Administrative Board) (Appendix 2.7.1), and the ASCIENDE Program (aimed at exceptional high school students so they can advance university courses (Appendix 2.7.2). During the 2022-2023 academic year, UPR-Ponce welcomed 462 new students, a distribution of fifty-one percent (51%) female and forty-nine percent (49%) male. Of these, thirty-eight percent (38%) were from private schools while sixty-two percent (62%) came from public schools. This diversity not only showcases the University's student demographic, but also highlights its commitment to accessibility, particularly for underrepresented students from low-income families and vulnerable backgrounds.

During the admission process, UPR-Ponce provides students with the sources and options for financing their studies. A financial aid officer is assigned to each student to provide all the information related to study costs, available economic aid, scholarships, the Work-Study Program, and student loans to provide them options. In the 2022-2023 academic year, 98% of students received the Free Application Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) grants and requested support for this matter. The following dashboard provides data related to financial aid awarded to students:

<https://www.uprp.edu/articulos/rectoria/opei/dashboards/asistencia-economica/#dashboard-asistencia-econ%C3%B3mica>. A translation of the third section of that dashboard is included in Appendix 2.7.3.

It must be mentioned that the institution encourages enrolling and future students to express themselves and inform their questions and concerns enroll students, even future students, to express themselves and inform their doubts and questions related to their financial aid applications, scholarships, and deferment of student loans through varied activities, such as Open Houses, Neon Nights, orientations in public and private schools, among others. In this manner, the university personnel make sure undergraduates know and understand the finance options and resources, tuition costs, and the methods for making informed decisions when assuming a student loan debt. Subsequently, this information is reinforced through conferences, training,

and workshops offered to the entire university community by professional improvement committees, student organizations, and service offices.

All these processes are aimed at helping students to make assertive, informed decisions focused on achieving their academic goals. Students can find on the institutional website and in the Financial Aid Office documentation of policies, regulations, procedures, policy letters, applications, and forms to help them through the process. One of the institution's priorities is to follow Verification and Compliance – Required Information for Students and federal regulation 34 CFR § 668.43. In addition, the institutional website provides a link for students to calculate the estimated cost to study: [Net Price Calculator](#).

The success of these efforts is evidenced by UPR-Ponce in the Official Cohort Default Rate Information for FY 2020, where the official default rate was zero (0). This validates all the work that the institution does to guide students on assuming loan debt, and the importance of paying them off. The Official Cohort Default Rates for Schools can be found in the following link https://fsapartners.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2023-09/PEPS300_FY2020.xlsx. UPR-Ponce appears in line #2523 of the Excel document.

Compliance with all applicable federal, state, and Commission reporting policies, regulations, and requirements (Criterion 8)

The evidence related to this criterion can be found in Appendix 2.8.1.

Periodic assessment of ethics and integrity as evidenced in institutional policies, processes, practices, and the manner in which these are implemented (Criterion 9)

The Puerto Rico Government Ethics Office, created by the Organic Law of the Office of Government Ethics of Puerto Rico Law 1 of January 3, 2012, has the power to investigate and prosecute any breach of ethical or legal conduct by any public official. In compliance with this law, both administrative personnel and faculty members complete 20 hours of ethics training every two years. All UPR-Ponce employees are responsible for verifying compliance with the ethics hours accumulated during the biennial period. Failure to comply with these hours may lead to administrative sanctions (Appendix 2.4.1, Article 3.3, Continuing Education, p. 13).

Accordingly, UPR-Ponce has created an Institutional Government Ethics Committee responsible for establishing the policies to guarantee integrity and sound administration. In addition, this committee serves as a mechanism to report inappropriate behavior, incidents, and make inquiries when a constituent has a question about an ethical issue. The continuous professional training in ethics and integrity provides the institution with the personnel and information necessary to continue offering efficient and effective services to the community. From July 1, 2021, to June 20, 2022, twenty-six (26) validated activities related to governmental ethics were held.

As part of a quality improvement program, the Institutional Assessment Committee promotes the continuous improvement of all academic programs, teaching support services and all offices and departments academic or administrative activities. Appendix 2.9.1 presents the Institutional Assessment Plan.

Every semester, the Academic Affairs Deanship coordinates the orientation for new faculty in which the mission, vision, academic and administrative procedures, and regulations and ethics requirements are presented and discussed. When non-faculty are recruited, they also receive guidance on regulations, standards, policies, and procedures. All staff sign a document attesting that that they were given all this information.

The UPR Student General By-Laws (Article 2) show the rights and moral and ethical liabilities of students (Appendix 2.1.4). Chapter II, Sections A, B, C; Chapter IV, Article 4.8; and Chapter VI, Parts A-E address topics like student discipline, student's rights to freedom of expression, grievance procedures, student's evaluations, sexual harassment, drugs and alcohol use, plagiarism, academic integrity violations, and property damages, among other issues.

The UPR-Ponce strictly follows established policies and regulations about integrity, as addressed in the UPR General By-Laws and supports the implementation of policies to maintain academic freedom, respect for different opinions and educational methods, formulate petitions, and sponsor and organize activities that comply with institution's laws. Also, UPR-Ponce adopts measures to support an environment of harmony, respect, unity, equity, and equality. Proof of that is the presence of three labor unions: the Brotherhood of Exempt Non-Faculty Employees, UPR Workers Union, and the Bonafide Union of Security Officers (BUSO) represent the non-faculty at the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce. Also, the Puerto Rican College Professors Association represents faculty members as a bonafide union (Appendix 2.1.2, Articles 11, 32, and 35).

UPR-Ponce promotes sound ethical practices and respect for its constituents as evidenced by the institutional values approved by the Academic Senate (Certification 50-2007-2008). These values are academic freedom, excellence, respect, integrity, communication and participation, commitment, and fairness (Appendix 2.1.1).

CONCLUSIONS:

1. Evidence supports that the UPR-Ponce upholds three core institutional values: Academic Freedom, Communication and Participation, and Respect.
2. UPR-Ponce actively works to create an atmosphere that promotes freedom of expression through student associations, assemblies, and extracurricular activities.
3. The institution is dedicated to creating a supportive and intellectually vibrant community that values freedom, integrity, and fairness for both students and faculty.
4. There is a commitment to ethical, legal, and transparent practices at UPR-Ponce, covering various aspects, such as research, employment, procurement, and conflict resolution.

5. UPR-Ponce is dedicated to fostering a fair, transparent, and inclusive environment for its faculty and non-faculty, ensuring adherence to legal and ethical standards in recruitment, evaluation, promotion, and disciplinary processes.
6. UPR-Ponce is actively engaged in a multi-faceted communication strategy, using multiple channels to disseminate information, recruit students, and enhance overall community engagement.
7. The institution's financial aid initiatives showcase a holistic approach to accessibility, transparency, and student support, ultimately contributing to the success and well-being of its student body.
8. UPR-Ponce places a strong emphasis on ethical conduct, continuous improvement, and the well-being of its community, as evidenced by its compliance to government ethics laws, the presence of ethical committees, ongoing professional training, and the promotion of student and employee rights and values.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Further nurture diversity, uphold respect, and maintain integrity within the UPR-Ponce community, as has been consistently done thus far.
2. Continue improving interactions within all sectors of the UPR-Ponce's constituents.
3. Continuously oversee and revise policies, practices, and procedures for students, faculty, and non-faculty.



Standard 3:
Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience



STANDARD 3: DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

An institution provides students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence at all program, certificate, and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences, regardless of modality, program pace/schedule, level, and setting are consistent with higher education expectations.

Requirements of Affiliation: 9 and 15

Institutional Priorities: Innovation, Student Success and Satisfaction, and Service

Certificate, undergraduate, graduate, and/or professional programs leading to a degree or other recognized higher education credential, of a length appropriate to the objectives of the degree or other credential, designed to foster a coherent student learning experience and to promote synthesis of learning (Criterion 1)

UPR-Ponce is committed to providing students with learning experiences characterized by rigor and coherence at all programs, certificate, and degree levels, in all instructional modalities. The institution demonstrates that the learning objectives are rigorous and consistent throughout all academic program offerings. For instance, each program has established goals or objectives that guide students through their academic undertakings, and they are aligned with their curricula. Each curriculum is also developed and approved by faculty, by the departmental curriculum committee by the Academic Affairs Dean, and by the Academic Senate. Then, the curriculum is revised and approved by the Vice Presidency of Academic Affairs and Research. The Vice President sends the documents to the Governing Board, as the highest academic institutional body, for the last approval within the UPR System. Finally, the Postsecondary Institutions Board provides the final revision and approval. Each program must develop an operational plan with its corresponding assessment plan approved by the members of the academic department and the Institutional Assessment Committee. As mentioned in Standard 6, the Institutional Assessment Committee is responsible for presenting and informing the faculty, deans, and Academic Senate the results of student performance and achievement. All programs develop activities and strategies that enhance and provide an enriched learning experience. The Annual Assessment Reports in the Spanish versions are available in the UPR-Ponce's website (www.uprp.edu/articulos/rectoria/opei/opei-avaluo/). Appendix 3.1.1 presents them in its English version.

The UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled "Vision 2026" requests that all programs align their objectives with the institutional mission, goals, and objectives. Analysis of this alignment is carried out according to the established planning and assessment cycle. Presently, they are aligned through the 2023-2024 academic year. This is evidenced through the annual assessment reports submitted to the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR), the Institutional Assessment Committee, and the Deanship of Academic Affairs. The Assessment Committee

presents the faculty reports with the objectives of each program, their scope, and use of results. The effectiveness of this plan is a guide to demonstrate the effort to maintain institutional effectiveness around student learning, student services, administrative services, and offices that belong to the Chancellor's Office.

UPR-Ponce offers 14 baccalaureate degrees, 5 associate degrees, and 36 articulated transfer programs to other campuses of the University of Puerto Rico. Most programs at UPR-Ponce are susceptible to professional accreditations and are either accredited or in the process of becoming accredited following the UPR Institutional Policy described in Certification 138-2003-2004 from the Board of Trustees. The [institutional webpage](#) presents the programs that hold professional accreditations at UPR-Ponce. Other programs are under way for accreditation. However, those programs that are not subject to accreditation must be evaluated every five years according to Certification 45-2019-2020 of the Governing Board (Appendix 3.1.2). This certification titled Regulations for the Periodic Evaluation of Academic Programs provides a framework on evidencing quality and results-based program effectiveness. These regulations also provide a set of guide questions about various aspects of the program, such as descriptions, its mission, and objectives. Appendix 3.1.3 shows a table with the programs and the year of their next periodic evaluation.

Also, UPR-Ponce is implementing a Project of Curricular Review and Educational Transversality, focused on developing student's soft skills. This project is contemplated on the current institutional Strategic Plan (Appendix 2.6.4). It has established an integrated educational transversality focusing on promoting entrepreneurship skills in the curricula across different programs and disciplines. The institution is committed to working, creating, promoting, and integrating transversal education as an innovation to approach situations and address them through an interdisciplinary perspective. Appendix 3.1.4 presents more information about the Curricular Review and Educational Transversality Project.

Student learning experiences that are designed, delivered, and assessed by faculty (full-time or part-time) and/or other appropriate professionals (Criterion 2 and Sub criterion 2.a)

The faculty at UPR-Ponce demonstrates an unwavering commitment to their academic responsibilities, aligning their efforts with the program's mission, goals, and policies. Their dedication significantly enhances the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. The UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled "Vision 2026" (Appendix 2.6.4) establishes this in Strategic Pillar 1: Academic Excellence and Innovation, aligned with Goal 1: To ensure the continuity of excellent education in recognized and accredited programs; and objective 1.3: Maintain a highly qualified faculty in their disciplines and post-secondary teaching methodologies.

To ensure that the faculty maintains the highest standards of quality, the UPR General By-Laws outline in Article 63 (Certification 55-2022-2023 of the Governing Board) the duties and attributions of the faculty. Furthermore, Articles 64 and 65 detail the responsibilities inherent to

teaching and list the elements of these tasks. Faculty employ 37.5 hours per week for teaching tasks distributed as follows: twelve (12) hours to teach (Article 65.1), six (6) hours for individual attention to students (Article 65.2), fifteen (15) hours for the effective preparation of courses, conducting research, preparing and grading exams, and performing the administrative work associated with their role (Article 65.3), and approximately 4.5 hours for meetings, course coordination, and other related tasks (Article 65.4). All faculty who has not achieved the rank of full professor are evaluated regularly by their supervisors, peers, and students to assess their compliance with these tasks and to assess their quality and effectiveness of teaching (Appendix 2.1.2).

The UPR General By-Laws also establish that faculty dedicated to research must remain aware of the research needs pertinent to their discipline (Article 63.2.1), initiate, conduct, or collaborate in studies and research to identify and solve problems. It also states that faculty must use methods and techniques that meet the characteristic rigor of scientific research (Article 63.2.2), collaborate in the preparation and development of the scientific research programs of their department or faculty, for their scientific and cultural improvement (Article 63.2.3), and contribute to better teaching of scientific research techniques (Article 63.2.4). In the Institutional Effectiveness Report UPR-Ponce for each academic year, under Goal 3 (Promote Research and Academic Creation), the activities and research projects carried out by the faculty at UPR-Ponce are detailed. Appendix 3.2.1 presents the 2022-2023 Institutional Effectiveness Report (pp. 39-49); Appendix 2.6.3 Institutional Effectiveness Report 2021-2022 (pp. 42-50); Appendix 3.2.2 Institutional Effectiveness Report 2020-2021 (pp. 49-61); Appendix 3.2.3 Institutional Effectiveness Report 2019-2020 (pp. 48-64); and Appendix 3.2.4 Institutional Effectiveness Report 2018-2019 (pp. 48-60).

Faculty members at UPR-Ponce are actively assessing student learning. Each academic department establishes a Departmental Assessment Committee, consisting of members of the faculty. There is a coordinator that acts as a liaison between the department and the Institutional Assessment Committee. The committee establishes the programmatic objectives that will be assessed, the courses or activities where they will be measured, the instruments to be used, and the indicators of success. At the end of each semester, professors provide the data according to the instruments used and submit reports to the coordinator so that the results can be discussed among the faculty and disseminated to the academic community during the Annual Institutional Assessment Forum. This activity is open to everyone and is a space for the community to provide feedback on the results presented by each academic department. These assessment activities are further explained in Standard 5. Appendix 3.2.5 presents the composition of the Student Learning Assessment Committee and its roles and responsibilities.

Qualified for the positions they hold and the work they do, sufficient in number, and provided with and utilize sufficient opportunities, resources, and support for professional growth and innovation (Sub criteria 2.b, 2.c, and 2.d)

The UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2) outlines a comprehensive framework established to govern the formulation of regulations concerning faculty recruitment, retention, tenure, and promotion. For instance, Article 42 delineates the fundamental requisites, specifying that faculty members must hold a doctoral or equivalent terminal degree from an accredited institution of higher education learning within the relevant field of expertise to get a tenure-track position. Moreover, Article 43 elucidates the criteria governing faculty recruitment, including the assessment of the applicant's academic record of accomplishment and the reputation of the degree-conferring institution. Additionally, this Article considers proficiency within the specific discipline to be taught, along with the ability to seamlessly integrate it with related fields of study. The Academic Senate of the UPR-Ponce, through Certification 11-2015-2016, also establishes the Norms, Criteria, and Procedures for Hiring Faculty based on systemic regulations adapted to the institutional goals and needs. Other vital considerations encompass teaching experience, practical application of knowledge within a particular field of study, as well as the publication of scholarly papers and the delivery of lectures.

Through an initiative of the Dean of Academic Affairs, during 2015-2016, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 academic years, a meticulous and objective process for recruiting new faculty was instituted. In it, specific and rigorous criteria were established to be eligible for the teaching positions. All departments were involved in the design and review of instruments and rubrics for evaluating candidates impartially. Appendix 3.2.6 presents examples of those instruments and rubrics. When candidates are invited for an interview, they meet with the Departmental Personnel Committee, which asks questions regarding the candidate's professional record, qualifications, teaching philosophy, and other critical aspects. To ensure adherence to university and governmental policies, the Dean or Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, the director of Human Resources, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer are present during these interviews. Regular evaluations and updates of these processes and instruments are done to maintain transparency in faculty recruitment. Upon hiring, all tenure-track faculty must abide by the UPR-Ponce contractual letter for the faculty (Certification 27-2016-2017 of the Academic Senate), which stipulates all responsibilities of faculty members during the probationary period as conditions for granting tenure, and also candidates are assigned their initial rank as stipulated in Article 44 of the UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2).

For faculty members seeking tenure and promotion, the guidance and structure are provided by Article 45 of the UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2). It articulates a set of criteria encompassing the quality of teaching, research contributions, dedication to university service, adherence to teaching responsibilities, and the pursuit of continuous professional development, among other factors. During the academic year 2022-2023, nine (9) promotions in faculty rank were granted: six full professors, two associate professors, and one assistant professor (Appendix 3.2.1 Institutional Effectiveness Report UPR-Ponce 2022-2023, p. 101).

Faculty qualifications are substantiated through their academic background, as depicted in Table 3.1. The institution mandates that newly appointed faculty provide evidence of their highest

academic degree from a U.S. recognized university. The Office of Human Resources maintains meticulous personnel records comprising transcripts, diplomas, degree certifications, and related documents.

Table 3.1
Faculty Academic Years 2018 to 2023

Academic Year	Number of Faculty Members	Academic Degree		
		Bachelor's	Master's	Doctorate
2018-2019	211	2 (1%)	101 (48%)	108 (51%)
2019-2020	204	0 (0%)	96 (47%)	108 (53%)
2020-2021	202	1 (1%)	87 (43%)	114 (56%)
2021-2022	194	2 (1%)	77 (40%)	115 (59%)
2022-2023	187	2 (1%)	77 (41%)	108 (58%)

Source: Annual Institutional Data Profile

It is important to establish that UPR-Ponce nurtures a culture of continuous improvement within its faculty. The Deanship of Academic Affairs leads various professional development initiatives, exemplified by the Faculty Workshops and the Summer Academy. These conferences are designed to provide faculty with the latest advancements in teaching and learning. Faculty members have actively engaged in these enriching activities (Appendix 3.2.7).

Objective 1.3 of the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled “Vision 2026” (Appendix 2.6.4) strives to maintain a highly qualified faculty in their respective disciplines and post-secondary teaching methodologies. To accomplish this, professional improvement activities respond to the needs identified in the annual professional development needs assessment. This is further explained in Standard 5. Faculty members are mandated to complete twenty (20) hours of professional development activities annually, comprising six (6) hours dedicated to teaching, four (4) hours in specific areas of interest, and ten (10) hours focused on ethics (Objective 1.3 UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan).

Furthermore, in pursuit of Goal 1 of the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled “Vision 2026”, which aims to address students' learning needs innovatively and effectively, objective 1.3 seeks to keep faculty that is highly qualified in their disciplines and in the postsecondary teaching methodologies. The Institutional Committee for Professional Development of the Faculty and the Departmental Committee for Professional Development coordinate various activities during each academic year. Appendix 3.2.7 shows a list of examples of activities organized during the past five academic years (2018-2023), offered by these committees in different modalities (face-to-face, online, and hybrid). For a complete list of the professional development activities held at the UPR-Ponce during the past five academic years, please refer to the Annual Institutional Effectiveness Reports (Appendices 3.2.1 to 3.2.4 and 2.6.3).

UPR-Ponce has a highly qualified faculty body with the necessary qualifications for teaching. Table 3.2 shows the number of faculty members for academic years 2018-2019 to 2022-2023. The number of faculty members is sufficient to deliver quality teaching experiences to students.

Table 3.2
Faculty Rank Academic Years 2018 to 2023

Academic Year	Number of faculty in teaching	Academic Rank			
		Full Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor	Instructor
2018-2019	211	44 (21%)	26 (12%)	72 (34%)	69 (33%)
2019-2020	204	38 (19%)	26 (13%)	72 (35%)	68 (33%)
2020-2021	202	33 (16%)	30 (15%)	74 (37%)	65 (32%)
2021-2022	194	29 (15%)	27 (14%)	78 (40%)	60 (31%)
2022-2023	187	34 (18%)	22 (12%)	72 (38%)	59 (32%)

Source: Annual Institutional Data Profile

Additionally, faculty has been trained in distance education methodologies to make sure they are qualified to offer online and hybrid courses. Table 3.3 shows faculty members at UPR-Ponce who earned a certification on the design of distance education courses between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023. Appendix 3.2.8 shows the content of those courses taken by the faculty.

Table 3.3
Faculty Certified to Design Distance Education Courses

Academic Years	Certification Title	Participants
2018-2019 and 2022-2023	UPR-Rio Piedras Construction of Virtual Learning Environments	34
	UPR-Mayagüez CREAD Virtual Educator	21
	UPR-Mayagüez CREAD Virtual Educator Trainer	20
Total		75

Source: Deanship of Academic Affairs

To further address this matter, UPR-Ponce established a Virtual Education Development Center (VEDC) which plays a pivotal role in facilitating ongoing education development in the realm of online instruction, technology integration, and various aspects of this pedagogical approach. At UPR-Ponce, VEDC provides comprehensive backing for distance education across diverse formats and settings. This encompasses instructional design, media production, capacity building, technical assistance, and support. The VEDC provides faculty with physical resources, equipment, and technology support personnel to enable the delivery of designated courses in online and hybrid formats with excellence.

This service aligns seamlessly with Goal 2 of the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled “Vision 2026”, which highlights the imperative of offering innovative and relevant academic programs tailored to the needs of the institution's key stakeholders and society. Objective 2.3 seeks to broaden the

array of academic offerings by embracing online, hybrid, and non-traditional scheduling modalities to cater to the diverse needs of students. To reach this objective, ongoing faculty training in the development and delivery of hybrid and online programs and courses has been paramount.

Goal 3 of the UPR-Ponce 2026 Strategic Plan focuses on fostering research and academic creation. Objective 3.2 is a key component of this goal, which aims to enhance faculty participation in research projects and academic creation activities. This objective entails integrating research, creation, and service responsibilities into the academic workload of faculty members. Additionally, substantial resources, including financial support, administrative assistance, equipment, and technological infrastructure, are provided to facilitate faculty engagement in research and academic creation initiatives. Furthermore, faculty contractual agreement for newly appointed tenure-track positions explicitly stresses a commitment to research, ensuring its prioritization within the institution (Appendix 3.2.9).

Moreover, research competencies are a prerequisite in faculty recruitment processes, ensuring that new hires contribute effectively to research endeavors. Regulations for granting promotions and tenure are currently under revision by the Academic Senate. This revision emphasizes the significance of research and knowledge dissemination within the evaluation criteria, making research contributions central to the promotion and tenure decisions. These reviews are done by the Department Faculty Committee, which establishes a work schedule for every faculty member granted a new position. A new tenure-track faculty member has up to five years to fulfill the contractual letter, which specifies the agreements established to achieve tenure in the UPR system. Among these agreements is the requirement to demonstrate that they have conducted research and scientific publications.

Table 3.4 offers a succinct overview of the research areas developed over the past five years by Academic Departments. For complete information on research projects, please refer to the Annual Institutional Data Profiles (Appendix 3.2.10).

Table 3.4
Institutional Projects and Scientific Research by Departments

Department	Number of research projects				
	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019
Biology	8	1	1	1	1
Chemistry-Physics	4	3	1	1	1
Counseling and Psychological Services	2	-	-	-	-
Education	2	2	2	2	-
Engineering	3	2	1	1	1

Department	Number of research projects				
	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019
Humanities	-	1	-	-	1
Mathematics	1	-	1	-	-
Social Sciences	-	-	-	-	1

Source: Annual Institutional Data Profile

In alignment with these strategic efforts, the development of the UPR-Ponce Smart Hub is already in progress. This initiative is aligned with Objective 3.1 of Goal 3 of the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled “Vision 2026”, which is dedicated to positioning the institution as a prominent research hub in the southern region of Puerto Rico. The establishment of the UPR-Ponce Smart Hub will actively promote collaborative research endeavors that involve various stakeholders, including industry and government partners, faculty members, other UPR campuses, and private institutions in Puerto Rico and outside the island. Additionally, it will facilitate the design and implementation of research projects with a strong community focus, addressing critical issues that impact Puerto Rico’s natural environment and its residents. Further information about the Smart Hub is presented in the discussion of Standard 6.

Reviewed regularly and equitably based on written, disseminated, clear, and fair criteria, expectations, policies, and procedures (Sub criterion 2.e)

UPR-Ponce has instituted a comprehensive evaluation process for teaching-focused faculty members, as delineated by the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board with an instrument created for that purpose (Appendix 3.2.11). This entails periodic student and peer evaluations conducted on a semester or annual basis. These evaluations serve as compelling evidence that each faculty member meets the essential criteria required for delivering their respective subjects. Importantly, this process aligns with Article 45 of the UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2). The Faculty Personnel Committee collaborates with the Dean of Academic Affairs on matters pertaining to appointments, leaves, tenure, transfers, bonuses, and related personnel actions, in accordance with the UPR General By-Laws, Section 24.4 (Appendix 2.1.2). To facilitate this process, the Administrative Board approves the Annual Calendar for the evaluation of faculty members who seek any of these personnel actions. Furthermore, the student evaluation of faculty, further explained in Standard 2, functions as a formative assessment tool for professors, providing valuable insights into their performance.

Academic programs of study that are clearly and accurately described in official publications of the institution in a way that students are able to understand and follow degree and program requirements and expected time to completion (Criterion 3)

All academic programs with their requirements are documented in official publications. These publications provide comprehensive insights into each program, encompassing their mission, goals, student outcomes, and educational objectives. To facilitate students' progress through their curricula, program information is structured by year and semester. This information is

available on the UPR-Ponce website, specifically in the Catalog section (Appendix 3.3.1 pp. 149-256). Furthermore, each academic department maintains a dedicated webpage accessible through the university's site, offering detailed insights into their respective programs. These are some examples of those webpages: [Social Sciences](#), [Biology](#), and [Physical Therapy](#). In UPR-Ponce's commitment to serving not only students but also the broader community, the institution fosters a culture of outreach by preparing brochures that highlight program offerings, and which are readily available to anyone seeking information. All information pertaining to academic offerings is updated regularly and published accordingly. The information is also available on the institutional webpage and hard copies at the departments.

Prospective students at UPR-Ponce are offered comprehensive orientation activities to familiarize themselves with academic programs. These activities are thoughtfully planned and executed by the Admissions Office which actively engages with high school seniors through school visits, open houses, and recruitment fairs, among others. During these activities, the personnel provide detailed information about programs and create a welcoming space for students to ask questions and address any concerns they may have. At these events, brochures prepared by the departments are distributed, ensuring that students gain a clear understanding of admission requirements, prerequisites, and the curricular structure. Appendix 3.3.2 exhibits examples of these activities. Information about all academic programs, including the General Admission Index (GAI) and program codes for application, can be easily accessed through the UPR-Ponce webpage or the systemic UPR website. Appendix 3.3.3 shows an example of the General Admission Indexes per academic program that prospective students can assess.

In preparation for their academic journey, first-year students receive a specialized orientation the week before classes begin. A representative from their academic department guides them through the curriculum, expected time to completion, course prerequisites, co-requisites, and other valuable information. By providing these orientation activities, the institution aims to empower prospective and incoming students with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their academic future at UPR-Ponce.

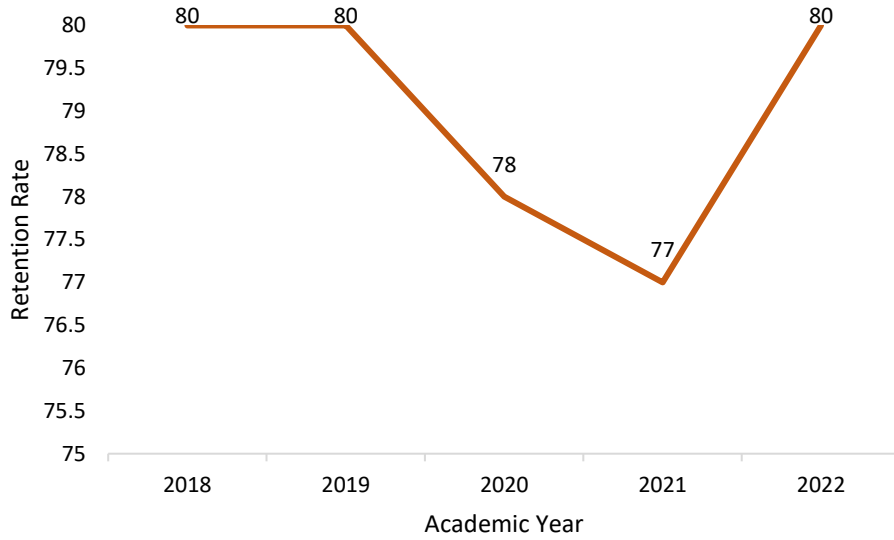
Also, UPR-Ponce ensures that students meet program requirements promptly. This commitment is guided by Article 65, Section 65.2, and Article 120, Section 120.8 of the UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2). The Registrar's Office plays a pivotal role in overseeing academic evaluations. This Office certifies which students have completed their program requirements. Evaluators utilize data from the Student Information System (SIS) to complete evaluations and send them via email to students. This process occurs every semester for each student, starting when they complete 30 credits and continuing until graduation. This ensures that all students are regularly updated about their progress. Academic counseling is a crucial part of the institutional approach for student success, offered within the academic departments. Advisors guide students to ensure they make progress, assist in course selection to meet prerequisites, and help them plan their courses to align with their career or graduate program aspirations. This process is carried out jointly by the department chairperson, academic advisors designated by the chairperson, or faculty members.

In addition to academic advising, academic advisors also assist students with various procedures, including transfers within and outside the UPR system, registration, readmissions, reclassifications, selection of program emphases, and the pursuit of minors or double majors. Notably, more than eighty percent (80%) of UPR-Ponce students are recipients of the Federal Pell Grant. Through academic advising and the Financial Aid Office, students are made aware of their eligibility for this grant, covering up to twelve (12) full-time terms. This incentivizes students to strive for timely degree completion.

Another important aspect that is carefully monitored at UPR-Ponce is students' academic progress. If a student's grade point average (GPA) falls below a certain threshold known as the retention index, specific actions are taken to support their academic success. Students whose GPA falls within 0.20 points below the retention index may be placed on probation. During this period, they receive additional support, such as tutoring and counseling services, to improve their academic performance. Students whose GPA falls within a range of 0.20 to 0.30 points below the retention index may face suspension. However, there is an opportunity to request extended probation to the UPR-Ponce Academic Achievement Committee. This committee comprises all the chairpersons of the departments that host academic programs and the Dean of Academic Affairs. If a student's request is justified and approved by the Dean, they may be allowed to register for the following semester under a customized class program designed by the department chairperson. This program is aimed at promoting an increase in GPA and exiting probation within one academic year. The probation process is explained in detail in the Catalog (Appendix 3.3.1 pp. 63-65). During this period, the chairperson of the student's department oversees his/her academic advising. This personalized support ensures that students can resume progress towards the completion of their program. Some academic departments and programs, such as the Physical Therapy and Business Administration and Computer Sciences, have implemented other measures to identify, as early as possible, those students who are at risk of falling below their retention index. These students are interviewed by members of the faculty to design a personalized plan of action to improve their GPAs and avoid falling into probation (Appendix 3.3.4). By following these steps, UPR-Ponce attempts to provide students with opportunities for academic improvement and success.

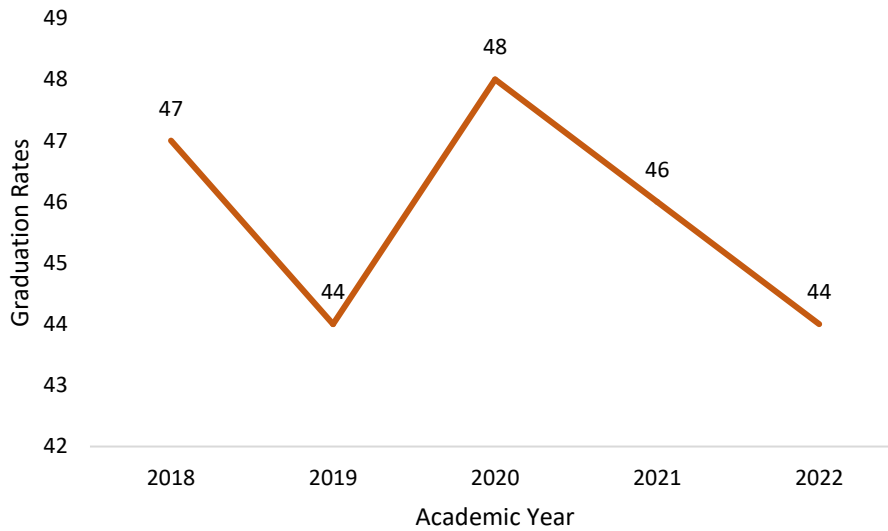
Student success is evident in the statistics published by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR), including retention and graduation rates, which highlight the institution's effort to advancing students through their programs and ensuring timely graduation. Over the past five academic years, graduation rates have consistently ranged between forty-four (44%) and forty-eight percent (48%), demonstrating students' successful completion of their programs. Similarly, retention rates have ranged from seventy-seven (77%) to eighty-five percent (85%), indicating that a considerable number of students continue their academic journeys at UPR-Ponce (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). These statistics are a testament to ongoing efforts to support students in achieving their academic goals and graduating within a reasonable period and compare favorably against similar public post-secondary institutions.

Figure 3.1
Institutional Retention Rates for the Past Five Academic Years (2018 to 2022)



Source: Office of Planning and Institutional Research

Figure 3.2
Institutional Graduation Rates for the Past Five Academic Years (2018 to 2022)



Source: Office of Planning and Institutional Research

It is important to mention that environmental factors such as the 2020 earthquake, and the Covid-19 pandemic disruption affected graduation rates of the cohorts ending in 2021 and 2022.

OPIR also publishes the percentage of students who persist and the time they take to complete their degrees. Table 3.5 shows that fifty-five (55%) to eighty percent (80%) of associate degree students who persist finish their degrees within the expected time limit of 3 years, and between eighty-six (86%) and ninety-two percent (92%) of those pursuing a baccalaureate degree do so within six years.

Table 3.5
Percentage of Associate and Baccalaureate Degree Students Who Complete their Program within the Expected Time (i.e., 3 years for Associate Degree and 6 years for Baccalaureate Degree)

Academic Year	Associate Degree	Baccalaureate Degree
2018 – 2019	65	86
2019 – 2020	75	92
2020 – 2021	80	89
2021 – 2022	55	89
2022 - 2023	57	89

Source: Office of Planning and Institutional Research

To help students thrive academically and personally, a range of support services that address both emotional well-being and the needs of students with disabilities are offered. The Department of Counseling and Psychological Services (DCPS) plays a crucial role in supporting students facing personal challenges that may impact their academic performance. Faculty members are periodically reminded of the processes to follow when referring students to DCPS. DCPS offers diverse services, including help with emotional problems and self-esteem issues, educational and vocational counseling, and support adapting to university life. Appendix 3.3.5 presents these services in detail. Additionally, the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services (DCPS) extends its support beyond mental and vocational dimensions by implementing a peer mentoring program specifically designed for first-year students. This program plays a crucial role in helping new students adjust to and integrate into university life. Appendix 3.3.6 exhibits a brochure explaining what the peer mentoring program is about.

On its part, the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) is committed to ensuring that all students, including those with functional diversity, have equal access to educational opportunities. Students with disabilities can seek assistance from OSD, which issues reasonable accommodation letters. Faculty members are responsible for implementing these modifications, which may include providing extra time for exams or term paper submissions, utilizing technology to facilitate learning, and creating an environment that reduces stressors to avoid exacerbating symptoms. These accommodations are tailored to meet the specific needs of individual students, fostering inclusivity and equity within the academic community. Both the services offered by DCPS and OSD are instrumental in helping students overcome personal challenges, advance in their academic pursuits, and complete their degrees. It is important to mention that students benefit from the equipment available at OSD such as trackpads, special keyboards, and dictation and voiceover tools, among others.

The institution encourages all members of the academic community to be aware of these resources and to collaborate in supporting the success and well-being of students. This is done through conferences, workshops, direct messages, and promotions sent by institutional email.

Learning Opportunities and Resources (Criterion 4)

The institution offers a wide range of learning opportunities and resources to enhance academic experience. These include the dissemination of academic programs, diverse course modalities, academic support services tailored to individual student needs, and effective communication channels for program requirements. On the institutional website, the [Academia section](#) provide detailed descriptions of each academic program by department. Information regarding new programs, degrees, and minor concentrations is shared with the internal and external community through institutional emails and departmental social networks. Collaboration with the Central Administration extends to the official website for [distance programs](#).

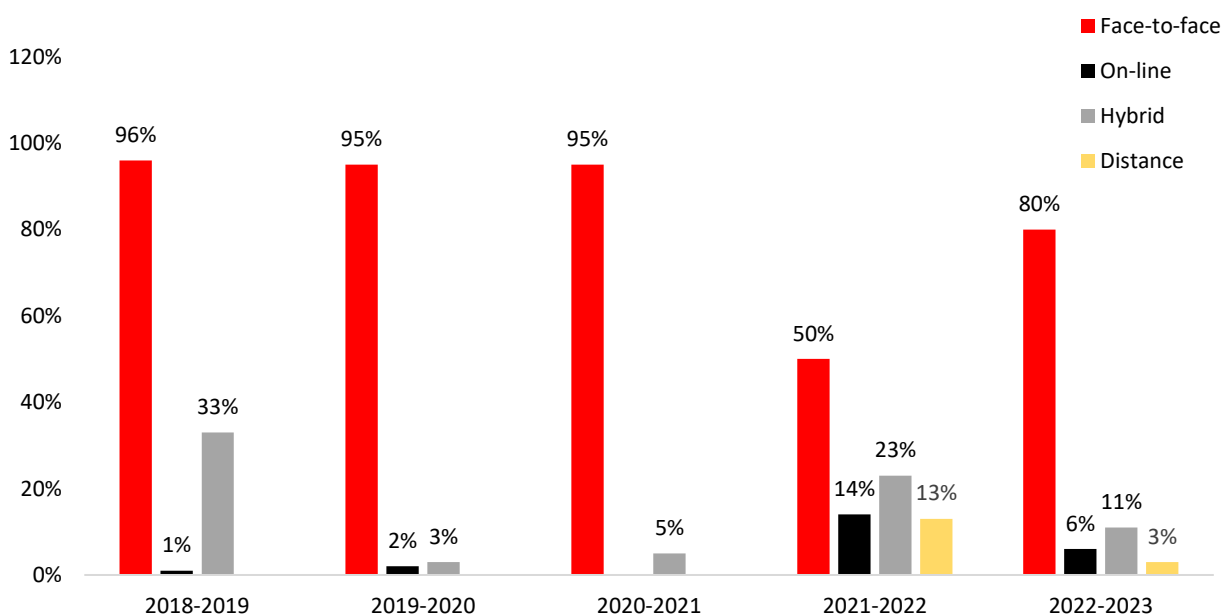
UPR-Ponce is committed to supporting students in completing their program requirements and achieving academic excellence. The Deanship of Academic Affairs oversees a tutoring program that harnesses the expertise of faculty and students. At the beginning of each semester, faculty members collaborate to identify students who can serve as tutors for various courses. To qualify as a tutor, students must have excelled in the course they are tutoring and receive a recommendation from the course professor. They also participate in workshops to enhance their tutoring skills. This mentorship initiative benefits students by offering academic assistance directly from their peers. Tutoring schedules are shared through institutional emails, ensuring easy access. The tutoring program's services extend beyond providing tutoring sessions; they also include reviews for exams, workshops, recruitment guidance, and others. Over the past five academic years, an average of 413 students have been served annually. Appendix 3.4.1 details all services provided during the reference period. It is noteworthy that before the academic year 2019-2020, tutoring services were offered face to face. However, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a change in the program to include virtual tutoring sessions. Financial support for tutoring programs is sustained through the work-study program. Assessment data has shown that students find these tutoring services valuable and effective in improving their academic performance (Appendix 3.4.2). The Office of Extracurricular Activities at UPR-Ponce (under the Deanship of Student Affairs) also hosted tutoring sessions each semester during academic years 2021–2022 and 2022–2023. Faculty members were recruited just before finals week to provide students with an opportunity to ask questions and strengthen their academic skills in preparation for exams (Appendix 3.4.3).

The Library is also an extremely helpful resource for students and the wider community. Its operation hours are available on its [website](#). Additionally, students have access through this website to off-campus databases, research tools, books, journals, and other information repositories allowing them to work on assignments at their convenience, 24/7. These support

services are designed to empower students and foster a culture of academic excellence at UPR-Ponce.

Additionally, and to cater to diverse academic and professional objectives, the institution offers various course modalities, including hybrid, distance, and online courses. This strategic vision, outlined in the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled “Vision 2026”, allows flexibility for the students to fulfil program requirements through diverse course modalities. Figure 3.3 shows the percentage of courses that have been offered in the different modalities. As can be observed, the percentage of courses offered in non-traditional modalities has seen significant growth in the last two academic years.

Figure 3.3
Courses Offered by Modality (Academic Years 2019-2020 to 2022-2023)



Source: [UPR Ponce Dashboards](#)

In response to the challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic, the institution demonstrated resilience by preparing its classrooms for multimodal learning. The online platform and collaboration tools continue to play a crucial role in ensuring academic continuity during unforeseen events. Moreover, technical staff and faculty received training and support resources to effectively utilize the equipment installed in classrooms.

The institution actively promotes student engagement in research projects and experiential learning opportunities. In the Annual Student Research and Creation Congress, students can present their work to the academic community (Appendix 3.4.4). Likewise, several academic programs incorporate mandatory internships or research experiences within their respective disciplines. This approach prepares students with valuable skills and knowledge to excel in the job market or explore entrepreneurial ventures. In this context, some departments facilitate

roundtable discussions with industry employers closely related to their fields, as well as organizations that host intern students.

Additionally, the departments organize meetings with advisory boards comprising external community representatives and organize gatherings and panels featuring alumni and graduates. Appendix 3.4.5 presents a table with more information about these boards.

An example of the activities done with advisory board members is when the Department of Education hosted the Meeting of Elementary Education Graduates in 2019. It was focused on the theme Positive Discipline in the Classroom. This event included a plenary session titled Positive Behavioral Support System and a workshop on Effective Classroom Management through Neuroeducation and Sustained Attention. In 2023, the department also organized the Education Leaders Symposium, focusing on Various Paths to Transform the Teaching Profession and Achieve Success. Graduates and educational leaders actively participated, sharing their insights and success stories in the field. The symposium addressed crucial topics, such as leadership, collaboration, innovation, and entrepreneurship. These activities serve as platforms for gathering valuable input, perceptions, opinions, and recommendations from participants, all of which contribute to the continuous enhancement of academic programs (Appendix 3.4.6).

The institution emphasizes providing technical support to students, equipping them with essential tools and technical skills to enhance their learning experiences. These services are a result of institutional efforts and systemic planning. At UPR-Ponce, students have access to the [Technical Support Portal](#), which offers a wealth of resources, including tutorials, videos, and other educational content. Systemic-level support resources are also accessible to students at a webpage called [University of Puerto Rico Online Students Resources](#) and [University of Puerto Rico Online Moodle 4](#).

It is important to mention that federal proposals play a pivotal role in supporting academic programs, as they enhance the quality of higher education. The UPR-Ponce Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (PRISE) is a program funded by the National Institute of General Medical Services. Since 2012, PRISE has been committed to high-caliber research, particularly in the biomedical sciences, aligning with rigorous academic standards. Their proposed research plan strategically enhances the academic and technical skills of qualified undergraduate students, creating a robust pipeline for those completing B.S. degrees in Biology and pursuing advanced studies in Biomedical Sciences. Emphasizing responsible research conduct, community-based learning, and college retention initiatives, PRISE fosters a holistic educational environment, preparing students not only as skilled researchers but also as socially responsible contributors to the scientific community and beyond. Services provided include workshops, English editing services, summer collaborations, and tutoring. Through newsletters published on the program's website, information is shared about their achievements, activities held, and future goals (<https://prise.uprp.edu/newsletters/>).

On the other hand, the GET (Girls Engineering Trip)-by-STEM project, sponsored by the Federal Department of Education and the Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program (MSEIP), has been awarded to UPR-Ponce for three consecutive three-year periods (2016-2019, 2019-2022, and 2021-2024). This initiative is targeted at female students in Puerto Rico's public and private higher education institutions interested in STEM careers (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), as well as female students within UPR-Ponce's STEM departments. Its primary goal is to increase female participation in STEM careers, nurturing a highly skilled generation of professional women to bolster competitiveness in the academic field and meet workforce demands in Puerto Rico and the United States. Program participants, who belong to UPR-Ponce's STEM departments, enjoy benefits such as annual participation in the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) Annual Convention and the GET-by-STEM Summer Camp, where high school students can explore industries, attend talks, and engage in educational activities related to STEM fields.

Another federally funded initiative at UPR-Ponce, focusing on STEM, is the Federal ET² Project: Engineering Tools for Engineering Technicians. This project aims to enhance female participation in engineering disciplines, improve retention rates among engineering students, and foster a highly skilled generation of professional women in the engineering sector to meet workforce demands in the United States and Puerto Rico. To achieve these objectives, female project participants attend the World's Largest Conference for Women in Engineering and Technology and receive training across various academic and professional domains. Additionally, to support retention among female engineering students, the Computer-Oriented Learning Space (COL SPACE) is provided, offering a creative and technological environment with access to resources like 3D printers, oculus devices, laser cutters, and LittleBits components. These initiatives are integral to empowering female students in STEM fields and contributing to their academic and professional success (Appendix 3.4.7).

General education component (Criterion 5)

UPR-Ponce is dedicated to expanding students' intellectual horizons and fostering cultural and global awareness through courses in the General Education Component (GEC). It is for this reason that at UPR-Ponce, the GEC has traditionally been associated with various academic departments, including Spanish, English, Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Humanities.

Since 1970, UPR-Ponce has introduced across-curricula programs aimed at providing students with a comprehensive education. These programs focus on enhancing skills in oral and written communication (in both Spanish and English), mathematics, logical and critical thinking, aesthetics, ethics, and general history. These competencies align closely with the current strategic plan, standards, and objectives. The conceptual framework for the GEC at UPR-Ponce emphasizes the development of rational, independent, integral, and competent individuals who integrate values such as equality, justice, veracity, dignity, prudence, and integrity into their lives (Appendix 3.5.1).

In compliance with the minimum requirements of the General Education Component (Appendix 3.5.1), Article VIII, Section A stipulates that: *"Those academic programs that in their curricular content exceed what is required by any of the competencies of the General Education Component, will be considered in compliance with the minimum requirements."*

The current compliance by program breaks down as follows:

Table 3.6
Current Minimum CGE Credits Compliance by Program

Competencies	Credits Hours
Oral and written Spanish and English communication	6/6
Mathematics	3
Scientific	6
Technological and basic information technology skills	3
Critical thinking skills	3
Aesthetic valuation	3
Ethic valuation	3
Historic valuation	6
Social and personal sensitivity	3
Total	42

Source: Academic Senate Certification 48-2015-2016 (Appendix 3.5.1)

Nonetheless, UPR-Ponce's commitment to expanding students' educational experiences beyond their professional disciplines is evident through the integration and constant revision and assessment of the current GEC component from courses across programs. After rigorous appraisal, the GEC committee's latest proposal developed a matrix to enhance the attainment of GEC proficiency levels with continuous integration of course credit compliance throughout the programs. The proposal has been aligned to the Academic Senate Certification 49-2013-2014, the UPR-Ponce's mission, and the Graduate Profile (Certification 59-2013-2014 Academic Senate) (Appendix 1.1.1 and 3.5.2). Thus, in line with institutional mission and goals, each academic program includes at least one mathematics, language, and science course, whereas humanities and social sciences courses emphasize the development of values, ethics, and aesthetics.

Furthermore, the Honor Studies Program contributes to the students' learning enrichment that encourages intellectual and humanistic potential, thus, enabling students to become holistic individuals capable of being productive and committed to their lives, the university, the community, and the Puerto Rican society. Therefore, the Honor Studies Program goal seeks to supply additional opportunities for its students as active and leading learners in their development across various fields of knowledge. The Program offers experiences in the research process and through an interdisciplinary curriculum. This stimulates critical and reflective thinking and self-directed learning. Likewise, it promotes leadership, respect for diversity, and commitment through community-based activities that allow students to become entrepreneurial agents in social transformation.

The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce has also embodied the community service component in its mission and institutional goals as an essential part in the integral development of the students. It offers a well-structured and purposefully designed program aimed at preparing students for academic and professional success focused on community service learning and the development and participation of students in community service activities. Also, it proposes that the educator encourage students to apply their learning by interacting and meeting the needs of a community and, in turn, reflect on their experience in the classroom. Students engage in reflective oral and written dialogue with educators to demonstrate that they developed a greater understanding of curricular content by serving. The institution provides intellectual and human resources to ensure that service learning benefits the students and the community.

Academic programs incorporate community service activities in their syllabi as an integral part of their mission, goals, objectives, values, and the qualities they aim to cultivate in their graduates. These community service competencies encompass various skills and attributes, including proficient communication in both English and Spanish, problem-solving abilities, collaborative teamwork, a deep understanding of significant social, historical, and economic issues within their local and global context, a commitment to ethical, civic, and aesthetic values, as well as the promotion of solidarity, tolerance, freedom, and democracy. Academic departments, the Honor Study Program, student organizations, and non-faculty participate in community service initiatives. Some of these projects are integrated into the curriculum and serve as essential components of course objectives, teaching methods, and assessment criteria. Professors play a pivotal role in guiding and supervising students as they contribute to these identified community service endeavors as students cultivate and develop competencies in areas of intellectual experience, expanding cultural and global awareness and cultural sensitivity, and well-reasoned judgments outside as well as within their academic field. Certification 32-2022-2023 from the Academic Senate presents the background and origins of the community services component at UPR-Ponce (Appendix 3.5.4).

The UPR-Ponce GEC and the community service policies are central to the fulfillment of the institutional mission, goals, and expected outcomes. The rigorous curriculum development process in these areas ensures alignment with UPR-Ponce's mission and meets the requirements of higher education standards; thus, it provides students with comprehensive support services that complement their academic journey and contribute to their personal and academic growth, including extracurricular activities.

Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of programs (Criterion 8)

UPR-Ponce has a strong culture of assessment as deeply explained in Standard 5. The Institutional Assessment Coordinator (IAC) organizes the process, including periodic assessment of their programs' effectiveness. The IAC is guided by the scope of Strategic Goal 11: To promote continuous improvement in academic and administrative operations, as outlined in the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled "Vision 2026". Its mission is to foster an institutional culture of continuous planning and assessment in every academic and administrative operational activity.

The structure of institutional assessment and its processes will be discussed in detail in the section related to Standard 5.

One crucial component of institutional assessment is student learning assessment, which primarily aims to determine educational effectiveness. It is regarded as a powerful resource that aids in achieving both program goals and the institution's mission and objectives, as well as professional accreditations. Institutional assessment is also backed-up by Certification 45-2019-2020 of the Governing Board (Appendix 3.1.2). This requests that all academic programs that are not subject to accreditation must be evaluated every five years. This provides the necessary information and data to help in the decision-making process.

In the UPR-Ponce, the assessment of student learning is a pivotal aspect of the educational framework, and the learning outcomes determined for each academic program. UPR-Ponce's assessment approach is anchored in the consideration of competencies outlined in the UPR-Ponce Graduate Profile (Appendix 3.5.2). These competencies serve as a compass, guiding the student learning activities and ensuring that students are well prepared for their future careers and endeavors.

The competencies within the UPR-Ponce Graduate Profile are thoughtfully designed to align with the essential skills and knowledge required by various programs and disciplines. By incorporating these competencies into the assessment process, not only academic proficiency is measured but also the development of well-rounded and capable individuals is nurtured.

Appendix 3.8.1 shows some examples of competencies that are integral to the assessment framework that are part of the UPR-Ponce Graduate Profile, and how they are assessed in the programs providing student learning opportunities. By aligning assessment practices with the competencies of the Graduate Profile, students not only acquire academic knowledge but also develop the skills, attitudes, and values necessary to stand out in their chosen fields and contribute positively to society. This commitment to holistic education is at the core of the mission of the UPR-Ponce and remains dedicated to continuously enhancing assessment methods to create and support a variety of student learning opportunities. Annual Assessment Reports can be found in Spanish in this link, www.uprp.edu/articulos/rectoria/opei/opei-avaluo/ but Appendix 3.1.1 contains some of the reports in English. Finally, the discussion of Standard 5 explains how the Institutional Assessment Committee is responsible for coordinating, collecting, documenting, and communicating the results of the assessment of student learning.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce provides students with learning experiences that are rigorous and coherent at all program and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences are consistent with higher education expectations.
2. There is a robust culture for assessment to pursue professional accreditations for all programs and periodically evaluate those that are not subject to it.

3. The institution has a faculty body who is highly qualified due to a rigorous recruitment and evaluation process and given many opportunities for professional development.
4. Students have multiple ways to comply with the requirements of their programs and ensure they complete their degree in a timely manner and count on many support services and diverse learning opportunities to enhance the educational experience.
5. The general education and community service components provide students with a comprehensive education.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Increase the number of online courses to serve students who cannot be physically present at the institution.
2. Increase the number of courses offered at night and at weekends.
3. Continue complying with the strategic objective that requests all academic programs to be revised every five years.



Standard 4: **Support of the Student Experience**



STANDARD 4: SUPPORT OF STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Across all educational experiences, settings, levels, and instructional modalities, the institution recruits and admits students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals are congruent with its mission and educational offerings. The institution commits to student retention, persistence, completion, and success through a coherent and effective support system sustained by qualified professionals, which enhances the quality of the learning environment, contributes to the educational experience, and fosters student success.

Requirements of Affiliation: 10 and 11 ***Institutional Priorities: Students Success and Satisfaction and Service***

Clearly stated, ethical policies and processes to admit, retain, and facilitate the success of students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals provide a reasonable expectation for success and are compatible with institutional mission (Criterion 1)

The admissions process for freshman students to the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) system is centralized. The UPR Central Administration's Admissions Office (UPRCA-AO) prepares material with information on all academic programs offered at each of the University's eleven campuses, which is available in printed form and online. Clear requirements for admission to the University of Puerto Rico are based on academic potential as established in Certification 25-2003-2004 from the Governing Board and in the institutional Catalog (Appendix 3.3.1 pp. 34-41).

The UPR Central Administration publishes an updated academic offer on its website, providing accurate information about all academic programs available at each of the University's eleven campuses. At the campuses, the Admissions Office oversees offering students orientation where they are provided with guidance regarding the documents required to complete the admission and financial aid processes. This orientation helps ensure that students understand the necessary steps to complete their admission and secure financial aid. The UPR-Ponce also organizes different activities for counselors such as conferences and webinars to provide information about changes in the admission process and any other important information, enabling them to effectively guide and advise students about their university options.

The admission officers from UPR-Ponce have been designated to visit high schools within the geographical area served by the institution. This area encompasses the cities of Adjuntas, Arroyo, Coamo, Guánica, Guayama, Guayanilla, Jayuya, Juana Díaz, Maunabo, Patillas, Peñuelas, Ponce, Salinas, Santa Isabel, Villalba, and Yauco. Their primary objective during these visits is to provide students with detailed information and material outlining the academic programs available at UPR-Ponce, as well as to offer comprehensive orientations regarding the financial aid opportunities accessible to them. Moreover, it should be noted that while the focus remains on schools within the specified geographical area, the admission officers are prepared to extend their services to any educational institution that expresses a need for orientation. This

underscores the institution's commitment to equitable access to information and support for all students interested in pursuing higher education. Through these structured outreach efforts, UPR-Ponce aims to ensure that prospective students are well-informed about their academic options and empowered to make informed decisions regarding their educational pathways. By providing accurate and comprehensive information through brochures, conferences, and orientations, the UPR system and the UPR-Ponce Admissions Office, aims to support prospective students in making informed decisions about their academic and financial future. Prospective students have the option to select up to three program alternatives, in order of priority, based on their preferences. The process where the students can submit their application is open from October to January and will receive an admission decision in early February.

Since 2022, the UPR Governing Board established Certification 162-2023-2024 (Appendix 4.1.1) to include an evaluation and the opportunity for non-traditional students to enter the UPR system. This New Admission Policy for Non-traditional Student is applicable to all undergraduate programs. It uses non-traditional admission methods such as placement tests, portfolios, interviews, essays, and letters of recommendation, among others as means of evaluation for students to enter the UPR System.

The process for admitting transfer students in the UPR-Ponce also had changes to benefit prospective students. Through Certification 27-2022-2023 of the Academic Senate (Appendix 4.1.2), revisions were made to adjust the Minimum Admission Indexes and credits required for the different programs. There was also a revision to the credit validation table of the UPR-Ponce to incorporate compatible courses and enable greater access to UPR-Ponce programs (Appendix 4.1.3).

Accurate and comprehensive information regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds (Sub criterion 1.a.)

The Governing Board of the University of Puerto Rico establishes registration fees for the UPR-Ponce. Every academic year the estimated annual study fees can vary; these fees are revised and updated yearly. This estimated annual study fee is used as a base for granting financial aid from federal, state, and private funds. Table 4.1 details the registration fees for students admitted at the UPR-Ponce from 2018-2019 to 2022-2023. The specific special quotas from 2019-2024 are presented in Appendix 4.1.4 and it breaks down the cost of the fees established at the UPR-Ponce according to the services offered to its students.

**Table 4.1
Registration Fees Per Credit for Students Admitted (2018-2023)**

Fees	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Resident students	\$124.00	\$124.00	\$145.00	\$157.00	\$157.00
Non-resident students	186.00	124.00	145.00	157.00	157.00

Foreign students	248.00	124.00	145.00	157.00	157.00
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Source: Finance Office

The Financial Aid Office of the UPR-Ponce has an essential role in meeting these criteria. Its mission is to help students with financial needs to achieve their academic goals by granting them the financial aid available, according to the regulations and standards established by the federal, state, and institutional government. The institution has well-defined financial aid policies and availability of scholarships, grants, and loans. All this information is available on the university website and in the Catalog (pp. 71-75) (Appendix 3.3.1). Finally, Table 4.2 indicates the total financial aid that UPR-Ponce students received from 2019 to 2022 detailed by type of aid.

Table 4.2
Financial Aid

Type of aid	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Pell Grant	\$11,346,930.98	\$10,873,756.79	\$9,697,532.83	\$10,310,274.64
Endowment Fund	160,050.00	81,000.00	199,000.00	146,900.00
SEOG Grant	59,862.50	321,400.00	281,394.28	280,618.57
Private Grants	34,678.80	34,587.22	49,991.22	32,842.60
Loans	1,074,231.00	705,950.00	655,600.00	634,550.00
Work-study	38,348.00	39,773.06	188,057.78	268,687.56
Others	500,245.98	1,040,929.52	1,713,213.66	1,671,219.52
Total	\$16,308,797.26	\$17,114,933.51	\$20,048,394.87	13,345,092.89

Source: Finance Office

The University of Puerto Rico is committed to supporting students in their economic needs. Since August 2019, Certification 4-2019-2020 Governing Board (Appendix 4.1.5) has established benefits to students whose family income does not exceed one hundred thousand dollars, have an academic load of at least 12 credits per semester, meet the academic progress standards, and have financial need uncovered. Approximately eighty percent (80%) of UPR-Ponce students receive financial aid from different funds that allow them to fully cover the cost of their tuition. This includes those students who previously only partially received the Federal Pell Grant, for whom the payment of the cost of the credits is completed.

A process by which students who are not adequately prepared for study at the level for which they have been admitted are identified, placed, and supported in attaining appropriate educational goals (Sub criterion 1.b)

As established in its mission, the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce is an institution dedicated to the intellectual, humanistic, scientific, cultural, and ethical development of its students (Appendix 1.1.1). The institution is committed to the comprehensive training of citizens and professionals trained to contribute to a global society as critical, creative, upright leaders aimed at continuous learning and community service. It promotes in its environment equitable access, academic rigor, enriching educational activities, quality support services, which converge in a graduate with a

profile of excellence. To achieve this commitment, the institution must face many challenges from the beginning and during the student's university life.

To help students achieve a better transition to university life and carry out adequate management of their studies, freshmen must enroll in the course EDFU 3005-Seminar on Orientation for Personal Development and Academic Success (Appendix 4.1.6). This course provides information and support for students to adapt to university life and achieve their academic and professional goals and it should be taken compulsorily during their first year. Each year, an average of 22 sections of the course are offered with a total impact of 600 students.

Additionally, professional counseling is offered in various aspects such as curriculum sequencing, reclassification, transfers, graduate schools, admission exams, vocational interest inventory, time management, study habits, emotional management, stress management, and referrals to other professionals.

Another program aimed at supporting students is the Mentoring Program. It is a service offered by the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services (DCPS) for all new students. As a support services department, DCPS recognizes that the first year of college is crucial and decisive. Therefore, the DCPS aims all its efforts to positively impact students to achieve the personal and professional goals that were initially established.

Students who serve as mentors are committed to supporting others from the beginning by helping with their coursework, offering seminars, helping with referrals to help services, offering support groups, and aiding with other aspects related to the university life. In this way, students can adapt effectively to the demands of the college experience. The areas to impact as part of the adaptation process are the academic, professional, social, personal, or emotional life, and building a sense of belonging. The minimum requirements to be a mentor are the following: having academic progress, no referrals to the Disciplinary Committee, good communication skills, and availability.

Orientation, advisement, and counseling programs to enhance retention and guide students throughout their educational experience; Processes designed to enhance the successful achievement of students' educational goals including certificate and degree completion, transfer to other institutions, and post-completion placement (Sub criterion 1.c and 1.d)

UPR-Ponce offers various services and processes that support and strengthen the student's educational experience and help them achieve their educational goals. The main tool to help students is academic advising. During the Spring it is offered twice: once to select the courses for the Fall and a second time for students interested in summer courses. Every semester, students are required to schedule meetings with academic advisors to plan the courses for the next semester. Each academic department has a team of dedicated academic advising professors who offer insights and guidance on academic curriculum, prerequisites, and requirements. These advisors also assess completed courses, courses currently in progress, and any outstanding

courses necessary to fulfill degree requirements or facilitate transfers to other University of Puerto Rico campuses for degree completion.

Academic advising not only provides students with a clear understanding of the courses they should take, but also serves as a tool for faculty to engage directly with students and provide information about available services and resources to help them achieve their academic goals. It also offers support in case students face any academic challenges. The students may also meet with the Registrar or the assigned evaluator to discuss their academic progress.

The Dean of Academic Affairs, through the different academic programs, carries out the following student retention strategies:

- **Orientation programs** – Orientation of academic programs is offered in academic departments, on the University website through ads and flyers, and on the official social networks through videos and podcasts.
- **Academic support** – The Tutoring Program aims to help the students to strengthen their knowledge on the material learned in the courses and offer support and improvement tools that can be effectively developed in their academic and professional life. Tutoring services are offered face-to-face and virtually.
- **Early monitoring** – Class attendance is monitored by professors in their classes. In addition, the Registrar's office requests that the attendance census be completed after the third week of classes and then midway during the semester.
- **Scholarship and financial aid programs** – Loan and scholarship opportunities are sponsored by non-profit institutions such as the Maestro Cares Foundation.
- **Emotional and mental health support** – The Department of Counseling and Psychological Services helps students either through referral or at their own choice. It offers emotional support, counseling, support groups, and wellness resources to help students manage stress and other emotional challenges.
- **Curricular enrichment** – Experiential learning activities and extracurricular activities are developed to increase student participation, interest, and sense of belonging, providing a more complete educational experience. The institution has over 30 student organizations to which students can belong.
- **Life skills development** – Workshops and programs are offered during the academic year for the development of important life aptitudes such as study skills, time management, problem solving, and communication skills.

On the other hand, the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services (DCPS) helps students to achieve their personal, academic, and professional goals through preventive, developmental, and remedial processes in the personal-social, educational, and psychological areas, and life and career planning. To achieve this, the DCPS has a professional staff that possesses the required academic preparation, professional licenses and certifications, and experience in applying a combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioral theories and intervention strategies that integrate in a multidimensional way the human behavior. In addition, it collaborates with non-faculty, faculty, and the administration to improve the quality of life and

the educational environment of the institution. The services offered at the DCPS are detailed in Appendix 4.1.7.

The DCPS uses Titanium, an electronic platform for all clinical services such as user schedules, appointments, reminders and attendance, contact information, client and group session notes, reports, and diagnosis, among others. According to statistics compiled at Titanium, in the last five years DCPS has served around 616 students for 2,417 interventions per academic year.

Finally, there is a detailed process carried out by the Registrar's Office related to graduation evaluation in which each evaluator is assigned a group of students according to their last names. Each evaluator is responsible for discussing academic progress with their assigned students. The requirements to obtain a degree at UPR-Ponce are established in the Catalog (pp. 68-69) (Appendix 3.3.1).

Policies and procedures regarding evaluation and acceptance of transfer credits, and credits awarded through experiential learning, prior non-academic learning, competency-based assessment, and other alternative learning approaches (Criterion 2)

As established in the UPR-Ponce Catalog, any student who has taken courses in other institutions of higher education may request a validation of credits to the department chairperson to which he/she belongs. There is a Course Validation Table that contains all courses that might be accepted from private universities when a student is transferred to UPR-Ponce. This table is available to all public at the institution's webpage.

The validation of the courses is governed by the Certification 34-2002-2003 of the Academic Senate- General Criteria for the Validation of Courses. It establishes the following criteria for validation of courses from other units of the University of Puerto Rico System:

a. Courses to be validated from another unit of the University of Puerto Rico system that have the same coding (as a course of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce) will be validated automatically. Uniform coding in the university system ensures that courses meet the criteria of homogeneity of description and curricular content.

b. If the course does not have the same coding, the guidelines established for the validation of courses from other higher education institutions of Puerto Rico will be followed.

Also, to validate a course, its description and content as presented in the syllabus must contain at least seventy-five percent (75%) of the course content offered by the UPR-Ponce. In those cases where it is difficult to obtain the course syllabus, the institution's Catalog may be used. Equivalence may be established between a set of courses with a course or set of courses of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce, if the set represents the seventy-five percent (75%) mentioned before. Likewise, only a course approved with a grade of "C" or more will be validated. Up to a maximum of fifty percent (50%) of the credits of courses of the specialty to which the student requests will be validated. If the student comes from other higher education institution in Puerto Rico but the institution is not a bonafide one, not accredited by both the Puerto Rico Board of

Education and the Higher Education Commission of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, courses from this institution will not be validated.

Similarly, a course with a lower number of credits will not be equivalent to one with a higher amount, except for those whose number of contact hours is equal to or greater than the number of contact hours of the course for which it will be validated. In these cases, the student must complete several credits with higher courses from the area. Each academic department establishes whether the equivalence of a sequence course will be done in its entirety, or equivalence can be established for each course of the sequence. In the case of sequence courses to be approved in full, the student must have approved both parts with "C" or more.

The course validation form must be accompanied by the official transcript of credits from the student's home university. In the case of new students admitted to the UPR-Ponce, the recommendation for validation of courses will be made at the time when said student is considered for admission. The validation will be official after the student enrolls in the institution. The Departmental Curriculum Committee should be consulted in cases where there is doubt about the Department's course validations. Any validated course will appear on the credit transcript with the letter "P" (passed or approved) and will have no honor points.

The accepted validations will be based on the courses offered by the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce. Courses that do not have equivalence at the UPR-Ponce may be used to complete free electives if they have this option in their academic program. The student who is in a transfer program and has approved courses that can be validated in the receiving unit will process his/her application for validation in that unit once they have been accepted. There is a validation table providing the specific courses accepted at UPR-Ponce when students are transferred to the institution. It is available at the webpage, but Appendix 4.2.1 presents its English version.

For higher education institutions outside of Puerto Rico, the following guidelines will be followed to validate courses:

a. If the institution is in the United States of America, its accreditation status with one of the accrediting bodies recognized by the Council of Post-Secondary Accreditation (COPA) will be verified. If it is not accredited, its courses will not be validated.

b. If the institution is in another country other than the United States of America, it will be verified if it has collaboration agreements for the exchange of students with the University of Puerto Rico or if it is a bonafide institution in that country. Bonafide is understood as an institution recognized by the government and that has some mechanism of accreditation of its programs and services, either externally or internally. If this condition does not exist, courses of the institution will not be validated.

c. The courses will be validated following the criteria established in the previous paragraph. Since there is a possibility that the grading system of higher education institutions outside of Puerto Rico is not equivalent to that of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce, the Dean of Academic Affairs will have the responsibility of establishing the relevant equivalences, so that it is respected that only courses approved with "C", or more are validated.

Additionally, UPR-Ponce has an Institutional Transfer Policy (Certification 28-2019-2020 of the Academic Senate) that establishes transfer types, requirements, and evaluation processes, among other aspects. It is explained in detail in the Catalog (pp. 36-40) (Appendix 4.2.2). Finally, UPR-Ponce does not have an alternative evaluation method different from the traditional certification for transfer students. These methods are currently established through Certification 162-2023-2024 of the Governing Board for freshmen students (Appendix 4.2.3).

Furthermore, the institution has a special program in which high school students are allowed to enroll in one (1) or two (2) of the designated courses, up to a maximum of eight (8) credits per semester, if they meet the requirements of the Program and present the requested documents. The program is called ASCIENDE and was created under Certification 13-2008-2009 of the Academic Senate. It belongs to the Division of Continuing Education and Professional Studies (DCEPS). This initiative recognizes the existence of academically outstanding students in the country's private and public high schools who can take university courses while completing high school. The program's purpose is to motivate and incentivize these students, allowing them to advance their university studies while gaining valuable experience. Appendix 4.2.4 provides more details on ASCIENDE.

Policies and procedures for the safe and secure maintenance and appropriate release of student information and records (Criterion 3)

The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce adheres to all state and federal laws and regulations governing the privacy and dissemination of information contained in student records, including academic performance, medical records, related actions, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), commonly known as the Buckley Amendment. FERPA ensures specific rights for students concerning their educational records. This law applies to all primary and secondary educational institutions, whether public or private, that receive federal funding. FERPA grants both parents and adult students the right to protect their personal records. Under FERPA, adult students are defined as those over 18 years old or enrolled in post-secondary schools, regardless of their age. Copies of this policy may be obtained at the Registrar's Office.

Additionally, the Medical Services Office abides by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability (HIPAA) Act of 1996 to protect students' medical information. There is a document titled Consent for Outpatient Diagnosis and/or Treatment that includes a section in which students must sign certifying that they received the privacy and confidential policy established by HIPAA (Appendix 4.3.1). Likewise, the institution communicates this law's provisions to all students upon admission each year, through the student services platform, and they are also informed in their EDFU 3005 freshmen course. Both FERPA and HIPAA laws are available at the institutional webpage.

For the institution to comply with the FERPA law, the student accesses the NEXT Portal during the first days of class and when they try to enter to see course schedule or any of their information, they must complete the FERPA form and submit it. Until they complete the FERPA process through the Portal, they will be unable to perform any process through the platform or through the

Student Information System (SIS). The Registrar carries out a monthly process where the data from the Portal is migrated to the Student Information System (SIS). The process opens from the third week of classes until the last day of final exams during their first semester so students can complete it.

Also, student records at the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce are managed within the Student Information System. The Information System Office (ISO) is dedicated to fulfilling the campus's administrative computing and information needs. To achieve this objective, the ISO has implemented strict procedures for safeguarding the data stored within the system. Furthermore, it is of utmost importance that this data is housed on high-quality servers, subject to regular maintenance and rigorous monitoring, to ensure their optimal performance and reliability. Certifications 85-2022-2023 and 89-2022-2023 from the Governing Board explain in detail these processes (Appendices 2.6.5 and 2.6.6).

If offered, athletic, student life, and other extracurricular activities that are regulated by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles and procedures that govern all other programs (Criterion 4)

The UPR-Ponce provides a variety of support services that can give the students the adequate environment to prevail and achieve personal and professional goals. It also offers leadership, educational, social, and cultural activities; educational exchange students experiences (U.S. and International Exchange), athletics programs, and student organizations such as Association of Psychology Students, Med-Life, Biology Honor Society, Association of Pro Deaf University Students, Pro Environment and Diversity University Students, Association of Future Educators, and Office Systems Association, among many others.

The Office of Extracurricular Activities is the main liaison of student organizations. These develop countless events during the year, for the student and external community's benefit. Student organizations submit for approval the different documents for their various activities. They are provided with consultations for various logistical and procedural aspects of their work schedules. These are governed by the Internal By-Laws of Student Organizations and schedule monthly meetings with the office's coordinator to discuss their affairs. Annually, the Office of Extracurricular Activities informs the accreditation processes of Student Organizations, which reviews, prepares the files and sends them to the Accreditation Committee. The accreditation process is detailed in Appendix 4.4.1. Students who possess artistic talents are encouraged to develop them by participating in activities that foster them.

Also, there is a Quality-of-Life Office that aims to promote healthy lifestyles through diverse activities of prevention. The areas that this office work with are campus safety, sexual harassment, prevention of drug and alcohol use and abuse, and wellness. The management of the Quality-of-Life Program is based on compliance with federal regulations, such as the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Crime and Security Survey (Jeanne Clery) Acts.

Another educational peer program service is known as FIESTA IX (Traffic Safety and Alcohol Facilitators and Instructors). The program's objective is to develop alcohol prevention activities to promote targeted messages to the student body as to avoid driving under the influence of alcohol. The official social network page of the Program can be accessed here [https://www.facebook.com/fiesta9UPRP/?locale=es LA](https://www.facebook.com/fiesta9UPRP/?locale=es_LA)

Additionally, the Athletic Program encourages student athletes to participate in sports activities that formatively effect on their lives and serve as a complement to their academic phase. UPR-Ponce student athletes can face competitors from other campuses and private universities in the Interuniversity Athletic League tournaments and championships in which they represent the institutional colors Red and Black with courage and pride. The campus has several sports facilities, such as the Víctor Manuel Madera Building with volleyball and basketball courts and a weight room, and two tennis courts outside. Members of the entire university community who wish to support and enjoy sports activities that promote healthy lifestyles are welcome to use the facilities. In addition, with the intention of collaborating with the university academics, the Athletic Program serves as a sports scenario for the clinical practice for the students of the Athletic Therapeutic Program.

All students that belong to these programs and organizations must abide by the UPR General By-Laws, UPR Students General By-Laws and all academic regulations. They are regulated by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles and procedures that govern all other programs.

Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of programs supporting the student experience (Criterion 6)

The institution carries out various evaluations that demonstrate the effectiveness of student success, in line with Standard 4 - Support for the Student Experience. One of these evaluations is the Exit Survey for Graduation Candidates, a study carried out by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) that analyzes the experience of graduating students at the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce. The main objective of this study is to measure student satisfaction in various aspects of the university, including academics, support services, and physical facilities. It also seeks to understand the students' professional goals upon completing their studies at the institution. Respondents evaluate how UPR-Ponce contributed to their development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes, in addition to evaluating other aspects related to the university. The 2019, 2021, and 2023 Exit Surveys to Graduating Students are presented in Appendices 4.6.1, 4.6.2., and 4.6.3, respectively. In addition to these surveys, OPIR conducted a study during the COVID-19 pandemic to evaluate technology-assisted courses. In collaboration with the Dean of Academic Affairs, an instrument was designed to know the students' perception of these courses (Appendix 4.6.4).

On the other hand, and as part of the Institutional Assessment Report prepared by OPIR, the Dean of Student Affairs presents a section that evaluates the level of satisfaction of students who use the services of the different offices overseen by the Deanship of Student Affairs, including

Extracurricular Activities, Admissions, Financial Assistance, Services for Students with Disabilities, the Athletic Department, Counseling and Psychological Services, the Registrar's Office, and Medical Services. These Institutional Assessment Reports are presented in Appendix 3.1.1. These reports compile and communicate evaluation results from all areas of the institution, including academic departments and the library. Each report includes evaluated goals or objectives, expected educational results, indicators of success, achievement levels achieved, and the use of the results.

Likewise, the UPR-Ponce presents an Annual Institutional Effectiveness Reports, also prepared by the OPIR, which highlights the projects and achievements accomplished during the academic year, both at the level of students and faculty and non-faculty. One of the objectives of this report is to promote a university environment that fosters student satisfaction and a sense of belonging to the university, highlighting activities and projects that contribute to improving the university experience. The Annual Reports for academic years 2018-2019 to 2022-2023 can be accessed in Appendices 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.4, and 2.6.3.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. UPR-Ponce has clearly stated ethical policies and processes to admit, retain, and facilitate the success of students through a variety of services and opportunities.
2. Information regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds is accurate and it is available for all constituents.
3. The institution offers various services and processes that support and strengthen the student's educational experience and help them achieve their educational goals.
4. UPR-Ponce has clear and transparent policies and procedures regarding evaluation and acceptance of transfer credits.
5. Student life, organizations, and extracurricular activities are governed by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles and procedures that oversee all other programs.
6. There are policies and procedures to keep student information and records safe and private.
7. The institution periodically assesses the effectiveness of its programs and uses results to make decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Continue carrying out the Exit Interviews and the Annual Effectiveness Reports to gather data, assess, and make decisions.
2. Maintain the current institutional policies, processes, and procedures related to admissions.
3. Continue producing information about all the different aspects important to constituents that is reliable, transparent, and accessible.
4. Continue preserving and strengthening technology and tools to maintain student information private and safe.



Standard 5:

Educational Effectiveness

Assessment



STANDARD 5: EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT

Assessment of student learning and achievement demonstrates that the institution's students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their program of study, degree level, the institution's mission, and appropriate expectations for institutions of higher education.

Requirements of Affiliation: 8, 9, and 10

Institutional Priorities: Student Success and Satisfaction

Clearly stated educational goals at the institution and program levels (Criterion 1)

UPR-Ponce is deeply committed to the intellectual, humanistic, scientific, cultural, and ethical development of its students. This commitment is reflected in the institutional mission and is further underpinned by its academic programs, which develop their student learning assessment plans in accordance with guidelines and timelines established at the institutional level (Certification 60-2013-2014 Academic Senate) (Appendix 1.1.1). Each academic department, in alignment with this mission, defines its educational goals, ensuring students acquire competencies and skills pertinent to their field of study. A specific example of this commitment can be seen in the assessment process of the Education Department, detailed in Appendix 5.1.1. The Department of Education Assessment System was developed to ensure the program aligns with the unit's and university's conceptual framework, state standards, Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) professional standards, and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC).

Moreover, UPR-Ponce educational goals are intricately linked with each other and with the institutional mission. The educational experiences that are offered are designed to mirror and fulfill the mission, ensuring that students not only gain academic knowledge but also undergo holistic development. These goals and experiences mutually reinforce each other, creating a cohesive and effective educational environment.

Also, the Institutional Graduating Student Profile, as detailed in Certification 59-2013-2014 of the Academic Senate (Appendix 3.5.2), further elucidates UPR-Ponce's duty to fostering a challenging and comprehensive environment that promotes student learning and the achievement of academic goals. This profile aligns with higher education expectations and the institutional mission by emphasizing communication skills, values awareness, technology information analysis, research skills, and quantitative and qualitative reasoning for problem-solving.

At the program level, an essential requirement for creating an academic program is its alignment with the mission and goals set by UPR-Ponce (Certification 55-2021-2022 of the Governing Board) (Appendix 5.1.2). This alignment ensures that program learning outcomes are clearly articulated and correspond to the institution's mission and goals. Furthermore, Certification 38-2009-2010 of the Academic Senate mandates that academic departments reflect include the alignment between institutional goals and departmental goals in their course syllabi. An analysis of various

course syllabi, graduating student profiles, and other departmental documents reveals that academic programs have clear and specific expectations for student learning, all of which are in harmony with the mission and goals statement. Appendix 5.1.3 shows the alignment of the institutional and learning expectations of some academic programs.

Regarding course level, UPR-Ponce has intensified its efforts towards student-learning assessment, fostering greater faculty awareness about the need to establish explicit learning goals for all courses (Certification 33-2020-2021 of the Governing Board) (Appendix 5.1.4). These goals, which are student-centered, encompass a range of outcomes, from the acquisition of information to the development of motor skills.

It is important to mention that UPR-Ponce has contributed to student skill development and knowledge acquisition. To prove this, different surveys have been conducted by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR). Respondents were asked about their perception of UPR-Ponce's contribution to the development of skills or the acquisition of knowledge which are included in the institutional graduate profile. The skills and knowledge in the profile are classified into seven areas: communication, mathematical, scientific, and technological competencies; logical and critical thinking; basic information skills; collaborative work skills; competencies related to the major; and other personal competencies. The first five areas correspond to the General Education Component of UPR-Ponce as established in Certification 48-2015-2016 of the Academic Senate (Appendix 3.5.1).

Table 5.1 compiles the competency ratings given by UPR-Ponce graduates from three survey periods. Ratings are assigned on a 5-point scale: 5 for “excellent”, 4 for “good”, 3 for “fair”, 2 for “poor”, and 1 for “deficient”.

Table 5.1
Contribution of the UPR-Ponce in the Development of Skills or Knowledge Acquisition (2019 to 2023)

Competencies	2023 Graduating Students Survey	2021 Graduating Students Survey	2019 Graduating Students Survey	Competency Average	% Percentage of Competency Average
Oral and written communication	4.33	4.32	4.22	4.29	85.8%
Math, scientific, and technological	4.06	4.24	4.16	4.15	83.0%
Logical and critical thinking	4.44	4.58	4.54	4.52	90.4%
Basic information skills	4.58	4.64	4.50	4.57	91.4%

Competencies	2023 Graduating Students Survey	2021 Graduating Students Survey	2019 Graduating Students Survey	Competency Average	% Percentage of Competency Average
Ethical, aesthetic, and historical valuation	4.51	4.66	4.61	4.59	91.8%
Working collaboratively	4.54	4.56	4.59	4.56	91.2%
Related to the major	4.47	4.52	4.55	4.51	90.2%
Other personal competencies	4.42	4.47	4.46	4.45	89.0%
Annual Average	4.36	4.49	4.46		
Percentage of the Annual Average	87.2%	89.8%	89.2%		

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

Competencies such as oral and written communication, critical thinking, and teamwork have consistently scored above 4.0, indicating a robust performance by the institution. While all competencies have been rated positively, mathematical, scientific, and technological skills show potential for improvement with slightly lower scores. These results demonstrate UPR-Ponce’s effectiveness in fostering skill development among its students while also pinpointing specific areas for further curriculum enrichment.

Following a detailed evaluation of competency assessment outcomes, UPR-Ponce is initiating several strategic initiatives aimed at reinforcing its educational efficacy. A key component of this initiative is the overhaul of the assessment methodologies. The Student Learning Assessment Committee has meticulously crafted a training plan to better align the assessment practices with the educational objectives and desired learning outcomes. This plan began with personalized training sessions for assessment coordinators, focused on refining evaluation plans and providing guidance on the most effective tools, instruments, and didactic practices. Appendix 5.1.5 presents the Professional Development Plan for Student Learning Assessment Committees (2021-2024) and Appendix 5.1.6 shows an example of an action and training plan as well as the Student Learning Assessment Committee members.

Moreover, departmental initiatives are in full swing, with the English Department hosting the Language and Communication Institute—a creative writing workshop designed to enhance skills for composition and literary courses. Together, the Library has updated and expanded its

information resources, securing new database subscriptions, thereby broadening the array of available resources. The Library also conducts annual workshops on information skills for students, using various internet communication technologies. Complementing these efforts, the Dean of Academic Affairs oversees a strong tutoring program that spans multiple disciplines, offering both face-to-face and virtual tutoring options. These tutoring sessions are integral to reinforcing student learning across various courses, thus strengthening the overall educational foundation.

Rigorous assessment of student achievements defining meaningful curricular goals with supported criteria (Sub criterion 2.a)

The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce commitment to academic excellence is evident in its approach to defining and evaluating curricular goals. It has instituted organized and systematic assessments, led by its faculty and, when necessary, supplemented by external professionals with specialized expertise. This rigorous process is a testament to institutional dedication and is anchored in the collective vision of the faculty, committees, and institutional frameworks. Aligned with institutional guidelines, academic programs implement student learning assessment plans. Departmental assessment committees, appointed by academic department chairpersons, lead the development and refinement of the Departmental Three-Year Assessment Plans. These committees establish assessment goals, scrutinize outcomes, offer insightful recommendations, and ensure that findings translate to tangible curriculum enhancements in the Three-Year Assessment Plans. The institution ensures that learning expectations are consistent across all academic tiers – institutional, programmatic, and course-specific, and these expectations undergo rigorous reviews to ensure their seamless integration throughout a student's academic path.

Faculty collaboratively set educational assessment goals, drawing inspiration from both institutional and programmatic missions and objectives. This joint effort also pinpoints both direct and indirect assessment methods, including rubrics, exams, and surveys. Professionally accredited programs integrate internal standards with those prescribed by [professional accrediting bodies](#) (Appendix 5.1.7).

Articulating Preparation for Successful Careers, Meaningful Lives, and Further Education (Sub criterion 2.b)

The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce strong commitment to academic excellence is deeply rooted in its institutional mission. The institution's primary objective is to ensure that students are well-prepared for successful careers, meaningful lives, and, where appropriate, further academic pursuits. This rigorous alignment with the institution's mission guarantees that students are not only prepared with the necessary skills and knowledge for their immediate goals but are also poised for lifelong learning and significant societal contributions.

The institution honors the success of its alumni and promotes the enhancement of its academic programs through annual alumni panels. These events are coordinated by academic programs such as Education, Social Sciences, the Business Administration program, Office

Systems Administration and Technology, and Computer Science. These panels allow alumni to discuss how their education has influenced their professional trajectories and lives. A particularly relevant example was the panel organized by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research during the 2020-2021 academic year, which provided a rich exchange of experiences and encouraged constructive feedback for the constant evolution of the institution. The detailed report of this panel can be found in Appendix 5.2.1.

Through the years, the institution has intensified its efforts in student learning assessment, raising faculty awareness about the significance of setting clear course learning objectives. As mandated by Certification 43-2020-2021 of the Governing Board (Appendix 5.1.4), every course syllabus explicitly outlines the expected student outcomes derived from the course's educational experiences. These outcomes span from knowledge acquisition to skill development and relationship building helping students to be prepared to have successful careers. A deep look into the academic programs reveals that course learning objectives are in perfect alignment with broader program objectives (Appendix 5.2.2).

Support and sustain assessment of student achievement (Sub criterion 2.c)

The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce's unwavering commitment to academic excellence is anchored in its systematic and ongoing assessment of student learning outcomes. The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) directs the ongoing assessment of student learning outcomes and ensures that assessments are both comprehensive and driven by tangible data, as highlighted in the OPIR Annual Institutional Effectiveness Report 2022-2023 (Appendix 3.2.1).

OPIR does not merely gather data; it employs a diverse range of quantitative methodologies, diving deep into metrics that span from individual course grades to broader institutional and programmatic graduation and retention rates, as evidenced in the [Graduation and Retention Data 2022-2023](#). This data is meticulously summarized into detailed reports, shedding light on both the institution's overall performance and the individual achievements of its students.

Some key reports and activities of OPIR are:

- Student Perception Surveys: Periodically conducted to gauge student satisfaction with the university's educational experience and its impact on their learning goals.
- Quantitative Analysis: Emphasizing academic success and performance metrics such as course grades, graduation and retention rates, course passing rates, and withdrawal rates.
- Annual Institutional Data Profile: A statistical overview of various institutional aspects.
- Graduating Students Survey & Exit Interview: Evaluates graduating students' satisfaction and gathers data on academic experiences.
- Alumni Surveys: Collects data from alumni on various aspects of their post-graduation experiences and their views on UPR-Ponce.
- IPEDS Reports: Mandatory reports for the U.S. Department of Education, covering a wide range of institutional data.

- Dashboards: They present institutional data in different areas, either at the academic program, department, or bachelor's degree level, or at the institutional level.
- Assessment Tools: OPIR manages the logistics and dissemination of tools like the National Survey of Student Engagement.

Prioritizing transparency, all analytical efforts, findings, and insights are made publicly accessible via the [OPIR's webpage](#). The OPIR Informs bulletins (Appendix 5.2.3) released by the office serve as a regular conduit of information, updating the university community on vital assessment statistics, news, and accreditation processes. Furthermore, the institutional commitment to collaborative introspection is highlighted through the traditional Assessment Forums. Initiated in the academic year 2005-2006, these forums foster in-depth discussions on student-learning outcomes and continuous improvement, with the positive feedback received over the years standing as a testament to their effectiveness.

Assisting students in improving their learning and improving pedagogy and curriculum (Sub criterion 3.a and 3.b)

At the core of UPR-Ponce's educational mandate is the aspiration to address and adapt to the evolving learning needs of its students. With this focus, the institution harnesses assessment results, translating them into actionable insights. Each department's Student Learning Assessment Committee meticulously reviews these results, pinpointing students' strengths, and areas for enhancement. By leveraging this data-driven understanding, the institution can fine-tune its resources to create a responsive learning environment.

For example, programs and departments such as Physical Therapy, Education, Social Sciences, and Office Systems have made significant changes in curriculum, syllabi revision, equipment, and educational strategies, among others. This highlights how assessment insights were harnessed to refine specific student learning tools or services. Additionally, the feedback loop generated by regular evaluations empowers students to make timely adjustments to their learning strategies. Recognizing the holistic needs of its student body, UPR-Ponce has introduced services, such as career guidance, psychological support, and social assistance. An example of this commitment is the “*Bien Estar* by CONSEP” project, which aims to provide comprehensive quality of life for students at the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce, especially those who are among minority groups, underserved, or in unequal groups, low-income, or homeless. This project offers basic needs services and equitable interdisciplinary support that facilitates their integration into university life. Moreover, in response to assessment findings that highlighted various academic and non-academic factors influencing student performance, tutoring services have been expanded to two modalities: face-to-face and virtual (Appendix 5.3.1).

Beyond catering to student needs, UPR-Ponce employs assessment outcomes to guide pedagogical and curricular innovations. Central to this endeavor is the continuous professional development of the faculty, with training content shaped by the insights drawn from assessments. By discerning which teaching strategies align with student preferences and learning

styles, instructors can continually refine their teaching methods. One notable instance of this adaptability is the changes made by the Business Administration Department in the academic year 2022-2023 where pedagogical modifications were initiated based on assessment insights. Also, it is important to mention that on November 29, 2023, Makerspace Project was inaugurated. These new facilities are inside the Adelina Coppin Library. This project aims to promote student's creativity, innovation, and practical learning.

From a curricular perspective, the dynamism and relevance of UPR-Ponce's programs are preserved by aligning them with the real-world competencies spotlighted in assessment findings. An example of this alignment is observed in the Social Sciences Department, where program profiles underwent more than 30 minor changes to address current global demands. Some of these changes were related to course order, eliminating courses, and substituting others. Appendix 5.3.2 shows the approved minor changes in detail.

Processes and procedures designed to improve academic programs and support services (Sub criterion 3.c. and 3.h)

UPR-Ponce believes in the continuous enhancement of its programs and services. To systematically guide these efforts, dedicated assessment committees have been named and are steered by representatives from all deanships. Each academic and administrative unit meticulously develops a three-year strategic plan, outlining their respective action initiatives. Appendix 5.3.3 illustrates some examples of Three-Year Assessment Plans.

Also, to ensure that the educational offerings remain top-tier and pertinent, comprehensive program that are not professional accredited must be reviewed every five (5) years as established by Certification 55-2021-2022 from the Governing Board (Appendix 5.1.2). These reviews leverage assessment outcomes and constructive feedback to shape the necessary academic programs' strategies not susceptible to professional accreditation. For those who are accredited, they must be reviewed for reaccreditation in the timeframe indicated by the corresponding agency. However, they also have advisory boards that help them in the assessment process. These boards, in their periodic meetings, offer crucial feedback on program content, evaluation metrics, and prevailing labor market trends.

It is noteworthy to mention that the Institutional Assessment Coordinator bears the responsibility of examining and consolidating assessment reports. This mechanism ensures all the enhancement initiatives are rooted in empirical data. Moreover, it guarantees strategies are not static; they evolve based on periodic reviews and emerging needs. Institutional Assessment Reports are available on the [Office of Planning and Institutional Research webpage](#) and some of them can be reviewed on Appendix 3.1.1. By analyzing these results, areas of strength and, more importantly, areas where change is needed can be identified. The following overview addresses how assessment outcomes have been instrumental in guiding the review and enhancement of the academic programs and support services. Additionally, it underscores the tangible changes

that have been implemented based on these assessments. The following are some examples related to academic programs:

- **Office Systems Department:** It has taken significant steps to enhance its curriculum. A written reflection in Spanish was integrated into courses such as ESCO 3006- Oral and Written Business Communication in Spanish II and SOFI 3327-Transcription in Spanish. The course content and teaching methodologies, particularly for SOFI 4005-Program Integration, were reviewed to emphasize the use of Excel. Furthermore, a comprehensive curricular revision for its bachelor's degree is underway.
- **Physical Therapy Program:** Reviews and adjustments to the curriculum have been done. These involved emphasis on topics that were identified as difficult by student, including activities and reports in English to strengthen this second language, and creating book clubs to provide more opportunities for students to gain technical knowledge, among others.
- **Humanities Department:** It has refined its teaching strategies. This involves a thorough revision of textbooks and an increase in technological support for modern learning. Courses like FILO 3185-Computer Ethics completed content updates to bridge the gap between ethics and computer science. Emphasis was also laid on highlighting the historical, social, and cultural significance of Greece in the HUMA 3101 course.

Recently, and responding to the latest trends, the Curriculum Revision and Educational Transversality Committee was instituted. Its main goal is to harmonize syllabi across programs and supporting the holistic preparation of students emphasizing the development of soft skills and entrepreneurship. Different meetings and workshops have been held to move this initiative forward. Appendix 5.3.4 presents the work done by the Curriculum Revision and Educational Transversality Committee.

In relation to support services, it is important to mention that they are also periodically assessed and excellent results have been achieved. For example, eighty-three percent (83%) of students who answered a satisfaction survey during the 2020-2021 academic year expressed satisfaction with the services provided overseen by the Deanship of Student Affairs. Similarly, ninety-four percent (94%) of student athletes said that the training methodologies employed on remote platforms were excellent. Also, the 2019-2020 academic year witnessed an overwhelming positive response to the electronic loan application process provided by the Financial Aid Office garnering a ninety-six percent (96%) satisfaction rate.

Likewise, the Counseling and Psychological Services Department asked students about the relevance of its services during the academic year 2019-2020. Ninety-nine percent (99%) of respondents acknowledged the department's pivotal role in bolstering their academic, emotional, and social wellness. Emphasizing user-centricity, the department has offered varying modalities for appointments, highlighting flexibility in line with institutional guidelines.

Other offices that made changes based on assessment results were Medical Services and Admissions. The first strategies developed to boost the online medical plan's usage and continuous engagement initiatives were carried out through platforms like Putty and Tera Term during academic years 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022. The latter obtained a seventy-seven percent (77%) student satisfaction rate for transfer orientation, falling slightly short of the eighty percent (80%) target of academic year 2020-2021. In response, different measures were introduced. These ranged from appointment-based interactions and regular status updates to devising a flow chart that details the admission process.

Finally, the Library identified a gap in student awareness related to their services, resources, and databases, among other topics. To address this, the Library initiated the production of instructional videos and PowerPoint presentations that spotlight the available resources. To watch them, students must install Institutional Microsoft Office to have access to Microsoft Stream Classic. Twenty-four videos were produced to help students. Additionally, the library staff started recording the workshops they offered to share with the student body. The videos are available on the library website under the "Help menu, videos section". The library also has tutorial videos in its databases section.

Since January 2024, the Adelina Coppin Alvarado Library has had the Research Support Center (RSC). It is an area dedicated to enriching research and information management skills. The RSC helps students and faculty identify and correctly use academic resources to complete research or assignments. It offers group services and in-person or virtual workshops on the: use of the APA style manual; use of databases; writing annotated bibliographies; and preparation of essays and monographs, among others.

Planning, conducting, and supporting a range of professional development activities (Sub criterion 3.d)

The Deanship of Academic Affairs and the Institutional Professional Development Committee oversees and coordinates professional development and improvement seminars for the faculty. Annually, the Committee circulates questionnaires to find out the faculty and departmental chairpersons' needs. In addition, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) does the same. In 2017, the Institutional Professional Development Committee inquired about faculty interest in topics such as curriculum and instruction, learning assessment, academic administration, proposal development, ethics and academic integrity, and law and student retention, among others.

In the survey carried out during academic year 2021-2022, Department Directors and Program Coordinators were asked about the possibility of offering during the Faculty Workshop, the Chairpersons' Academy or the Summer Academy, a variety of topics that went from technology and emotional matters to ethical and human issues and institutional processes and procedures. Appendix 5.3.5 shows the list of activities and workshops provided to the faculty. Similarly, the 2022-2023 Faculty Professional Improvement Needs Assessment listed diverse educational options for the faculty. This questionnaire included areas such as enrollment, graduates, human

resources, graduation rates, finances, institutional profile, and financial aid. Other questions asked about educational effectiveness in academic departments, trends in applications, admissions, and enrollment of high school students, factors affecting retention of distance-learning students, research ethics, and plagiarism, among many others.

Starting in 2017, questions related to preferred day and time to carry out the trainings were included in the Needs Assessment. Then a question was incorporated inquiring about the preferred modality to receive these trainings. Based on these results, now professional improvement activities are offered both in person and remotely. One hundred percent (100%) of the participants evaluated the 2019 Chairpersons' Academy: Reflection Workshop: Rethinking the University, A Look at 2030, as "Excellent" or "Good". That same year, Dr. Philippe Scott Destouches gave the Distance Education Conference. Once again, one hundred percent (100%) of the participants evaluated the activity as "Excellent" or "Good". Similarly, ninety-nine percent (99%) of participants who completed the 2020 Faculty Workshop evaluation rated it as "Excellent." In these evaluations, it was recommended to provide more practical activities related to Moodle and virtual education topics.

Every semester the Deanship of Academic Affairs, through the Institutional Professional Improvement Committee, oversees the organization of orientations for newly hired faculty. In these activities several speakers explain UPR By-Laws, institutional policies, and faculty expectations, among other relevant topics to faculty. Appendix 5.3.5 provides a comprehensive list of activities coordinated by the Institutional Professional Improvement Committee, based on the analysis of data from studies conducted between 2019 and 2022. Recently, a digital module was created to provide these orientations for new faculty.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to align with the institutional Goal 2: Offer innovative and relevant academic programs focused on the needs of the main constituents of the institution and society, faculty received training as distance educators. More than sixty professors received the Virtual Learning Environment Construction Certification from UPR Río Piedras and more than 100 professors obtained the Virtual Educator Certification taught by UPR Mayagüez.

In addition, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) designed the Employee Questionnaire to identify strengths and needs in the work environment of UPR-Ponce employees. Its objective was to design strategies aimed at improving employee satisfaction in their workplace. Some actions taken were workshops for the proper management of finances and personal wellbeing, for example: self-care and time management, strategies for burnout syndrome in caregivers of the elderly or children with disabilities. Additionally, in collaboration with the Human Resources Office, they planned relaxation activities at the institution.

Professional development at UPR-Ponce is not only a priority but a continuous endeavor strategically aligned with assessment outcomes to maintain its relevance and effectiveness. Led by the Professional Development Committee and overseen by the Deanship of Academic Affairs, training initiatives are tailored to address faculty-identified needs. Regular input from faculty

members guides the Professional Development Committee in its planning, allowing the institution to make real-time adjustments. This iterative feedback loop ensures UPR-Ponce stays at the forefront of pedagogical practices, offering solid support to its academic community. Every year, the Institutional Professional Development Committee initiates a comprehensive review of faculty interests through a questionnaire. The insights procured from this survey are invaluable, serving as a cornerstone for sculpting focused and relevant professional development opportunities in the upcoming year.

In the wake of the recent pandemic, the necessity for upskilling in digital methodologies became paramount. This prompted an emphasis on training sessions dedicated to online teaching platforms and the integration of collaborative tools. Simultaneously, recognizing the profound impact of such unprecedented times on mental health, UPR-Ponce prioritized workshops on stress management, wellbeing promotion, and healthy lifestyle, among other topics to foster both personal resilience and the creation of inclusive learning environments.

Effective communication with the university community is essential. The institutional email known as *Cartero Ponce* and the OPIR Informs bulletins are used to keep everyone updated on matters relevant to institutional effectiveness. Appendix 5.2.3 shows some examples of these bulletins. Additionally, UPR-Ponce's accredited programs regularly update the evaluation section on their institutional website. These are examples of some of the webpages: [Elementary Education](#) and [Engineering](#) Programs. Other communication channels the institution utilizes include Facebook, UPR-Ponce YouTube Channel, and the official University Website: <https://www.uprp.edu/>.

Planning and budgeting for the provision of academic programs and student services (Sub criterion 3.e)

UPR-Ponce is deeply committed to a robust planning and budgeting process that is intrinsically tied to the assessment results of its academic programs and services. This commitment is not only essential for fiscal responsibility and transparency but is also central to the quest for academic excellence and continuous improvement.

The institution believes in data-driven decision-making. Thus, the assessment results play a pivotal role in how budget for academic programs and services is allocated. Since 2008, assessment results emanating from the Institutional Assessment Committee have provided vital data for the UPR-Ponce administration and the Executive Committee of Institutional Renewal (ECIR). This data forms the bedrock upon which policies are designed, and strategic allocations are determined, ensuring alignment with the institutional mission and the continuous enhancement of operations and services. Appendix 5.3.6 illustrates minutes and presentations shared at these meetings.

Budgetary requests made by the department chairpersons are not viewed in isolation. Instead, they must be directly aligned with operational plans, assessment outcomes, and the overarching strategic vision of both UPR-Ponce and the broader UPR System. This rigorous requirement

ensures that any alterations or enhancements to programs, which necessitate additional resources, are grounded in actual assessment data, as highlighted in annual reports and budget requests.

After the 2005 Self-Study, UPR-Ponce has made remarkable strides in bolstering its educational effectiveness assessment. A concerted effort has been undertaken to instill a culture of assessment across all deanships. Central to this endeavor is the Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal (ECIR), which has, since 2008, been instrumental in leveraging assessment results for both planning and resource allocation. UPR-Ponce employs a comprehensive blend of direct and indirect, qualitative, and quantitative assessment methodologies to gauge institutional effectiveness. These rigorous assessments have not only elevated the quality of the planning processes but have also enhanced resource allocation and institutional renewal.

The influence of assessment on the institution's resource allocation is evident in the tangible improvements and enhancements that have been realized over the years. In the past few years, as part of the assessment process, academic programs have shown the need to increase the number of faculty with regular positions. With that in mind, the budget distribution was aligned with departmental needs. In this way, it has been possible to search for and select nineteen (19) new teaching positions in several departments. Also, assessment results have identified the need for administrative personnel to strengthen support services in the achievement of the institutional mission and vision, including positions for the maintenance and repair of the facilities, as well as the areas of compliance. In addition, upgrades to technological infrastructure to further refine the teaching-learning process and to increase efficiency have occurred.

Likewise, training and professional development initiatives targeting faculty and non-faculty to elevate the caliber of teaching and services were held. Furthermore, refurbishments have been undertaken in key areas, including the Medical Services, Business Administration Department, and several labs in the Office System, Chemistry, and Biology departments (Appendix 5.3.7). Finally, and noteworthy, is the Information System Office's automation processes for the offices of Students with Disabilities, Registrar's, Admissions, and Medical Services, streamlining administrative operations.

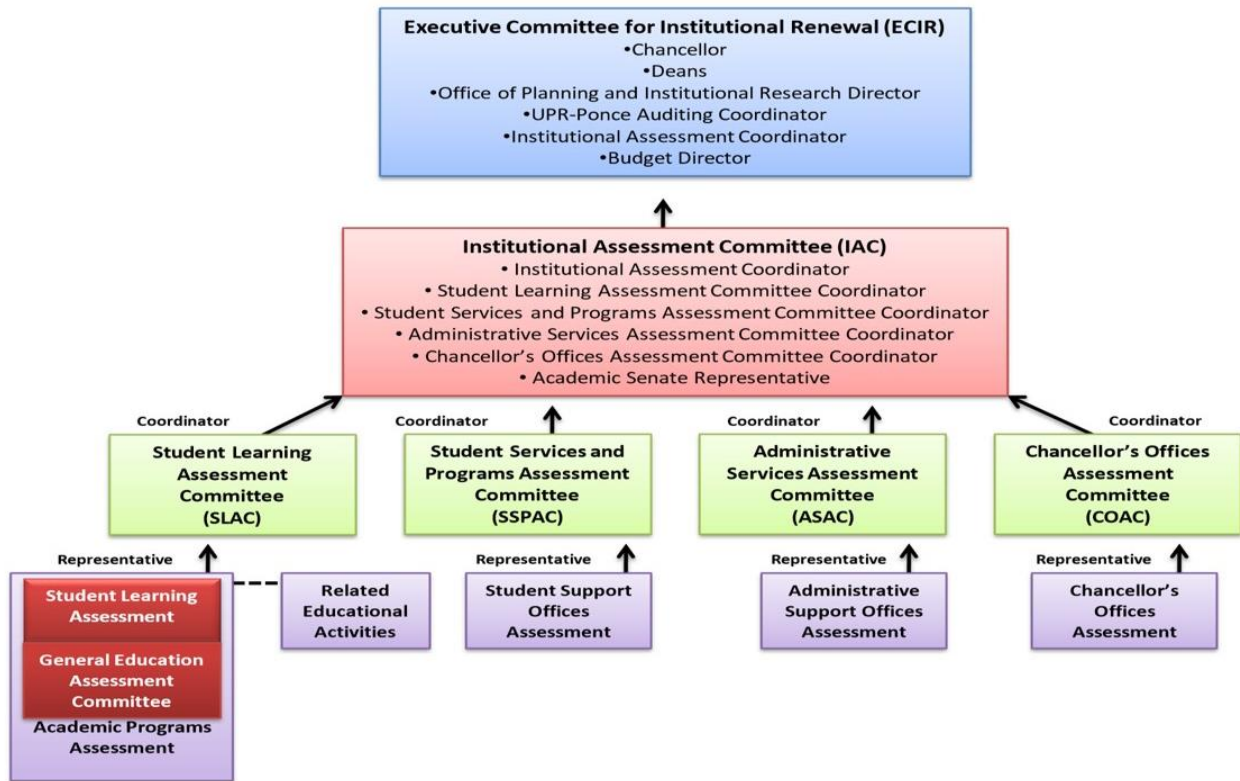
Informing constituents about the institution and its programs (Sub criterion 3.f)

Transparent communication with stakeholders is paramount to UPR-Ponce. The robust assessment process not only guides the institution in making informed decisions for better educational outcomes but also provides a means to keep constituents abreast of its performance, initiatives, and the overall health of academic and administrative operations.

As illustrated in Figure 5.1, the assessment process framework ensures that results are communicated across all levels, paving the way for informed decision-making to further educational endeavors. This assessment process is not restricted to the upper administration. It actively engages every part of the university community, including all deanships and the

Chancellor’s Office. Such inclusivity underscores the collective responsibility to document, assess, evaluate, and then share the findings, thus fortifying a culture of ongoing assessment at UPR-Ponce.

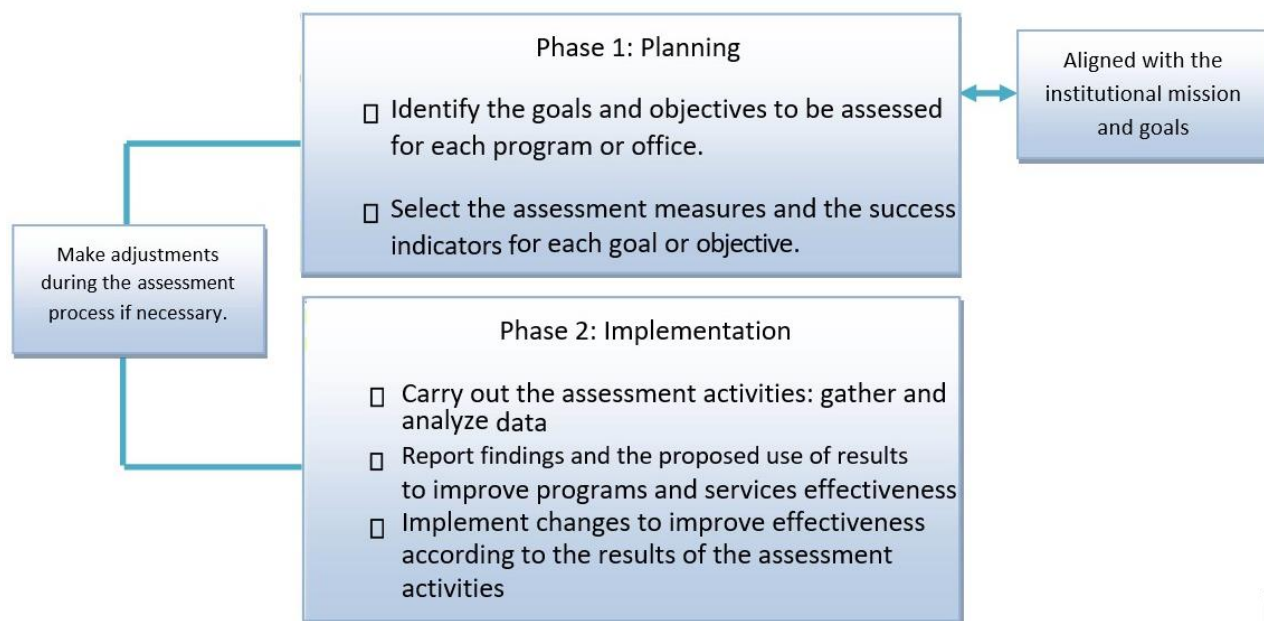
Figure 5.1
UPR-Ponce Institutional Assessment Structure



Source: Institutional Assessment Plan

As shown in Figure 5.2, Phase 2 of the assessment model emphasizes the transparent communication of findings. One of the most meaningful results pertains to the Assessment of Student Learning, which is diligently reported to the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR). These findings form the focal point of discussions during institutional assessment forums, fostering collective introspection and mutual learning.

Figure 5.2
UPR-Ponce Assessment Model



Source: Institutional Assessment Plan

The consolidation of assessment results from across UPR-Ponce culminates in the Annual Institutional Assessment Report. Appendix 3.1.1 shows examples of these reports. This comprehensive document is available to a wide range of stakeholders including faculty, administrators, and students through institutional email. They are also presented and discussed at forums, meetings, and in OPIR publications. In conclusion, UPR-Ponce believes that an informed community is an empowered community. Its emphasis on sharing assessment results with the constituents not only underscores institutional transparency but also its dedication to collaborative growth and improvement.

Improving key indicators of student success (Sub criterion 3.g)

UPR-Ponce views student success as the most genuine reflection of institutional effectiveness. By rigorously measuring and enhancing key indicators of student success, such as retention, graduation, transfer, and placement rates, the institution is not only fulfilling its mission but also reaffirming its determined commitment to educational excellence.

Recognizing the foundational significance of retention to student success, targeted interventions like early alert systems, peer mentorship programs, and academic support workshops have been implemented. These strategies are designed to identify students who might be at risk early in their academic journey and equip them with the necessary resources and guidance.

Institutional dedication to help students graduate is manifested through robust advising systems, career counseling sessions, and continuous curricular reviews. By ensuring that coursework remains both relevant and challenging, and by delineating clear academic pathways, UPR-Ponce has had stable graduation rates that are comparable to peer institutions. This data is shown in the OPIR's dashboard related to [graduation rates](#).

Also, to perpetuate and further amplify these indicators, a rigorous feedback mechanism has been instituted. Periodic surveys, activities with alumni, and industry feedback keep the institution apprised of potential improvement areas. This feedback is seamlessly woven into strategic planning, ensuring that institutional actions remain both effective and agile. The most recent Graduating Student Survey from academic year 2022-2023 is shown in Appendix 4.6.3.

Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of assessment processes (Criterion 5)

In today's dynamic educational environment, the emphasis on assessment and continuous improvement is paramount to meet the evolving needs of the academic and occupational landscape. Central to UPR-Ponce's continuous enhancement endeavors is the cyclical assessment of the efficiency of its adopted assessment mechanisms. The institution adheres to a structured protocol to periodically assess the efficacy of its evaluation methodologies, deeply rooted in its Institutional Assessment Plan (Appendix 5.5.1). This policy draws inspiration from the Nichols Institutional Effectiveness Model (2000), a holistic framework tailored to combine plan formation with assessment reports. Through the adoption of this model, UPR-Ponce instigates evaluative cycles that are not merely confined to pinpointing potential enhancement areas but also to instill effective strategies to fulfill outlined objectives.

A rounded assessment process would be incomplete without the incorporation of precise indicators to track progression and enhancement. In that sense, UPR-Ponce highlights its dedication to upholding high standards. Improvement indicators emanate from the preset outcomes delineated in several institutional plans. To elucidate, the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled "Vision 2026" (Appendix 5.5.2) and the Institutional Assessment Plan stand as pivotal documents, serving dual purposes: sketching the institution's future trajectory and evaluating its current performance. Integrated with other specialized plans, each document outlines clear objectives and tangible metrics to gauge efficacy and progress.

UPR-Ponce's dedication to amplifying its caliber based on evaluative processes is reflected in the fact that eighty-three percent (83%) of its academic programs that are susceptible to accreditation are accredited. This fact is shown in the [institutional webpage](#). This endorsement acts as an extrinsic affirmation of the institution's programmatic quality and effectiveness.

In essence, UPR-Ponce has cultivated a comprehensive and delineated mechanism for its periodic evaluation. Its well-drafted policies and a rigorous evaluative framework continues to help the institution to excel in the academic area.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. UPR-Ponce has clearly stated educational goals at the institution and program levels.
2. The institution, propelled by the rigorous endeavors of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR), has a clear and supported culture of assessment, transparency, and collaboration.
3. The institutional approach to planning and budgeting is assessment-driven and results in tangible improvements across academic and administrative areas.
4. UPR-Ponce's decision-making process is anchored in empirical data and feedback.
5. The institution plans, conducts, and supports a wide range of professional development activities during the academic year.
6. UPR-Ponce shares assessment results with constituents in many ways.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Preserve the current institutional assessment structure.
2. Maintain the data-driven decision-making culture.



Standard 6:

**Planning, Resources, and
Institutional Improvement**



STANDARD 6: PLANNING, RESOURCES, AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

The institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges.

Institutional Priority: Sustainability

Institutional objectives, both institution wide and for individual units, that are clearly stated, assessed appropriately, linked to mission and goal achievement, reflect conclusions drawn from assessment results, and are used for planning and resource allocation (Criterion 1)

UPR-Ponce continuously establishes priorities and directions to sustain and improve use of institutional resources, academic quality, and the fulfillment of its mission. Fostering a strategic alignment between the systemic and institutional plans, the following pillars of UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled "Vision 2026" (Appendix 2.6.4) were established: Excellency and Academic Innovation; Student Success; Sustainability and Resilience; and Technology and Administration.

Considering these strategic pillars that will mark the path towards achieving the mission and vision of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce, the following twelve (12) goals were developed:

1. Guarantee the continuity of excellent teaching in recognized and accredited programs.
2. Offer innovative and relevant academic programs focused on the needs of the main constituents of the institution and society.
3. Encourage research and academic creation.
4. Diversify and increase university enrollment by twelve percent (12%).
5. Innovatively and effectively meet students' learning needs.
6. Promote a college environment that stimulates student satisfaction and their sense of belonging to the university.
7. Increase the proportion of external funds to complement the institution's general budget.
8. Improve infrastructure and foster operational resilience.
9. Provide a greater link with industry, the government, and the institution's interest groups.
10. Maximize the potential of human resources in the institution.
11. Promote the continuous improvement of academic and administrative operations.
12. Use emerging technological resources to maximize the institution's operational efficiency.

Each deanship, department, and administrative office bears the responsibility of aligning their operational and strategic plans with the pillars and goals outlined in this plan. Appendix 6.1.1 presents an example of a departmental strategic plan and Appendix 6.1.2 presents the 2020-2021 Operational Plan as an example of the process. The specified assessment metrics should be seamlessly integrated as key indicators of success within the operational plans of each

administrative unit. Additionally, the distribution of the institution's budget should be strategically oriented to consider the identified priorities.

To ensure the effective implementation of the Strategic Plan, it is imperative to provide the university community with the opportunity to thoroughly review and discuss it within their respective academic or administrative personnel. Encouraging collaborative participation from the entire university community is instrumental in executing the plan successfully.

Several institutional dashboards have been designed to facilitate the dissemination of up-to-date and validated data to both the university community and external stakeholders (Appendix 6.1.3). At the institutional level, these dashboards have proven to be a crucial and innovative tool for evidence-based decision-making. Users can access historical data, track changes, and identify areas for improvement. The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) continues its efforts to design dashboards that enhance the planning process, assessment, and the accreditation processes of its academic programs.

Clearly documented and communicated planning and improvement processes that provide for constituent participation, and incorporate the use of assessment results (Criterion 2)

UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2) ensures that both faculty and students have a voice in all UPR-Ponce's governing bodies, promoting their active involvement in institutional decision-making processes. UPR-Ponce's Academic Senate, a forum for academic deliberation, features a representative from each academic department among its tenured faculty members. Student representation in this body is enabled through the participation of the Student Council president and three members elected annually by their peers. The Academic Senate plays a crucial role in making academic decisions and addressing matters that concern the academic community. Appendix 6.2.1 presents some examples of the Academic Senate Annual Reports that are shared with all stakeholders by email and are available on its webpage. In addition, UPR-Ponce's Administrative Board is another deliberative body that evaluates and approves administrative affairs over the entire institution. The Board's composition allows faculty and students to participate in all administrative decision-making processes, including budgeting, faculty promotions and tenures, academic calendars, among other matters. Enacted norms of both the Academic Senate and Administrative Board are communicated to the university community through numbered certifications. Appendix 6.2.2 includes some examples of the Administrative Board Annual Reports which are shared with all stakeholders by email and are available on its webpage.

Faculty members are also given opportunities to express their views and engage in the decision-making process during faculty meetings. According to the UPR General By-Laws, these meetings are scheduled at least once per semester, with the flexibility to convene extraordinary meetings when necessary. Institutional and departmental committees serve as additional avenues for faculty, non-faculty, and students to be part of decision-making processes at various levels.

Institutional committees are appointed by the Chancellor, while departmental committees are appointed by department chairpersons or selected by the faculty.

The Disciplinary Board is another body where students, administrators, and faculty collaborate to address situations related to student disciplinary affairs. The Student Council serves as a platform for students to voice their concerns regarding issues that affect them, as well as to propose ideas and initiatives for institutional enhancement. This student body, elected annually, is the official forum representing the student community and has a presence in UPR-Ponce's primary governing bodies, as previously discussed in this chapter. Student senators can submit proposals concerning matters that impact them. Members of student organizations can also communicate their concerns and ideas to the Dean of Student Affairs, who then channels them to the appropriate governing body.

Non-faculty members play vital roles in the decision-making process. They are integral components of the institutional assessment structure and are represented in the Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal. This committee includes non-faculty in decision-making positions, reinforcing their significance in the decision-making process. The UPR-Ponce Institutional Organizational Chart is included in Appendix 6.2.3.

In October 2020, the Steering Committee responsible for formulating UPR-Ponce's Strategic Plan for 2021-2026 was appointed (Appendix 2.6.4). This committee conducted a comprehensive SWOT Analysis to pinpoint the institution's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The initial draft of the plan was shared with the university community, ensuring that the final document would be the result of a collective and collaborative effort. Additionally, in 2021, a public hearing was convened, allowing students, faculty, and non-faculty the opportunity to provide input and suggestions for the Plan. The UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled "Vision 2026" outlined the foundational pillars that will guide the institution in achieving its mission and vision. However, the strategic plan fosters assessment results for improving decision-making processes. It encompasses twelve (12) goals aligned with specific objectives, activities, and assessment metrics looking for continuous improvement.

Each of the twelve (12) strategic goals from the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled "Vision 2026" guides the planning process for all office directors, department chairpersons, and deans annually. They are required to submit their office, department, and deanship's Operational Plan for each academic year, outlining the activities they intend to undertake. All planned activities should be aligned with the goals and objectives of the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan. At the end of each academic year, an annual report should be submitted by the office and department's chairpersons to the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR). Department chairpersons and deans are further tasked with analyzing their departments or deanships activities during the year and outline necessary actions for continuous improvement. The Report includes an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, along with the identification of three significant achievements per year.

The Institutional Assessment Plan (Appendix 2.9.1) complies with the established and approved guidelines by the Academic Senate in Certification 61-2002-2003 and 14-2005-2006. Certification 14-2005-2006 outlines the roles of the institutional assessment coordinator. UPR-Ponce's assessment structure includes a network of hierarchical committees that serve as conduits for sharing assessment results. The application of these results enhances efficiency across all sectors of the institution. The Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal (ECIR) receives and reviews information on assessment outcomes from all areas, utilizing this data for strategic planning and resource allocation priorities. This structural setup ensures that programs, offices, departments, and committees both inform and are informed about decisions related to planning and resource allocation. Findings from the assessment cycle are deliberated during ECIR meetings, giving the chancellor an opportunity to engage with deans in taking necessary decisions. Appendix 5.3.6 presents meeting minutes and reports discussed.

Within the scope of OPIR functions and responsibilities, data pertaining to the perception of students, faculty, and non-faculty regarding institutional effectiveness is collected. Each year, data is gathered from incoming freshman students (Appendix 6.2.4), gauging their experience and satisfaction with the university admission process. Every two years, satisfaction data is collected from graduating students, evaluating various academic and administrative aspects of their respective programs (Appendices 4.6.1, 4.6.2, and 4.6.3). The OPIR also conducts studies regarding institution alumni, reaching out to them one or more years after graduation (Appendix 6.2.5). Alumni, who may be part of the workforce in their respective fields, provide valuable insights to academic program effectiveness. These studies' results are shared with the university and external community through the OPIR website. A dashboard was created to showcase the results of the 2017-2019 alumni study ([Alumni Dashboard UPR-Ponce](#)). The dashboard illustrates the profile of the graduates and various satisfaction variables, including data on their integration into the workforce and the connection they maintain with their alma mater. Academic programs leverage data from these reports for decision-making, program evaluations, and self-study design. Also, these findings serve as a resource for academic departments to pinpoint areas for continuous improvement.

**A financial planning and budgeting process that is aligned with the institution's mission and goals, evidence-based, and clearly linked to the institution's and units' strategic plans/objectives
(Criterion 3)**

Enhancing the educational experience through the strategic allocation of technology resources stands as a top priority at UPR-Ponce. Annually, the institution accrues a technology fee. To oversee the evaluation of needs presented by academic department chairpersons, the Chancellor appoints a Technology Committee. The Dean of Academic Affairs initiates the process by petitioning assessments from department chairpersons regarding their requirements for academic technology, encompassing both equipment and software (Appendix 6.3.1). These requests are then compiled and presented to the Technology Committee by the Dean for

thorough consideration. The committee, in turn, assesses and allocates the funds accordingly. Following the distribution of technology funds, the budget chairperson scrutinizes the operational budget to identify supplementary funds to address any outstanding requests. Additionally, budget petitions submitted each year include other equipment needs for academic departments and support offices, along with any specific requisites presented to each Dean. Certain departments proactively submit proposals seeking external funds for distinct technological projects.

UPR-Ponce has been intensifying efforts to pinpoint alternative revenue sources to guarantee its sustained financial stability. UPR-Ponce has achieved a remarkable three hundred percent (300%) increase in the submission of funding proposals to federal agencies and foundations within the last academic years 2018-2019 to 2022-2023. As a result, the institution has secured substantial research grants. These grants are instrumental in advancing knowledge and fostering innovation in a variety of fields, including science, chemistry, physics, humanities, and engineering. Additionally, they enable the institution to enhance the support provided to students, both in terms of academic performance and meeting their essential needs, while also contributing to infrastructure improvements. UPR-Ponce’s researchers have excelled in securing highly competitive grants that have fostered faculty and student engagement in research projects.

The following table outlines the federal funds approved over the past audited academic years (2018-2019 to 2022-2023). Data collected for this purpose is also included in the Annual Institutional Data Profile (AIDP) (Appendix 6.3.2). During this period, proposals were successfully approved in various areas, encompassing student services, scientific research, humanities, and infrastructure.

Table 6.1
Federal and Private Funds Awarded for the Past Audited Academic Years (2018 to 2023)

Type	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Federal	\$1,130,983.59	\$4,723,913.00	\$31,010,888.00	\$9,067,759.00	\$3,372,161
Private	\$129,044.85	97,336.06	114,391.22	97,003.37	181,528.60
Total	\$1,260,028.44	\$4,821,249.06	\$31,125,279.20	\$9,164,762.37	\$3,553,689.60

Source: UPR-Ponce External Resources and Finance Offices

Education and Professional Studies, and the Evening University, among others. The following table presents a summary of these funds.

Table 6.2
Additional Funds Received for the Last Academic Years (2018 to 2023)

Type	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Revolving Funds	\$667,748.25	\$72,685.22	\$1,713,547.93	\$35,255.55	\$707,810.50

Source: UPR-Ponce Finance Office

In pursuit of financial sustainability, it is essential for UPR-Ponce to explore various funding sources. The main source of income for the preparation of the institutional budget is the general fund. Contributions from the general fund of the Government of Puerto Rico consist of legislative allocations granted to the University of Puerto Rico under Act Number 2 of 1966, and Act 53 of 2021. The Fiscal Oversight Board establishes the annual budget corresponding to the general fund allocations that make up part of the operational budget of the University of Puerto Rico, based on the Approved Fiscal Plan 2021-2026. Every year, the Fiscal Oversight Board establishes the final approved budgetary appropriations from the general fund that will be assigned to the University of Puerto Rico. After receiving the approved budget from the general fund, the UPR Governing Board distributes this budget throughout the university system, taking into considerations multiple aspects corresponding to each campus.

Although the budget planning of the UPR-Ponce considers the general fund of the Government of Puerto Rico as one of its main sources of income, the institution has other sources of income that, along with the general fund, represent its consolidated budget. These other sources of income are generated through the institution’s Extended University, Title IV Federal Funds, projects subsidized with federal or state funds, and private funds. All these sources of income together represent the consolidated budget of the UPR-Ponce.

The next table provides a comparative overview of the operational funds and federal grants. This data provides a deep insight to assess the financial strategies. By analyzing this data, administrators can assess the efficacy of UPR-Ponce’s efforts in reducing its reliance on state funding and thereby ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of the programs. Table 6.3 presents an overview of the expenses for the past five years.

Table 6.3
Expenses Distribution (2018 to 2023)

Type	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Total	\$39,426,913.00	\$41,306,675.46	\$53,442,373.92	\$38,148,109.30	\$29,972,445.51
General Fund	\$23,022,304.78	\$22,821,089.22	\$28,252,321.08	\$10,120,877.80	\$12,616,005.51

Source: UPR-Ponce Finance Office

The following table offers an overview of the various forms of financial aid programs, including scholarships, federal loans, and other resources, that students receive to help alleviate the financial cost of their educational journey. Historic data is also available at the [Financial Aid Dashboard](#). This data underscores the institutional efforts for making education accessible and affordable for all, facilitating informed decisions and planning.

Table 6.4
Financial Aid Programs (2018 to 2023)

Type	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Pell grant	\$12,287,004.62	\$11,601,522.28	\$10,873,756.79	\$10,227,918.43	\$10,391,494.59

Type	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
SEOG	121,063.00	59,862.50	321,400.00	281,394.28	280,618.57
FWSP	299,806.10	38,348.00	39,773.06	188,057.78	342,387.62
Direct loan	1,606,354.00	1,704,231.00	705,950.00	655,600.00	627,959.00
Merit scholarship	-	160,800.00	287,172.00	305,600.00	368,000.00
Legislative	540,600.00	-	-	-	-
Governing Board Certification 49 and 50	474,742.00	-	-	-	-
Governing Board Certification 4	-	288,245.98	655,977.14	972,518.91	558,515.00
Law 44	95,169.11	51,200.00	97,780.38	188,832.25	237,321.16
HEERF	-	2,658,271.60	2,802,557.62	7,153,605.20	0.00

Source: UPR-Ponce Financial Aid Office

Table 6.5 provides an overview of the institution's funding over the past five years through the general funds. It serves as a record of financial allocation, allowing for a thorough examination of budgetary trends and resource distribution.

Table 6.5
Budget for the Last Five Years (2018 to 2023)

Budget	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
General Fund	\$23,068,820.00	\$21,296,502.00	\$23,760,495.00	\$20,001,465.00	\$20,849,660.00
Consolidated	\$39,426,913.00	\$41,306,675.00	\$53,442,374.00	\$38,148,109.00	\$29,419,468.00

Source: UPR-Ponce Finance Office

It can be seen on Table 6.6 an overview of the institution's revenues over the past five years. The data presented herein offers valuable insights into the institution's financial stability.

Table 6.6
Revenues for the Last Five Years (2018 to 2023)

Academic Year	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Revenues	\$40,895,490.19	\$38,927,599.28	\$48,460,191.01	\$47,839,570.40	\$26,464,525.60

Source: UPR-Ponce Finance Office

The Office of External Resources procures external funding in alignment with UPR-Ponce's Strategic Plan entitled "Vision 2026", as well as the specific needs and interests of the faculty and students. The office has successfully enhanced the process of disseminating external funding opportunities through regular newsletters to the university community. These newsletters

highlight opportunities from various agencies (Appendix 6.3.3). Through diligent management of the pre-award, the budget has been optimized to ensure alignment with UPR-Ponce's mission, goals, and objectives, allowing the post-award financial and auditing processes to run smoothly and efficiently, as planned. The following table shows a summary of research proposals that have received approval over the course of the last five years and the respective agencies responsible for funding, and the number of faculty members who contributed as Principal Investigators (PI) or Project Directors (PD).

Table 6.7
Number of Faculty and Funds Received for Fiscal Years 2019-2023

Proposals	Department	Faculty	Agencies	Year	Total Funds
10	Biology	4	National Institute of Health (NIH), PR IDEA Network Biomedical Excellence (PR-INBRE), Center of Neuroplasticity of the University of Puerto Rico, PR-ACTD (Department of Commerce and Economic Development)	2019-2020 2020-2021 2022-2023	\$370,250
5	Engineering	2	Economic Development Administration (EDA), United States Department of Education (USDE)	2019-2020 2020-2021 2022-2023	\$15,799,663
2	Education	1	United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)	2019-2020 2021-2022 2022-2023	\$261,723.89
3	Day Care Center	1	Puerto Rico Department of Family Affairs – Administration for Childcare and Development	2022-2023	\$38,400
1	Counseling and Psychological Services Department	1	United States Department of Education (USDE)	2022-2023	\$948,423
1	Dean of Student Affairs	1	Commission for Traffic Safety (FIESTA Project)	2019-2020 2020-2021 2022-2023	\$249,644
1	Mathematics	1	National Science Foundation (NSF)	2022-2023	\$435,207

Source: UPR-Ponce External Resources and Finance Offices

Fiscal and human resources as well as the physical and technical infrastructure adequate to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered (Criterion 4)

The UPR General By-Laws establish policies, regulations, and procedures, overseen by the Human Resources Office, for the recruitment of both faculty and non-faculty. Academic department chairpersons and office directors assess their staffing requirements in alignment with their operational plans and objectives. When additional personnel are necessary, a formal request is submitted to the respective dean. To ensure the transparent management of funds, the Budget Chairperson must grant approval and certify the availability of funds for the position. Following evaluation and recommendation by the Dean, Budget Chairperson, and Human Resources

Chairperson, the final approval is granted by the Chancellor, aligning with the institution's mission and goals.

The Annual Institutional Data Profile (AIDP) encompasses a comprehensive range of data, encompassing statistics, trends in student applications, admission and enrollment figures, freshmen and transfer statistics, retention and graduation rates, annual grade distributions, degrees conferred, and program-specific time-to-degree information. Furthermore, it offers a detailed overview of the faculty composition, available resources, fiscal expenditures, budget specifics, salary costs, and information pertaining to physical facilities. For the academic year 2023-2024, the institution's workforce comprised 176 faculty members and 212 non-faculty support personnel. In response to the evolving demand, both administrative and academic support services have been provided effectively. The table below provides a comparative breakdown of personnel distribution by type of appointment for the academic years spanning from the AIDP 2018-2019 to 2022-2023 (Appendices 6.4.1 and 6.4.2).

Table 6.8
Personnel by Type of Appointment for the Last Five Academic Years (2018 to 2023)

Academic Year	Employee	Regular	Position of Trust*	Temporary **	Special** *	Substitute ****	Service Contract *****	Total	Ratio
2018-19	Faculty	72	16	0	0	0	114	202	1:1
	Non-faculty	131	21	29	10	17	0	208	
2019-20	Faculty	72	17	0	0	2	110	201	1:1
	Non-faculty	132	17	38	11	10	0	208	
2020-21	Faculty	67	17	0	0	0	103	187	1:1
	Non-faculty	122	18	37	12	11	0	200	
2021-22	Faculty	64	16	0	0	0	108	188	1:1
	Non-faculty	111	17	50	15	12	0	205	
2022-23	Faculty	62	18	1	0	0	95	176	1:1
	Non-faculty	106	18	65	12	11	0	212	

Source: Institutional Annual Data Profiles

*Employee who provides services to the University at the will of the corresponding nominating authority. These personnel shall be freely selected and removed from the positions thus classified; but shall retain the rights acquired by virtue of any previous regular appointment in the System.

**It is the appointment granted to cover a non-regular position, which is approved for a fixed period of no more than twelve (12) months, to meet special needs of the service, such as unforeseen and occasional increases in the volume of work.

***It is the appointment that is granted to cover a position that is paid for with funds from extra-university sources, which recurrence is not guaranteed.

****It is the appointment granted to university personnel for a period of no more than twelve (12) months, to provisionally cover a regular position approved in the budget, while the incumbent is on leave.

***** It is the appointment granted to a person who provides services to the University without occupying a position, under a service contract that assigns a set of duties and responsibilities for a fixed term.

During the last five years, around 4.6 million have been invested in technological infrastructure. There have been network enhancements, implementation of equipment to offer hybrid courses, strengthening of Wi-Fi signal on campus, better servers, and lab equipment. The institution has made some investments in physical plant projects, such as electrical infrastructure, maintenance, paint, air conditioners, and others.

Well-defined decision-making processes and clear assignment of responsibility and accountability (Criterion 5)

The Governing Board assumes the responsibility of enacting policies for the university system, guiding its growth, allocating its budget, and appointing the President and Chancellors for each unit. This body plays a pivotal role in securing the necessary resources to sustain and enhance the university's activities as a system. According to the UPR University Law, the President holds the highest organizational position and is entrusted with leading the University System. The President represents the Governing Board, which is appointed in consultation with the Academic Senates of the UPR system. The University Board, which the President presides, coordinates and advises the President on academic, administrative, and financial institutional matters. The President harmonizes initiatives from both the University Board and the Governing Board to foster development and improvement within the university. These boards offer guidance to the President in the administration of the university system and in the establishment of general institutional policies. The President maintains open communication with all sectors of the academic community, engaging them in the current issues affecting the UPR. Standard 7 provides an in-depth view inside the role played by the Governing Board and the University Board.

At the institutional level, the Chancellor holds the highest academic and administrative authority. The UPR President, in consultation with the Academic Senate of UPR-Ponce, non-faculty, and student committees, nominates the Chancellor according to Article 19 of the UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2). Dr. Tessie H. Cruz Rivera has been the Chancellor at UPR-Ponce since the 2019-2020 academic year.

The Academic Senate serves as the formal deliberative forum within each campus's academic community. It is responsible for various matters, including academic affairs, course content, curriculum, and admission requirements. At the end of the academic year, it prepares the Annual Report with the agreements made and communicated to the university community through certifications during the year (Appendix 6.5.1). However, the Administrative Board advises the Chancellor on a range of administrative issues and is responsible for developing plans and projects to facilitate institutional growth. This board also evaluates and approves the allocation of the institutional budget submitted by the Chancellor, in addition to overseeing UPR-Ponce academic calendar. The composition of the Academic Senate and of the Administrative Board can

be seen in the Catalog (pp. 15-16) (Appendix 3.3.1). At the end of the academic year, both bodies prepare the Annual Report with the agreements made and communicate to the university community through certifications (Appendix 6.5.2).

The Dean of Academic Affairs is responsible for the supervision of all academic departments, the Library, the Continuing Education and Professional Studies Division, the Honor Study Program, the International Studies Office, and the Academic Support Center for Students and Faculty. The Dean of Student Affairs coordinates student support services and supervises the following offices: Registrar, Quality of Life, Financial Aid, Alumni, Counseling and Psychological Services, Admissions, Medical Services, the Athletic Program, the Student Recreation Center, Technological Assistance, Extracurricular Activities, and Veterans' Affairs. Finally, the Dean of Administrative Affairs supervises the administrative support services, which include Human and Physical Resources, Security, Internal Post Office, Printing Services, Property, Receiving, Physical Maintenance, Documents Administration, and Finance (Accounting, Disbursement, Purchasing, Payroll, Pre-Intervention, and Bursar, Account Receivables, and Financial Aid Fiscal).

Department chairpersons are faculty members with administrative functions. They are the main executive and administrative officials of the academic departments. As part of their responsibilities, they preside over department meetings and are the official representatives of their departments before university authorities. They are *ex officio* presidents of all the department permanent committees except for the Personnel Committee in which they are members, and the president is selected from the Personnel Committee members. Office directors are non-faculty personnel overseeing operational and administrative offices, such as Budget Director, Finance Director, Human Resources Director, and other high-ranking positions that are similar to the categories previously mentioned. Deans, chairpersons, and directors are considered trusted employees and are appointed by the Chancellor.

Expected outcomes and objectives are aligned with UPR-Ponce mission and goals. The assessment activities are identified as part of the Assessment Plan and the Operation Plan from each office or department. After the activities have been carried out, assessment coordinators collect results and feedback from its constituents. Results can be used by departments, coordinators, office, administrative personnel, or other representatives as part of the continuous improvement process. Adjustments can be made when needed, as well as planning and resource allocation.

Assessment coordinators, in collaboration with corresponding directors or supervisors, identify all action that must be taken or that can be proposed for future events. The findings could be shared using different means, such as assessment forums and website links, and discussed during ECIR meetings for actions and decisions based on institutional priorities.

Academic departments and programs strategies should be unambiguously aligned with the attainment of their intended learning objectives, while the plans for service and support offices should be clearly geared towards realizing their specific goals and objectives. Assessment plans

play a pivotal role in advancing institutional enhancements in both teaching and learning processes, as well as in the supporting services provided. The objectives and goals are quantifiable, practical, and achievable, with a direct correlation to the graduate profile and articulated using action verbs. Success indicators are realistic, quantifiable, and expressed as percentages. The assessment process is ongoing and systematic, with the outcomes being used to strengthen various aspects of programs and services, ensuring continuous improvement in institutional quality and excellence.

Comprehensive planning for facilities, infrastructure, and technology that includes consideration of sustainability and deferred maintenance and is linked to the institution's strategic and financial planning processes (Criterion 6)

UPR-Ponce has twenty-one buildings occupying an urban campus of 333,362 square feet of academic and administrative facilities. The campus is equipped with a modern network having a single-mode fiber optic wired infrastructure at a speed of 1 Gbit to connect all the buildings, with even higher capacities. There have been considerable investments in technological infrastructure to foster distance education and respond to any events causing interruptions in regular operations. This is why the network has been strengthened, not only to offer faster communications, but also to protect the information with a next generation firewall, and features to controlling incoming and outgoing traffic, filters to address vulnerabilities, viruses, and other applications addressing institutional security policies. In addition, other projects for facilities enhancement have been included in institutional plans for maintenance (Appendix 6.6.1).

UPR-Ponce received approval to construct a new building called Smart Hub, a construction of four (4) free standing tiered buildings by means of covered and open plazas, hallways, green areas and paths, with an approximate construction area of approximately 22,500 square feet. These new facilities will include laboratories, administrative offices, an auditorium, among other academic and support areas. The Smart Hub is currently in the award process. Advertisements for bids will be in April 2024. The approved budget for this project is \$13,000,000.00.

Additionally, the institution has an approved budget of \$4,207,259.94 for the construction of a Rehabilitation and Integrated Services Center (RISC), spanning approximately 4,693.28 square feet. The project includes installing equipment commonly found in gyms and furnishings for medical, administrative, and physical therapy facilities. RISC will serve as a center for practice, research, and specialized services in Physical and Athletic Therapeutic, Forensic Psychology with an emphasis on Vocational Rehabilitation, and Psychology and Mental Health with an emphasis on Vocational Rehabilitation. UPR-Ponce is dedicated to growth and to innovate by providing students with the opportunity to access a practice and research center in the fields of mental health and other specialized physical therapy services. With this project, UPR-Ponce will enhance student learning with tools for professional development, but also expanding services to benefit the university community and the citizens of the southern area of the island.

Another project of new development in the Learning Skills Center (LSC), a space with nearly 3,115 sq. ft. dedicated to providing individual and group tutoring for its students and a faculty support service (Appendix 6.6.2). The LSC will include equipped computer laboratories, language lab with computer stations, and offices for tutors and for the administrative personnel. The development of this space has been submitted to the U.S. Department of Education Application for Grants Under the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program (Title V) on June 13, 2023, under the project UPRP: A Pathway for Achieving Students Engagement and Academic Success (PASEAS). Currently, the project was awarded on September 12, 2024, for \$3 million.

An annual independent audit confirming financial viability with evidence of follow up on any concerns cited in the audit’s accompanying management letter (Criterion 7)

Audited financial statements and reports for the last five years are included in Appendices 6.7.1, 6.7.2, 6.7.3, 6.7.4, and 6.7.5. The reports present financial statements of the business-type activities and the aggregate discretely presented component units of the University of Puerto Rico. The institution’s audit is in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America and the standards applicable to financial audits contained in Government Auditing Standards, issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

UPR-Ponce established a robust system for overseeing audit processes within the institution through an audit coordinator. This coordinator, supervised by the Chancellor, ensures the seamless execution of audits, and assumes responsibility for submitting any corrective action plans, closely monitoring the progress of ongoing audits.

Moreover, the Finance Office proactively conducts an annual assessment of its operations, aiming to pinpoint potential risks and take measures to mitigate them. Results are part of the Institutional Assessment Reports that are shared and published at the institutional webpage. Some of these reports can be found at Appendix 3.1.1. Identifying these risks is particularly focused on areas where state and federal regulations directly influence financial operations. Assessment results can be found at the Institutional Assessment

To enhance financial integrity, the institution has implemented meticulous procedures. This includes the tracking of all payment checks issued by UPR-Ponce and the introduction of random audits for cashiers' petty cash. These measures significantly reduce financial risks, fostering a more secure financial environment for the institution. The periodic audits conducted at UPR-Ponce play a crucial role in evaluating the effective and efficient utilization of resources, ensuring accountability and optimizing resource allocation.

Quarterly Expenditures Projections is a tool used by UPR-Ponce to assess the use of assigned funds from the General Fund. This helps the Chancellor make the necessary adjustments to fulfill his/her annual working plan and keep a balanced budget. This Quarterly Expenditures Projections is a requirement for the UPR Budget Certification.

Strategies to measure and assess the adequacy and efficient utilization of institutional resources required to support the institution’s mission and goals (Criterion 8)

Assessment processes are utilized to enhance financial planning and resource allocation. At UPR-Ponce, all academic departments, programs, and administrative offices share the responsibility of creating annual assessment plans. They are tasked with offering guidance and training on assessment, organizing and maintaining relevant documentation, providing yearly reports, and ensuring that the university community is informed of assessment outcomes and the corresponding actions to enhance services. The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) supports these efforts by furnishing statistical data, reviewing questionnaires, and collaborating on surveys. The Institutional Assessment Committee is entrusted with the coordination and documentation of institutional assessment activities. The OPIR compiles all the data provided by the assessment coordinators from all deanships into an Annual Institutional Assessment Report that presents the results of the conducted assessment (Appendix 3.1.1). The report includes recommendations for the continuous improvement of the services offered by the institution to fulfill its mission.

In addition, the OPIR has digitalized the process for submitting annual data as part of the Annual Report of Institutional Effectiveness. This process engages directors and coordinators to present the accomplishments of their respective offices and departments, aligning them with the institutional objectives and goals as stipulated in the strategic plan. The OPIR performed an assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of the digitalized data collection process for the Annual Report after two years of using it. The assessment form was shared with deans, non-faculty, office directors, and department chairpersons. Results showed satisfaction from users in the following criteria: ease of use (91%), organization (91%), and form design (81%).

The Annual Institutional Effectiveness Report encompasses projects undertaken during the academic year, achievements attained by the institution, students, faculty, and non-faculty, among others. Furthermore, it offers a concise summary of the activities conducted by offices and departments under the purview of the Dean of Academic Affairs, the Dean of Administration, the Dean of Student Affairs, and the Chancellor. The Institutional Effectiveness Annual Report adheres to the goals outlined in the UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled “Vision 2026”.

After the departments and offices have provided their data for the Annual Report as a summary of achievements (Appendix 6.8.1), it becomes the deans' duty to examine the information submitted by their respective teams. Subsequently, they are required to recognize the accomplishments achieved in the academic year, pinpoint any constraints or challenges encountered, and outline their action plan for the forthcoming academic year. The data collected from the deanships is then submitted to the Chancellor for the ultimate assessment and decision-making concerning the work plan for the upcoming academic year. This comprehensive analysis fosters effectively identifying areas that warrant scrutiny for ongoing enhancements.

Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation, institutional renewal processes, and availability of resources (Criterion 9)

The UPR-Ponce has successfully accomplished its mission and objectives by providing high-quality services to its constituents. The budgetary process and the planning of the assigned budget for UPR-Ponce consist of the following aspects: instructions from the Budget Office of Central Administration, budgetary request from offices and departments of UPR-Ponce campus (Appendix 1.4.1), and UPR Governing Board Certification with the approved budget (Appendix 6.9.1).

Regarding the planning budget request, UPR-Ponce Administrative Board Certification 33-2004-2005 established guidelines for this purpose. These guidelines are based on the assessment results and working plan of the offices and departments and these guidelines aligned the budgetary lines to the goals and objectives of the University of Puerto Rico and UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled "Vision 2026". Operational plans and budget requests are enhanced by incorporating assessment data, which is systematically compared with previous results and performance indicators. This process facilitates the establishment of continuous improvement practices.

According to the departments and offices data provided and considering the instructions from Budget Office of Central Administration, the UPR-Ponce Budget Office analyzes the results to prepare a draft of the budget distribution and presents it to the Chancellor's working team for its discussion. Once the Governing Board Certification with the assigned budget is issued, the Budget Distribution is completed and presented to the UPR-Ponce Administrative Board for evaluation and final approval.

A recent analysis on institutional effectiveness in administration was performed as part of the current budgetary analysis. UPR-Ponce passed with flying colors. This was communicated to the faculty by the faculty representative to the University Board during the most recent meeting (Appendix 6.9.2).

In the coming years, UPR-Ponce is poised to tackle financial challenges head-on by fortifying its external funds base and optimizing both academic programs and administrative resources. The institution will persist in receiving a proportionate share of the UPR annual allocation through the established formula, concurrently working towards a strategic increase in the portion of the total budget sourced from external funds. This approach ensures a diversified and sustainable financial model, strengthening UPR-Ponce's resilience and fostering continued growth and excellence in its academic and operational endeavors.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. UPR-Ponce has demonstrated success in the execution of its strategic and operational plans, aligning effectively with its mission.

2. The institution has displayed remarkable effectiveness in navigating reductions in the consolidated budget without adversely impacting its operations.
3. UPR-Ponce consistently produces financial reports that adhere meticulously to the law and all applicable regulations, ensuring a high level of compliance and transparency.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Enhance endeavors aimed at increasing external funding by actively pursuing research proposals, soliciting donations, and securing grants.
2. Persevere in the implementation and ongoing assessment of the strategic plan, providing guidance for the institution throughout the 2021-2026 period.



Standard 7:

**Governance, Leadership,
and Administration**



STANDARD 7: LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE, AND ADMINISTRATION

The institution is governed and administered to realize its stated mission and goals in a way that effectively benefits the institution, its students, and the other constituencies it serves. Even when supported by or affiliated with governmental, corporate, religious, educational system, or other unaccredited organizations, the institution has education excellence as its primary purpose, and it operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy.

Requirements of Affiliation: 12, 13, and 14

Institutional Priority: Sustainability

A clearly articulated and transparent governance structure that outlines roles, responsibilities, and accountability for decision making by each constituency, including governing body, administration, faculty, staff, and students (Criterion 1)

The University of Puerto Rico is a state supported university system created by Law No. 1 of January 20, 1966, Law of the University of Puerto Rico (Act No. 1), as amended (Appendix 7.1.1). The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce (UPR-Ponce) is an integral part of the University of Puerto Rico System. The Central Administration (CA) is headquartered in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, and exercises oversight over the operations of the eleven academic units, including the UPR-Ponce. The highest governing and administrative body of the UPR system is the Governing Board of the University of Puerto Rico, which was established by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Legislature on April 30, 2013, through Law 13 (PC 927). Previously, the Board of Trustees had the responsibility of governing the public university system. However, Law 13 repealed Article 3 of Law 1 of January 20, 1966, as amended, known as the “UPR Law”, and replaced it with a new Article 3, for the purpose of eliminating the Board of Trustees of the University of Puerto Rico and creating the Governing Board of the University of Puerto Rico.

The UPR University Law (Law 1 of 1966, as amended) clearly delineates the university's governance structure, including the composition, duties, and responsibilities of each constituent of the university in the formulation of policies and the decision-making process. The internal administration of each institutional unit is guided by relevant provisions of the law, UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2), and complementary by-laws applicable to the university system. Moreover, these units are guided by resolutions enacted by the Governing Board, the guidelines established by the University President, and the rules and regulations endorsed by each institutional governing body (Certification 40-2012-2013 Governing Board) (Appendix 7.1.2). Chapter II of the UPR General By-Laws outlines the composition of the UPR university system, Chapter III describes the central governing structure, and Chapter IV details the institutional units. Each entity within the UPR System shares responsibility for formulating, planning, and executing policies within the framework of their defined roles and duties, guided by the vision, mission, strategic plans, and objectives of the institution and the UPR System.

The Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico was created under the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), which was enacted by the United States Congress in June 2016. This legislation established the board to oversee and manage the financial affairs and fiscal stability of the government, including the University of Puerto Rico. By virtue of the provisions of Article 16 of Law No. 2 of 2017 known as the Law of the Financial Advisory Authority and Fiscal Agency of Puerto Rico (FAAFA), the Executive Director of that agency, or his designee, will be a member of the UPR Governing Board because the UPR is an entity covered under the federal PROMESA Law, as determined by the Fiscal Supervision Board.

University of Puerto Rico-Central Administration

The UPR System has a central administration (CA) in which the President's office is located, as well as the Vice Presidency of Academic Affairs and Research, the Vice Presidency of Student Affairs, and the Vice Presidency of Professional and Distance Programs, among other offices. The UPR organizational chart reflects the structure of the CA (Certification 114-2019-2020 of the Governing Board) (Appendix 7.1.3). The CA manages the entire UPR system and is structured so that each component of the institution responds to an academic or administrative area.

As mentioned before, UPR-Ponce is part of the UPR System. The System has a clear governing structure with specific roles and responsibilities for each part. Appendix 7.1.4 presents the Related Entities Required Disclosures and Certification Statement as required by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE).

A legally constituted governing body (Criterion 2)

The Governing Board role encompasses policy formulation, system development guidance, budget allocation, and the appointment of President and Chancellors for each unit within the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) system. Additionally, it plays a vital role in resource generation to secure external funding from nonpublic sectors and organizations to sustain and enhance UPR's activities. The Governing Board's commitment, as outlined in its Internal By-laws (Certification 40-2012-2013 Governing Board) (Appendix 7.1.2), is firmly directed towards improving the UPR's ability to meet societal needs, with its primary allegiance lying with the UPR. A complete list of the non-delegable duties and powers of the Governing Board establishes in the UPR University Law can be accessed through the following link: <https://juntagobierno.upr.edu/facultades-y-deberes/>.

The University of Puerto Rico is a public corporation of the Government of Puerto Rico directed by a fourteen members Governing Board. The Law of the University of Puerto Rico describes the duties of the members of the Governing Board. Also, all members shall comply with the

provisions of Law No. 1 of January 3, 2012, known as the Puerto Rico Government Ethics Act. This law formulates a Code of Ethics that regulates the conduct of active and former public employees and constitutes the guiding principle of the legislation to prohibit actions that endanger the stability of the moral integrity of the State by injurious actions or by conflict of interests. The Governing Board has established policies related to conflict of interest, such as Certification 8-2012-2013 (Appendix 7.2.1), Policy and Guidelines for Financial Conflicts of Interests and Commitments in Research and Sponsored Programs of the University of Puerto Rico, amended by Certification 12-2015-2016 (Appendix 7.2.2).

The UPR Governing Board has authority to oversee the quality of educational programs, the awarding of degrees, the formulation of policy for the system, guiding its development, allocating the budget, and the appointment of the President and Chancellors. The Governing Board includes two (2) full time students, two (2) tenured professors, and eight (8) members appointed by the Governor of Puerto Rico and confirmed by the Puerto Rico Senate. The Secretary of the Department of Education of Puerto Rico and a representative of the Fiscal Agency and Financial Advisory Authority are *ex officio* members. The list of current members of the Governing Board during fiscal year 2023-2024 is established by Certification 6-2023-2024 (Appendix 7.2.3).

Chief Executive Officer (Criterion 3)

The President of the UPR is appointed by the Governing Board in consultation with all Academic Senates of the UPR System. As per Article 5 of UPR University Law (Law 1 of 1966, as amended), the President is the chief executive officer of the University System. This law stipulates that the President manages all academic, administrative, and financial affairs of the institution. The President also represents the institution and the Governing Board in all pertinent forums, presides the University Board, and harmonizes the Governing Board and University Board initiatives, as well as his own, to ensure the development and fulfillment of the University goals. As per Certification 115-2015-2016 of the Governing Board (Appendix 7.3.1), the President is evaluated in terms no less than two (2) years and greater than four (4) years.

Since July 1, 2022, Dr. Luis A. Ferrao is holding the title of President of the University of Puerto Rico. Dr. Ferrao has a Bachelor's degree in History and a Master's degree in Latin American Studies. He also completed a doctoral degree in Political Science at the *Universidad Autónoma de México* (UNAM) and postdoctoral studies in Advanced Studies of Contemporary History and International Relations at the University of Paris I-Pantheon Sorbonne. Dr. Ferrao has worked as a professor for the University of Puerto Rico since 1988 and has held various positions including being the Director of the Project for European Studies, Dean of the Faculty of General Studies, and Chancellor of the Río Piedras Campus.

Administration (Criterion 4)

University Board

According to Article 6 of the University Law (Appendix 7.1.1), the University Board is responsible for maintaining a cohesive university system through a planning process that responds to the university's mission and goals. In the fulfillment of this function the Board evaluates academic proposals and advise the President regarding the development plan and the integrated budget project of the University. These functions, among others, are carefully balanced to respect the autonomy of individual units. In fact, to ensure autonomy and a broad University representation the Board has as members the Chancellors, a faculty member, and a student representative of each UPR unit. The Chancellor, one senator elected by the Academic Senate, and a student elected during Student Council elections represent UPR-Ponce on this Board. The list of current members of the University Board during 2023-2024 academic year can be accessed through the following link: <https://juntauniversitaria.upr.edu/miembros/>. The web page of the UPR University Board can be accessed through the following link: <https://juntauniversitaria.upr.edu>.

Chancellor

Chancellors hold the maximum academic and administrative authority at each UPR unit. Upon a vacancy, qualified members of the community could nominate themselves for the position. The selection process includes consultations with the Academic Senate, faculty, non-faculty, and student committees according to Article 19 of the UPR General By-Laws. These committees hold public hearings to evaluate the candidates' qualifications and their proposals to accomplish the institutional goals. After these consultation processes, the President recommends a nominee to the Governing Board, which appoints the Chancellor. Chancellors for each unit of the University's system are evaluated periodically according to Certification 115-2015-2016 of the Governing Board (Appendix 7.3.1). This evaluation is conducted by the President, who reports the results to the Governing Board. The Chancellor's duties are outlined in Article 7 of the University Law (Appendix 7.1.1), and Section 19.3 of the UPR General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2).

Since July 2019, Dr. Tessie Cruz has been holding the title of Chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce. Dr. Cruz holds a Bachelor's in Arts and a Master's in Education with a specialization in Counseling from the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico. In 2017, she completed a Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) with a specialization in Counseling from the Inter American University of Puerto Rico. Dr. Cruz has worked in UPR-Ponce as a professional counselor since the year 2000 and has participated in several institutional committees that have coordinated processes regarding learning assessment, accreditation, curriculum development, and faculty professional development, among other relevant academic affairs. From 2017 to 2019, she served as special assistant to the Chancellor.

Academic Senate

The Academic Senate (AS) serves as the official deliberative body for the academic community at each unit. Its responsibilities encompass a wide range of academic matters, including academic policies, course and curriculum content, and admission requirements. The composition of the Academic Senate, as outlined in UPR General By-Laws Article 21, Section 21.4, includes *ex officio* members, such as the University President, the Chancellor, and the Deans, along with representatives of the academic departments. Furthermore, it includes a representative from the Counseling and Psychological Services Department, the Library's chairperson, the Office of Planning and Institutional Research chairperson (as permanent guests), and four student representatives. The Student Ombudsperson has been included as an observer during AS meetings, as per Certification 119-2014-2015 of the Governing Board (Appendix 2.1.3). The composition of the Academic Senate for 2023-2024 academic year is detailed as follows: six *ex officio* members, fourteen faculty senators, and four students (Certification 01-2023-2024) (Appendix 7.4.1).

Administrative Board

The Administrative Board serves in an advisory capacity to the Chancellor, providing guidance on a range of matters and assuming the responsibility for formulating plans and projects aimed at institutional development. Additionally, the Board carries out evaluations and grants approvals for the allocation of the institutional budget presented by the Chancellor, as well as for the UPR-Ponce academic calendar, as specified in the UPR-Ponce Administrative Board By-Laws, Chapter IV - Article 10 (Appendix 7.4.2). Furthermore, the Board is responsible for making decisions and granting licenses, academic ranks, tenure and promotions of faculty and non-faculty of the institutional unit, in accordance with the UPR General By-Laws.

The composition of the Administrative Board is established in accordance with certifications from Puerto Rico's Council of Higher Education (1970-1971-49) and (1985-1986-180), as well as Law 186 from August 7, 1998. Its membership includes the President of the UPR (*ex-officio*), the Chancellor of UPR-Ponce, the Deans of Academic, Student, and Administrative Affairs, four academic department chairpersons appointed by the Chancellor, two faculty representatives elected by the Academic Senate, and one student representative elected by peers through an assembly, in accordance with the Student By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.4).

Deans

The Dean of Academic Affairs oversees various aspects of academic administration, including academic departments, the Library, the Continuing Education and Professional Studies Division, the Honor Study Program, the International Studies Office, and the Virtual Education Development Center. Also, the Dean, which is considered a trusted employee serving at the

discretion of the Chancellor, is responsible for managing academic programs with professional accreditation requirements.

The Dean of Student Affairs oversees supporting services for students and supervises several offices, including the Registrar, Quality of Life, Financial Aid, Alumni, Counseling and Psychological Services, Admissions, Medical Services, Athletic Program, Student Recreation Center, Technological Assistance, Extracurricular Activities, and Veterans' Affairs. On the other hand, the Dean of Administrative Affairs oversees administrative supporting services, which encompass Human Resources, Security, Internal Post Office, Printing Services, Operations and Maintenance, Documents' Administration, Receiving and Delivery, and Finance (including Accounting, Disbursement, Property, Purchasing, Payroll, Pre-Intervention, Fiscal Financial Aid, Accounts Receivables, and Bursar).

Academic Department Chairpersons

Academic department chairpersons serve as faculty members with administrative roles, acting as the primary executive and administrative authorities within their respective departments. Their responsibilities encompass chairing department meetings and serving as the official representatives of their departments to university authorities. Additionally, they hold *ex officio* positions as presidents of all permanent department committees, excluding the Personnel Committee, where they are members and the president is selected among the committee's members, as stipulated in UPR General By-Laws Articles 25.3 and 25.4 (Appendix 2.1.2). The appointment of department chairpersons is made by the Chancellor, upon the recommendation of the Dean of Academic Affairs. The Chancellor engages in consultations with department members in accordance with the provisions outlined in Article 40 of the UPR General By-Laws. Chairpersons are considered trusted employees serving at the discretion of the Chancellor.

Office Chairpersons

Office chairpersons are individuals in non-faculty roles, and they manage different administration and operational offices, such as Budget, Finance, Human Resources, and others. Their appointment is made by the Chancellor, upon the recommendation of the correspondent Dean. The Chancellor conducts consultations with members of the specific department or unit, as outlined in UPR General By-Laws Article 37 Section 37.3.2 (Appendix 2.1.2). Office Directors are considered trusted employees serving at the discretion of the Chancellor.

UPR-Ponce's organizational structure

UPR-Ponce has a well-defined organizational structure with clear lines of organization and authority to facilitate its efficiency and effectiveness. The UPR-Ponce organizational chart illustrates this structure (Appendix 6.2.1). Evidence to support these lines can be found in many

documents, which clearly respect hierarchical lines of communication and approval. Among these documents are Request for Approval of Contracts, Request for Purchases, and Request for Activating Courses, among many others.

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

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

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

To ensure institutional effectiveness and efficiency, it is essential that administrative personnel have the academic credentials and professional qualifications that are inherent to the duties and responsibilities of their positions. The institution recruits its administrative leadership through the consultation process stipulated in the UPR General By-Laws (Articles 19 and 20, 2006, as amended) (Appendix 2.1.2). Clearly established criteria guide the selection processes for the positions of Chancellor and Deans to ensure they have the appropriate skills, degrees, and training to carry out their duties. The selection processes include candidate nominations and evaluations by university constituents. Search committees constituted for consultation purposes draw up a profile with the essential professional characteristics. The UPR-Ponce's Academic Senate ensures that the consultation process is carried out as mandated.

Traditionally, administrative leaders come from the ranks of the institution, where approximately sixty percent (60%) of the faculty has a master's degree and forty percent (40%) hold a doctoral degree. Twenty-seven percent (27%) have a rank of at least associate professor or higher. Policies for the selection and assessment processes for administrators are established in Articles 75-79 of the UPR General By-Laws. Appendix 2.1.2 presents the qualifications of the current chancellor, deans, academic department chairpersons, and other institutional administrators.

The Deans of Academic and Students Affairs are experienced full-time faculty members with a hundred percent release time from teaching duties, to guarantee they have the necessary time to discharge their duties effectively. The current Dean of Administrative Affairs is a non-faculty member.

The Chairperson of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research have a seventy-five percent (75%) release from their teaching duties. The academic department chairpersons are released from fifty percent (50%) of their teaching load. Qualified non-faculty with the appropriate skills and experience to perform their responsibilities occupying other administrative positions.

The administration keeps the community informed about all relevant matters in multiple ways, including forums, meetings, electronic distribution of information, distribution of printed material, as well as posted dissemination of the relevant information in student spaces. This broad access ensures effective communication and, thus, more transparency in the administration. UPR-Ponce guarantees its constituents the right to freely express, associate, meet openly, formulate petitions, and organize events that do not interfere with legitimate activities and must comply with institutional codes as according to UPR General By-Laws and Students By-Laws (Appendices 2.1.2 and 2.1.4). UPR-Ponce strives to remain transparent and make public documents accessible to the community.

Institutional policies

The Governing Board (GB) through its permanent and special committees evaluates and supervises the fundamental areas of the UPR. Such committees recommend to the GB the adoption of policies and actions, or make determinations of facts (Certification 40, 2012-2013, as amended) to ensure the effective operation of the UPR system. The approval of policies, regulations, certifications, and any other dispositions must respond to a priority norm as established by Article 7 of the University of Puerto Rico General By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.2). University authorities must adhere to regulations to establish rules, norms, resolutions, instructions, and procedures. These regulations are as follows:

- Certifications of the Governing Board
- Integral Development Plan for the University System
- UPR General By-Laws

- Norms, instructions, resolutions, and any other disposition of the President
- Certifications of the University Board
- Applicable dispositions by law
- Regulations of each institutional unit in accordance with the internally established hierarchy

Proposed rules, norms, resolutions, instructions, or procedures must consider the established organizational structure and chain of command. This must be done to ensure the preservation of democratic principles in decision-making processes, the functional independence of each unit, and the promotion of consistent cooperation and unity among different units, as outlined in the Declaration of Principles found in the General By-Laws of the UPR. This approach minimizes conflicts and nurtures a sense of belonging within constituents.

The University of Puerto Rico Law takes precedence over any other rules, norms, procedures, certifications, resolutions, or customary practices enacted by any unit. The Governing Board establishes rules regarding the applicability of laws to address emerging conflicts. While the President can formulate policies, it is essential to keep the Governing Board informed about them, as detailed in Articles 5 and 6 of the UPR General By-Laws. Furthermore, governing bodies must ensure the autonomy of UPR-Ponce, as stipulated in Article 10.1 of the UPR General By-Laws in the establishment of any administrative or academic public policy.

Accessibility to governance documents, policies, and procedures and maintaining the community informed is crucial for efficient administration. In response to this, governing bodies issue official certifications whenever a new policy or procedure is adopted or modified to ensure its implementation and to raise awareness within the community. The UPR Governing Board actively disseminates these certifications throughout the university system using electronic means, such as email and webpages (<http://www.vcertifica.upr.edu>, <https://juntagobierno.upr.edu/politicas/>). Likewise, the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate and Administrative Board routinely distribute approved certifications to the university community via email and the institutional webpage. The sessions of the Academic Senate are broadcasted live through the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate YouTube channel.

Elected senators contribute to this transparency by delivering both written and oral reports during faculty meetings, addressing academic matters of interest to the body, and discussing newly approved certifications. These matters are further deliberated upon in departmental faculty meetings. Moreover, the Academic Senate ensures that students are well-informed about its decisions and activities through Student Council representatives.

Involvement of constituents in decision-making processes

The Law of the University of Puerto Rico, as amended (Appendix 7.1.1) ensures that both faculty and students partake in the decision-making processes of UPR-Ponce's governing bodies. Also, the UPR-Ponce Academic Senate serves as a forum for deliberation, where each academic department is represented by a tenured faculty member. Student representation is evident through the involvement of the Student Council President and three student members elected annually by their peers. The Academic Senate actively engages in academic decision-making and matters concerning the academic community.

Another important deliberative body is the UPR-Ponce Administrative Board, whose decisions have institution-wide implications. As previously explained, its composition allows for the participation of faculty, non-faculty, and students in the decision-making process regarding relevant issues. Faculty members also can express their views and engage in decision-making during faculty meetings, which are held at least once every semester in accordance with the UPR General By-Laws, with the possibility of convening extraordinary meetings as needed. Additionally, institutional, and departmental committees provide various avenues for faculty, administrative personnel, and students to contribute to decision-making at various levels. The appointment of institutional committees falls under the responsibility of the Chancellor, while departmental committees are appointed by department chairpersons.

The Disciplinary Board is yet another body where decisions related to student discipline are made. It comprises students, administrators, and faculty members, including the Dean of Student Affairs, two Academic Senate members elected by their peers, and two student representatives, as outlined in Article 17 of the UPR General Student By-Laws (Appendix 2.1.4).

The Student Council, established as a platform for addressing student concerns and suggesting ideas for institutional enhancement, serves as the official forum for the student community. This body is elected annually and holds representation in UPR-Ponce's primary governing bodies, as previously mentioned. Student senators are empowered to submit proposals on issues that affect them to these governing bodies. Student organizations also have a channel for voicing their concerns and ideas through the Dean of Student Affairs, who directs them to the appropriate governing body.

Non-faculty are integral to the decision-making process as well. They play significant roles within the institutional assessment structure and are represented in the Executive Committee for Institutional Renewal (ECIR), which includes non-faculty in decision-making positions, such as the duties of the Finance Director, Auditing Coordinator, Institutional Assessment Coordinator, and Budget Director. The ECIR's role is to provide advice and recommend processes or policies to the Chancellor. Support offices, directed by non-faculty, also contribute by offering input and recommendations to various institutional policymakers, including the Chancellor, Academic

Senate, and Administrative Board. Additionally, they participate in the consultation process for selecting Chancellors and Deans.

Over the past five years, the institution has embraced a systemic culture by organizing public hearings, meetings, and forums. These activities allow all segments of the university community to participate, offer suggestions, and make recommendations to strengthen the decision-making process. Examples of these hearings, forums, and meetings include those related to the selection of the UPR President, [Chancellor](#), and Deans, as well as the creation of UPR-Ponce Strategic Plan entitled “Vision 2026”, and accreditation-related matters, among others (Appendix 7.4.3).

Within the UPR System, the University Board serves as a crucial platform for faculty and student voices to be acknowledged. The composition of the University Board is meticulously structured to uphold the autonomy of individual units. To guarantee both autonomy and comprehensive University representation, the Board includes Chancellors, a faculty representative, and a student representative from each UPR unit as its members.

Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of governance, leadership, and administration (Criterion 5)

Assessment of leadership and governance

As established by UPR Law, Section 3 (e) (7), the Governing Board will evaluate the work of the President of the UPR and the Chancellors of the institutional units. The procedures to assess the performance of the Chancellors of the UPR units and of the President are established in the Board of Trustees Certification 50-2004-2005, as amended by Governing Board Certifications 95-2015-2016 and 115-2015-2016 (Appendix 7.3.1).

The UPR Law and General By-Laws establish that the evaluation of the President and the Chancellors has five purposes, which are as follows: to improve the performance of the institutional leaders, to promote a relationship of support and trust between the Governing Board and institutional leadership, to contribute to the achievement of established and defined plans and objectives for the institution, to account for the exercise of the duties of these officials, and to make decisions regarding their retention. As per Certification 115-2015-2016 of the Governing Board, the President is evaluated in terms no less than two (2) years and greater than four (4) years of their incumbency in the following criteria: institutional planning, administration, academics, leadership, problem solving and decision-making, relationship with the external community, professional development, and relationship with the student body. A committee is named by the Governing Board to conduct the evaluation process set by its Certification 115-2015-2016.

Chancellors for each unit of the University's system are evaluated by the same criteria set by Certification 115-2015-2016 of the Governing Board. This evaluation is conducted by the President, who informs the Governing Board of said evaluations. In the UPR-Ponce, the Chancellor is evaluated using the assessment instrument Chancellor's Performance Evaluation Questionnaire for Faculty approved by the Academic Senate Certification 18-2023-2024 (Appendix 7.5.1).

Academic department chairpersons are annually evaluated by the Dean of Academic Affairs using the criteria approved by the Certification 40-2006-2007 of the Academic Senate. Appendix 7.5.2 shows the assessment instrument used for this purpose. The evaluation will form part of the file of the person and will be considered by the corresponding personnel committees.

As part of the function and duties of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR), this office gathers data about the perception of students, faculty, and non-faculty of institutional effectiveness. The OPIR also prepares annually the Institutional Assessment Report (Appendix 3.1.1) and the Annual Institutional Effectiveness Report (Appendices 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.4, and 2.6.3).

Assessment of UPR-Ponce's administration and services

The Chancellor of UPR-Ponce is the executive in charge of the evaluation of personnel in positions of trust at the University as stipulated in the UPR General By-Laws, Article 39, Section 39.1 and 39.3 (Appendix 2.1.2). The Chancellor uses the document Evaluation of Faculty Personnel in Administrative Functions, Certification 40-2006-2007 of UPR-Ponce Academic Senate. For assessing non-faculty in administrative functions, the Chancellor uses the instrument shown in Appendix 7.5.2.

The Chancellor also evaluates the Deans using the same instrument to evaluate department chairpersons. Certification 40-2006-07 of the Academic Senate provides the bases for using Evaluations of Faculty and Non-Faculty Personnel in Administrative Functions to evaluate the Deans.

The Dean of Academic Affairs conducts the evaluation of the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and the academic department chairpersons by using the instrument Evaluations of Faculty Personnel in Administrative Functions, Certification 40-2006-2007 Academic Senate. The Deans of Student and Administrative Affairs evaluate the Directors of their respective administrative offices using the form OCRH-001, Non-faculty Evaluation Form. The evaluation will form part of the employee's record.

Deans' follow-up on findings from evaluations by meeting periodically with the administrative personnel after the evaluations (Certification 40-2006-2007 Academic Senate). Areas for the

improvement of administrative structures and services are identified through needs assessment surveys and addressed in the institution's staff development program to improve administrative services. Appendix 2.9.1 shows the complete Institutional Assessment Plan 2019.

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

- **Office of the Comptroller of Puerto Rico** - Periodic audits are performed to evaluate the effectiveness of the administrative processes, institutional management, and fiscal operations. The aim of this audit is to determine if institutional operations are carried out effectively and efficiently, and if they comply with all the applicable regulations.
- **UPR Governing Board** - This Board assesses different administrative and compliance processes through the Internal Audit Office. The results are used to improve these processes continuously. Audits are performed annually. Audits are performed in accordance with the Audit Plan prepared by the Office of Internal Audit and approved by the Governing Board.
- **External audits** - External auditing firms are contracted by the UPR to make annual assessments of the effectiveness of different administrative, operational, academic, and fiscal processes to financial aid programs. Upon issuance of the annual financial statements by the external auditors' firm, the Governing Board receives, deliberates on them during a Board meeting, and grants authorization for widespread distribution to the university community. Financial Statements can be found in Appendices 6.7.1, 6.7.2, 6.7.3, 6.7.4, and 6.7.5.
- **Federal audits** - Federal agencies, such as the US Department of Education and Veteran's Affairs Department, regularly assess UPR-Ponce in its administrative processes, including student services, such as Veterans' and Financial Aid Services.
- **Regulatory agencies** - Other state and federal agencies, such as Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Women's Advocate Office, Disabled Citizens' Ombudsperson Office, Office of Government Ethics, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and others make periodic assessments of the institution's fulfillment of agency mandatory regulations.
- **Assessment of the Annual Institutional Effectiveness Reports** - The Institutional Annual Report contains an assessment approach of the institutional effectiveness in compliance with its strategic plan.

After these assessments are carried out, the institution, through the Chancellor's staff, develops and implements plans for improvement, to address concerns raised by audits, and submits them to corresponding offices. The regularity of the audits ensures the institution's compliance with the plan submitted.

The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) conducts institutional assessment activities and offers support to the academic, student, and administrative areas in implementing their assessment plans. Institutional research reports conducted by the OPIR are important sources of information for assessing institutional and program effectiveness. Some of the institutional studies performed and published by this office during recent years are Alumni Surveys, Graduating Student Survey, UPR-Ponce Annual Reports, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System Reports (IPEDS), and Freshman Students' Profile, among others.

Each Dean prepares a compiled report to the OPIR Director, who prepares the Institutional Annual Effectiveness Report to evidence the effectiveness of the institution in achieving its mission and goals through its individual units. The report is disclosed to the UPR President, to the Chancellor, to the Deans, and to other institutional constituents.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. University Law and established policies offer a well-defined structure that effectively guides and governs the institution, with clear lines of authority being adhered to.
2. Members of governing bodies possess the necessary expertise to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities.
3. The UPR General By-Laws and policies of governing bodies play a vital role in directing and facilitating effective governance and institution functioning. These guidelines are shared with the community through both print and electronic media.
4. Examination of constituent participation in institutional-level decision-making reveals a satisfactory balance, with representation from faculty, non-faculty, and students across various decision-making levels.
5. The university's administrative structure provides stability, even in the face of administrative changes at higher levels.
6. Administrative structures and services undergo periodic assessments to enhance their effectiveness and performance within the university community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Maintain the practice of providing formal orientations to the UPR-Ponce governing bodies regarding the institution's mission, structure, objectives, and academic programs.
2. Explore innovative strategies to improve constituents' perception of their roles and achievements and strengthen the mechanisms designed for regular communication of their perspectives.



Conclusions



CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were stated after careful analysis of all standards, their individual criterion, and the Commission's requirements of affiliation:

1. The essential components of academic, student, and administrative activity are aligned with the mission of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce.
2. The budgetary resources to fulfill the mission are distributed based on an institutional assessment process that addresses the three components.
3. The institution fulfills its mission in all areas.
4. Evidence supports that the UPR-Ponce upholds three core institutional values: Academic Freedom, Communication and Participation, and Respect.
5. UPR-Ponce actively works to create an atmosphere that promotes freedom of expression through student associations, assemblies, and extracurricular activities.
6. The institution is dedicated to creating a supportive and intellectually vibrant community that values freedom, integrity, and fairness for both students and faculty.
7. There is a commitment to ethical, legal, and transparent practices at UPR-Ponce, covering various aspects, such as research, employment, procurement, and conflict resolution.
8. UPR-Ponce is dedicated to fostering a fair, transparent, and inclusive environment for its faculty and non-faculty, ensuring adherence to legal and ethical standards in recruitment, evaluation, promotion, and disciplinary processes.
9. UPR-Ponce is actively engaged in a multi-faceted communication strategy, using multiple channels to disseminate information, recruit students, and enhance overall community engagement.
10. The institution's financial aid initiatives showcase a holistic approach to accessibility, transparency, and student support, ultimately contributing to the success and well-being of its student body.
11. UPR-Ponce places a strong emphasis on ethical conduct, continuous improvement, and the well-being of its community, as evidenced by its compliance to government ethics laws, the presence of ethical committees, ongoing professional training, and the promotion of student and employee rights and values.
12. The University of Puerto Rico at Ponce provides students with learning experiences that are rigorous and coherent at all program and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences are consistent with higher education expectations.
13. There is a robust culture for assessment to pursue professional accreditations for all programs and periodically evaluate those that are not subject to it.
14. The institution has a faculty body who is highly qualified due to a rigorous recruitment and evaluation process and given many opportunities for professional development.
15. Students have multiple ways to comply with the requirements of their programs and ensure they complete their degree in a timely manner and count on many support services and diverse learning opportunities to enhance the educational experience.

16. The general education and community service components provide students with a comprehensive education.
17. UPR-Ponce has clearly stated ethical policies and processes to admit, retain, and facilitate the success of students through a variety of services and opportunities.
18. Information regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds is accurate and it is available for all constituents.
19. The institution offers various services and processes that support and strengthen the student's educational experience and help them achieve their educational goals.
20. UPR-Ponce has clear and transparent policies and procedures regarding evaluation and acceptance of transfer credits.
21. Student life, organizations, and extracurricular activities are governed by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles and procedures that oversee all other programs.
22. There are policies and procedures to keep student information and records safe and private.
23. The institution periodically assesses the effectiveness of its programs and uses results to make decisions.
24. UPR-Ponce has clearly stated educational goals at the institution and program levels.
25. The institution, propelled by the rigorous endeavors of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR), has a clear and supported culture of assessment, transparency, and collaboration.
26. The institutional approach to planning and budgeting is assessment-driven and results in tangible improvements across academic and administrative areas.
27. UPR-Ponce's decision-making process is anchored in empirical data and feedback.
28. The institution plans, conducts, and supports a wide range of professional development activities during the academic year.
29. UPR-Ponce shares assessment results with constituents in many ways.
30. UPR-Ponce has demonstrated success in the execution of its strategic and operational plans, aligning effectively with its mission.
31. The institution has displayed remarkable effectiveness in navigating reductions in the consolidated budget without adversely impacting its operations.
32. UPR-Ponce consistently produces financial reports that adhere meticulously to the law and all applicable regulations, ensuring a high level of compliance and transparency.
33. University Law and established policies offer a well-defined structure that effectively guides and governs the institution, with clear lines of authority being adhered to.
34. Members of governing bodies possess the necessary expertise to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities.
35. The UPR General By-Laws and policies of governing bodies play a vital role in directing and facilitating effective governance and institution functioning. These guidelines are shared with the community through both print and electronic media.

36. Examination of constituent participation in institutional-level decision-making reveals a satisfactory balance, with representation from faculty, non-faculty, and students across various decision-making levels.
37. The university's administrative structure provides stability, even in the face of administrative changes at higher levels.
38. Administrative structures and services undergo periodic assessments to enhance their effectiveness and performance within the university community.