

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

**The University of Puerto Rico-Arecibo  
Arecibo, Puerto Rico**

**by**

**A Self-Study Evaluation Team Representing the  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education**

**Prepared After a  
Visit to the Institution on:  
April 17 – 20, 2016**

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**Working with the Visitors:**

**Dr. Tito Guerrero, III  
Vice President  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education**

**At the Time of the Visit:**

**President/Chief Executive Officer:  
Dr. Otilio González Cortés, Chancellor**

**Dean for Academic Affairs:  
Dr. Ana García Adarme**

**Chair of the Governing Board:  
Mr. Jorge Sánchez Colón**

## **I. Institutional Overview**

The University of Puerto Rico at Arecibo (UPRA) is part of the University of Puerto Rico System, which is the state-supported university system and consists of eleven campuses. UPRA began operation in 1967 as the Arecibo Regional College responding to the need for providing access to higher education to the citizens of the North-Central area of Puerto Rico. On July 1, 1998, the Board of Trustees of the University of Puerto Rico bestowed institutional autonomy. In March 9, 2002, the UPR Board of Trustees authorized the change of the name to the University of Puerto Rico at Arecibo.

Since its earlier beginnings as a technological college in the Buenos Aires residential area in downtown Arecibo, the University of Puerto Rico at Arecibo (UPRA) has evolved to become a powerful educational agent for social change, cultural awareness, and technological progress. Arecibo is a small city of approximately 45,000 inhabitants. It is the center of the municipality of Arecibo with a total population close to 100,000 inhabitants. Arecibo is located 49 miles west of San Juan. It is one of the oldest towns in Puerto Rico, and it houses the regional offices of the Commonwealth government for the northwestern region of the Island. The economy of the region is centered mostly on manufacturing plants and agriculture. Seven institutions of higher education operate in Arecibo.

In the course of almost fifty years, the institution has graduated generations upon generations of dedicated students who in turn have gone on to become leading professionals in their fields of expertise. UPRA has consistently met the standards required by the highest accreditation agencies for each major. The self-study document characterizes the UPRA graduate as one whose academic credentials are distinguished in the business and industrial world of the region it serves, opening the doors of opportunity in a competitive job market where only the most competent succeed. The self-study document goes on to say that this impact in the region is due to UPRA's firm commitment to meet and surpass MSCHE standards of educational excellence, attainable due to a committed faculty and administration, counseling and information systems faculty, in addition to the reliable and effective support of its non-teaching workforce.

The college is also the site for some of the most impacting academic and cultural projects. Week in and week out the university is the host for a variety of academic activities, fairs, theater events, prospective student orientations, theme conferences or workshops, field trips, varsity/inter-varsity sports events, art exhibitions, musical cantatas, competitions, and science-related projects. The number of community, educational or business-related organizations and special interest groups that choose the campus as their meeting place of choice belies the size of the campus and its midsize student enrollment.

UPRA's outreach not only serves the interests of the local surrounding community: its student and teaching body have also made their mark on the national and international front. Scores of students and teaching faculty have transcended local demographics and made a noticeable impact in national student exchange programs and/or cultural, science, and sports competitions, in addition to higher education seminars and conferences for professors covering California to Spain, and New York City to Buenos Aires, Argentina. These outreach ventures are in line with

UPRA's mission and general education goals—the successful linking of theory and praxis, aimed at expanding a culture of research and investigation in its faculty and student body alike. In the light of its past and present success, the University of Puerto Rico in Arecibo looks forward to continuing its mission as an educational beacon to a challenging and bright future.

The University of Puerto Rico at Arecibo is currently classified as a general baccalaureate and associate degree institution. It offers 17 programs conducive to a degree, 14 bachelor degrees, three associate degrees, and over 30 articulated transfer programs. Through its Division of Continuing Education and Professional Studies, the institution also offers a variety of credit and non-credit courses and certificate programs both to the university and external communities. Enrollment at UPRA is close to 3,900 students, 60% of which are female. Although students come from all over the island, the majority is from the local area.

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

The visit was conducted by a team of peer evaluators as part of the institution's self-study.

The visiting team met with the following UPRA groups and individuals\*:

- Self-Study Steering Committee
- Self-Study Committees for Standards 1-14
- Chancellor and Staff
- Department Chairs
- Dean of Academic Affairs and Staff
- Dean of Student Affairs and Staff
- Student Governing Body and other Student Organizations Representatives
- Institutional Assessment & Assessment of Student Learning Staff
- Administrative Board
- Academic Senate
- Faculty Representatives
- Related Educational Activities Staff

In addition, the visiting team met with the following staff and individuals from the University of Puerto Rico system:

- UPR Board of Trustees Representatives
- UPR President
- UPR Vice President for Academic Affairs
- UPR Finance Office Staff

**\*Note: A complete list of individual participating in meetings and interviews is found in the detailed working agenda for the visit.**

The visiting team reviewed evidence supporting the self-study through various sources including:

- Resource Room documentation organized by MSCHE standard
- Self-study supporting evidence submitted as electronic attachments
- UPRA self-study data depository available through password protected website
- UPRA website
- UPR website
- Special data requests furnished at the request of team members
- Special document translations prepared exclusively for the use of the visiting team
- *Normateca* (UPRA's regulations depository available through UPRA's website)

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

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

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

Based on the separate verification of compliance with accreditation-relevant provisions of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 and, as necessary, review of the self-study, certification by the institution, other institutional documents, and/or interviews, the team affirms that the institution meets all relevant federal and state regulations and the requirements of other Department of Education recognized accreditors.

The team conducted additional reviews of the following compliance categories: Transfer of Credit Policies and Articulation Agreements, Institutional Records of Student Complaints, Required Information for Students and the Public, Standing with State and Other Accrediting Agencies and Assignment of Credit Hours. The team affirms that the institution is in compliance with the federal requirements of these categories.

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

Commendations made by the team are addressed in the narrative addressing compliance with individual standards.

## VI. Compliance with Accreditation Standards

### Standard 1: Mission and Goals

The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are used to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

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

#### Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff and students, and others, the team developed the following conclusions about this standard:

- UPRA provides a formal and clearly articulated mission statement that encompasses the areas of teaching, research and service.
- UPRA has implemented highly structured procedures and systems that are well documented via multiple working groups, guidelines, recurrent meetings, minutes and reports that insure that the mission and goals are well communicated and addressed.
- The Institutional Strategic Plan 2008-2014 (PEI), outlines specific objectives, strategies and indicators to operationalize and evaluate UPRA's mission and its alignment with the UPR system Strategic Plan 2006-2016, *Ten for the Decade*. The great effort made by the institution to document, communicate and maintain a reference to the institutional goals at all program levels is notable.
- UPRA references, revisits and updates its mission statement. The last revision (2013) resulted in minor edits to fine-tune the language, but did not alter the essential elements of the mission declared in 2002.
- The institution uses multiple mechanisms to communicate the mission to its community, including print, media, webpage, UPRA radio and special events. The email distribution of information, such as *El Cartero El Lobo*, provides an expedient form of communication, in addition to promoting a sense of pride and community.
- The institution has formal channels to engage with the external community it serves, including the office of Continuing Education and Professional Studies and the Centro de Vinculación Comunitaria, the Alumni Office and others, as evidenced by the diversity of programs and initiatives implemented.
- UPRA goals and strategic initiatives are systematically accounted for and tracked through UPRA's indicators of institutional effectiveness. Reports from the Office of Planning and

Institutional Studies provide an account of the results achieved in the different objectives, the corrective measures implemented, and the evidences that support them.

Suggestion:

- Considering the primary mission to provide quality educational offerings and the drive to promote a culture of research, the institution may wish to encourage faculty and students to also engage in internal research that addresses previously-defined institutional questions, such as the effectiveness of different teaching and learning models, including the impact of a research-driven undergraduate education.

## **Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal**

An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.

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

Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff and students, and others, the team developed the following conclusions about this standard:

- Institutional planning is a disciplined, coordinated, systematic, and sustained effort to achieve the institution's mission and goals through decisions and actions that shape and guide what the institution is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future.
- UPR is currently devising a five-year strategic plan. UPRA's current strategic plan, *Horizon 2020*, will be modified as necessary to ensure conformance.
- The institution has developed and maintained a culture of strategic planning and corresponding levels of assessment. In addition, UPRA has identified effective indicators that will measure the progress with goals and objectives.
- The institution's planning culture appears to be transparent, participative and collegial in nature. The process began with identifying academic and administrative priorities supported with the appointment of related committees.
- The strategic plan and the overall planning process are supported via additional plans including the *Framework for Physical Planning* and the *Institutional Student Retention Plan*.

- There is integration between planning, budget and assessment that is disclosed within the worksheet *Budget Distribution by Priority*.

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

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

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

#### Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff and students, and others, the team developed the following conclusions about this standard:

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the UPR System and UPRA are each facing economic and fiscal challenges. The Commonwealth's challenges include a severe economic recession as GDP has remained negative since 2007, further compounded by reduced revenues, investors' confidence and reduced borrowing capacity. Unemployment rates within the Commonwealth remain high, ranging between 13-15%. During 2015, one bond rating agency downgraded the credit rating of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, given these ongoing circumstances. In March 2016, it was reported that a plan proposed by the U.S. Congress to assist the Commonwealth was under consideration. The plan has been greeted initially with both support and concerns within Puerto Rico as it remains under consideration within Congress.

The entire UPR system, including UPRA, has been strongly dependent upon the Commonwealth for financial support. UPR's revenues (excluding financial support from the Commonwealth) in FY2014 were lower than FY2013 by \$35 million or 12.6%. In addition, bond rating agencies have also downgraded Puerto Rico's credit rating and its revenue bonds, and have announced a negative outlook given its financial reliance upon the Commonwealth. UPR's borrowing capacity has been substantially reduced, and perhaps eliminated, during the foreseeable future. In addition, the audited statements for FY2015 have not as yet been issued as a result of undisclosed financial issues, continuing discussions concerning the accounting treatment of pension obligations, and to a lesser degree as a result of reconciliation differences associated with the transition in the administrative/accounting system.

UPR has a strategic plan in place, working in concert and with support from the Commonwealth, to address these fiscal challenges. Strategic objectives include plans to ensure fiscal stability and promote the modernization of information systems, to internationalize its enrollment base and to strengthen entrepreneurial programs. Financial support for these initiatives is needed from the Commonwealth and is dependent upon successful negotiation to defer substantial levels of upcoming debt payments. UPR is also conducting a complete review of each of its academic programs, and is pursuing opportunities to promote sustainability objectives and generate

substantial reductions in energy costs. Lastly, UPR is taking several measures to strengthen its level of philanthropic support from alumni and other stakeholders.

In conjunction with the aforementioned challenges, UPRA is operating within an austerity program to ensure resources remain committed to strategic initiatives including the following:

- Over the past nine-year period, 91% of the operating budget has been dedicated to staff salaries, and of this amount, 61% is applied to teaching staff.
- In the past five years, the Institution has received over \$10.7 million in external federal funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and agencies such as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the Department of Education. These proceeds have funded infrastructure, technological upgrade, academic curricular revisions, and have supported new research projects.
- Going forward, UPR has mandated an operating budget which keeps operating expenses in FY2017 at the same level as FY2016, and reduces this budget by 4% annually during each of the following two fiscal years. A significant portion of capital expenditures during this period will very likely need to be funded within UPRA via continued successful receipts of grants.
- At the time of the visit, UPRA could not produce UPR's audited financial statements for FY2015. The delay in the publication of audited statements could impact debt agreements and or debtor relationships, and could significantly hamper UPRA's standing with the US Department of Education and Title IV funding as well as its ability to pursue economic remedies and could adversely impact fund-raising efforts.

Commendation for noteworthy areas of progress or improvement:

- UPRA has operated in a resourceful manner during an extended challenging period. A sufficient level of resources appears to have been applied to academic programs and campus operations.

Recommendations:

- Given the challenging financial circumstances, it is recommended that UPRA closely monitor its progress in developing plans to insure adequacy of available resources.
- UPR should expedite its issuance of FY2015 audited financial statements in accordance with Title IV regulations.

Suggestion:

- UPRA intends to continue its emphasis in attracting external funds and broadening its efforts to strengthen fund-raising activities and donations. During 2017, UPRA will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In addition to continuing to strengthen its community

relations, UPRA should consider exploiting this event as a fundraising opportunity with all stakeholders including alumni and business partners.

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

The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.

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

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

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff and students, and others, the team developed the following conclusions about this standard:

- The UPRA governance system clearly defines the roles of the different organizational components of the university as well as its relationship with the University of Puerto Rico system. UPRA governance structure is led by a systemwide Governing Board which exerts sufficient autonomy to assure the institutional integrity of the UPR system and fulfill the mission of the university through policy and resource development.
- At the governance level, the UPR *Governing Board (Junta de Gobierno)* is the primary governing body of the UPR system; at the administrative leadership level, the UPR president and UPR Central Administration constitute the administrative leadership of the UPR.
- UPR and UPRA have a well-defined system of collegial governance including written policies outlining governance responsibilities of administration and faculty. These policies are available to the campus community.
- The UPR primary regulatory sources are the *Bylaws of the University of Puerto Rico (Ley de la Universidad de Puerto Rico)* and the *General Regulatory Handbook of the University of Puerto Rico (Reglamento General de la Universidad de Puerto Rico)*.
- Although part of UPR system, UPRA has, to a large extent, administrative and academic autonomy under the general administrative and governance framework of the UPR.
- UPR Governing Board provides appropriate opportunities for faculty and students to provide input into decisions that affect them.
- Through its bylaws, UPR recognizes the importance of faculty and students as members of the academic community and establishes a collegial governance structure of shared governance.

- The UPR president has an advisory board (*University Board*), the function of which is coordinating and integrating the eleven units of the UPR system.
- The UPRA chancellor has two advisory boards, the *Academic Senate* and the *Administrative Board*. The Academic Senate is the UPRA faculty forum to discuss academic issues and to promote academic excellence. The Administrative Board is responsible for approving policies, procedures and administrative matters, as well as for allocating UPRA's budget.
- UPRA's academic structure also includes a *Student General Council* composed of eighteen students representing UPRA's academic programs. All student representatives are elected by their peers and serve one-year terms. The Student General Council is responsible for representing and advocating for student rights and for promoting the academic development of their fellow students.
- In 2005, the Board of Trustees approved a policy to assess institutional leadership. A procedure was established to assess the performance of the UPR president and the chancellors.
- The self-study and campus interviews indicate that procedures or mechanisms do not exist within the UPR Governing Board to assess its performance and to evaluate the overall institutional effectiveness of the UPR system in a periodic and systematic manner.

#### Recommendations:

- The UPR Governing Board should develop regularly scheduled assessments of its own operational effectiveness in carrying out the Board's goals.
- The UPR Governing Board should develop regularly scheduled assessments of the overall institutional effectiveness of the University of Puerto Rico system.

#### **Standard 5: Administration**

The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution's organization and governance.

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

#### Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff and students, and others, the team developed the following conclusions about this standard:

- The administrative team has strong credentials and the appropriate skills, degrees and training to carry out their responsibilities and functions.
- The organizational structure delineates clear lines of organization and authority.
- The institution appears to conduct periodic assessment of its services and activities, specifically learning, other academic activities, student services and administrative processes.
- The institution provides a strong and thorough level of workshops for faculty and non-teaching staff.

### **Standard 6: Integrity**

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom.

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

#### Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the team arrived at the following conclusions about this standard:

- UPRA implements fair and impartial processes regarding student grievances. Guidelines pertaining to these processes are available in print and online. The institution follows the guidelines from its *General Regulatory Handbook*. In addition, UPRA spells out specific procedures in its *2016-2020 UPRA Catalog*. The institution recently developed complementary student bylaws.
- UPRA's ethical practices are overseen by the University's Ethics Committee. This committee follows regulations from the Puerto Rico Government Ethics Acts. The Ethics Committee is charged with developing training workshops and conferences for the university community. The Human Resources Department evaluates protocols for non-teaching staff. Recently, the Academic Senate put together an Ad-Hoc Committee on Institutional Integrity.
- UPRA has procedures in place designed to protect academic and intellectual freedom. Such procedures are informed by Federal Copyright Law. The institution implements protocols for the dissemination for ethical conduct practices to faculty, staff and students via printed literature and workshops.
- Course offerings and scheduling information are available to students from the point of admissions. Relevant information is included in the *UPRA 2016-2020 Catalog*. Students

are informed of course availability during academic advising. The institution has a system that keeps students from enrolling in courses for which they do not meet the prerequisites.

- UPRA implements periodic assessment of its institutional policies, practices and procedures as evidenced during interviews with key committee members and reviews of documents in the resource room.

Commendation for noteworthy areas of progress or improvement:

- UPRA is commended for its efforts in sharing institutional assessment findings via *Notiopei* and its main website's *Normateca*.

### **Standard 7: Institutional Assessment**

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards

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

Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the team arrived at the following conclusions about this standard:

- Over the past ten years UPRA has developed processes of assessment that are organized, sustained and rooted in the institutional mission and that are designed to evaluate and improve the total range of institutional programs and services. The outcomes of these processes demonstrate achievement of strategic planning goals as well as improvement of services.
- UPRA's *Institutional Assessment Plan* (PAI) aligns assessment with the goals of its *Institutional Strategic Plan* (PEI). The PAI clearly articulates processes for the assessment of institutional, unit-level, and program-level goals encompassing all programs, services, and initiatives. These processes are appropriately integrated with one another within a framework that provides for systematic and sustained use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative measures that maximize the use of existing data and information, clearly relate to the goals they are assessing, and are of sufficient quality that results can be used with confidence to inform decisions.
- Assessment processes are well-coordinated by an Institutional Assessment Committee (CAI), which consists of six (6) members who represent the four major areas of institutional assessment: learning, other academic activities, student services, and administrative processes. CAI members are responsible for preparing an operational plan

within their areas for each academic year, which is based on the PAI, identifies specific areas of focus and activities to be accomplished within the year, as determined by findings from assessments conducted during the previous year.

- Regular training opportunities in assessment practices and processes are provided for the members of CAI, who are responsible for dissemination of this information at the departmental and unit levels, as well as for promoting collaboration of faculty and administration in assessing student learning and responding to assessment results.
- Assessment results and institutional improvements from the implementation of UPRA's previous strategic plan, *Ten for the Decade 2006-2016*, are documented in *Institutional Effectiveness Reports* produced over the past ten years. Institutional planning and resource allocation are linked through the budgeting process (described more fully in Standard 2). UPRA is in the process of implementing its new strategic plan, *Horizon 2020*.
- It is clear that assessment results are shared and discussed with the appropriate constituents and used in institutional planning, resource allocation, and renewal, as evidenced (for example) by notable improvements in student retention (75% in 2005 to 83% in 2014) and graduation rates (28% in 2003 to 43% in 2009).
- UPRA has begun to develop benchmarking techniques, including the use of key performance indicators (KPIs) and comparison groups of similar institutions.

Significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices:

- Over the past ten years, UPRA has made great strides in promoting and maintaining a strong culture of assessment that guides decision-making, as evidenced in several key documents that are rooted in the institutional mission, including:
  - UPRA Strategic Plan – *Horizon 2020*
  - Institutional Assessment Policy
  - Institutional Assessment Plan
  - Institutional Effectiveness Reports

Suggestion:

- UPRA is encouraged to continue development of a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to be used as the basis for an institutional “dashboard” that portrays important data points in an accessible and easily-understood format.

## **Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention**

The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students' educational goals.

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

#### Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the team arrived at the following conclusions about this standard:

- UPRA's enrollment has fluctuated significantly over the past six years. However, enrollment has gradually grown to its current level (3,923). Given the existing economic challenges faced by the Commonwealth, the senior leadership team has developed a fiscally sound approach in forecasting realistic three-year enrollment projections for the upcoming academic years.
- UPRA has an admissions policy that is guided by system wide processes and procedures which are consistent with their institutional mission. Admissions criteria are clearly defined and accessible to prospective students via traditional print media, as well as being available on the university website. Admissions to UPRA are based on a General Academic Index (GAI) which is comprised of the weighted average of scores on standardized admissions tests (verbal and math) which are offered by the College Board, as well as the student's cumulative high school grade point average.
- UPRA has a robust recruitment plan, that leverages system-led marketing and outreach strategies with institutionally driven initiatives that are focused on serving the north-central region of the island, and which utilizes multiple high school visits to ensure the dissemination of recruitment material, as well as utilizing professional admissions personnel and other university stakeholders (i.e., faculty, student ambassadors, alumni, etc.) in promoting the academic programs offered at UPRA to prospective high school students and their families.
- A review of new student enrollment data reveals that UPRA has maintained a relatively high yield with admit offers to enrollment averaging 93 percent over the eight-year period reported. However, this impressive measure is tempered with the fact that over the same reporting period new student enrollment has experienced an overall headcount decline of 109 students (10.7%). The institution has responded by expanding recruitment activities, including increasing visits to regional high schools.
- The fluctuation in enrollment is most certainly impacted by the economic challenges that the Commonwealth has been experiencing over the past several years, and which has resulted in an increase in outmigration of its residents to the United States mainland. Unfortunately, the macro economic issues impacting Puerto Rico adds a significant burden to the UPR as it seeks to respond to the myriad of challenges this crisis has produced.
- UPRA is in the early stages of developing graduate program offerings and exploring recruitment of students from Latin America and the Puerto Rican diaspora, as a means to

address the pending decline in native born college age students, as a result of the increased outmigration to the U.S. mainland and declining birthrates on the island. Students and faculty expressed overwhelming support for the planned introduction of graduate programs at the University.

- Retention programming is clearly a UPRA priority, with efforts being led by the Institutional Student Retention Committee (CIRE), which is tasked with ensuring organizational compliance with the *Institutional Student Retention Plan*. Since 2008, a full complement of strategies has been implemented which has resulted in a retention rate of 83 percent for the 2014-15 academic year. This increase represents an overall increase of seven percent compared to 2009-10 academic year. These retention efforts are an important response in addressing some of the new student enrollment challenges that have been recently experienced.
- Notwithstanding the documented improvement in retention rates and the strong affinity for UPRA expressed by students during interviews, in a review of the evidence students have indicated relatively low levels of satisfaction with the matriculation process.
- UPRA has been successful in bridging co-curricular programming in support of positive retention outcomes, as demonstrated with the wide array of active student associations which promote and encourage student and faculty engagement and collaboration. These student organizations promote academic and professional affiliations and help students become socialized within their fields of study. There are also many associations which are focused on celebrating the arts, music, Puerto Rican culture and folklore, and community outreach. These programs contribute to building individual student's organizational, time management and self-efficacy skills which will ultimately promote student retention and personal development.

Commendation for noteworthy areas of progress or improvement:

- The team wishes to commend UPRA for improving its retention and graduation rates.

Suggestion:

- Despite the significant improvement in retention and graduation rates, UPRA should continue to review and eliminate administrative and bureaucratic processes that negatively impact the student experience with the matriculation process.

### **Standard 9: Student Support Services**

The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

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

## Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the team arrived at the following conclusions about this standard:

- Providing effective student support services that meet the needs of the student body is a priority at UPRA. This commitment is demonstrated through the availability of a full complement of academic and student support programs designed to meet the academic and social development needs of the student body. Evidence has been presented that indicates a coordinated delivery of critical enrollment services by designated enrollment service offices.
- Through the Dean of Students Office, UPRA offers services that are targeted to address the health, wellness, and overall safety needs of their student body. Specifically, these services are provided by Athletics, the Medical Services Office, the Service Office for Disabled Students, the Counseling and Psychological Services Office, the Quality of Life Office, the Veteran Affairs Office, and Campus Security. In addition, UPRA has the Student Ombudsman Office whose primary mission is to guide and help students in navigating a wide array of bureaucratic challenges, including the student grievance process and Title IX compliance, while ensuring confidentiality.
- Academic support services are effectively delivered through the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs. The value and effectiveness of these services in supporting student learning is demonstrated by the overall UPRA retention rate of 83 percent.
- UPRA's Student Support Services Project (PSE) serves 215 low-income/high risk students through the federally funded TRIO Program. The results are impressive with reported persistence rates of 93% and graduation rates of 53% for program participants.
- The self-study references student-athletes' desire for improvements of athletic facilities and UPRA has responded by appropriating capital funds for these purposes.
- UPRA has clearly defined policies and procedures to protect the integrity of student records and the data stored on the student information system. In addition, key policies and procedures were available on the UPRA website as required by federal and state regulations.

## Significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices:

- UPRA has assembled a dedicated faculty and student support staff focused on engaging and challenging students academically, while supporting, motivating and inspiring them toward excellence.

## Commendations for noteworthy areas of progress or improvement:

- The team commends UPRA for funding the improvement of athletic facilities despite the existing economic challenges.
- The team commends UPRA for securing and leveraging federal funding for the delivery of direct academic support services through TRIO and Title V grant programs to support the expansion of the Learning Communities model and the projected construction of a Learning Commons building adjacent to the library.

### **Standard 10: Faculty**

The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

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

#### Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the team arrived at the following conclusions about this standard:

- UPRA continues to strengthen faculty preparation and qualifications by providing grants and reassigned time to faculty members pursuing terminal degrees in their field. As a result, there is a noted increase of faculty with Ph.D.s, from 20% to 30% over the past ten years.
- The institution has invested \$625,000 into the sponsorship of scholarly endeavors. This is evidence of the institution's support for teaching, research and service.
- UPRA's student-faculty ratio is 14:1 with an average class size of 25 students. It is clear that the number of qualified faculty is sufficient for UPRA to fulfill its academic mission. In addition, 70% of faculty are tenured or on the tenure-track.
- Even though funding has decreased over the years, the institution continues to provide ongoing professional development to its faculty, as evidenced by the activities of the Faculty Resource Network and the responses of the faculty during the meeting with faculty representatives.
- The *General Regulatory Handbook* of UPR provides specific criteria for evaluations for tenured and non-tenured faculty, including the guidelines for promotion and tenure.
- UPRA has an established protocol for evaluating faculty performance. There are two committees charged with implementing the criteria contained in *Rules, Criteria and Procedures for the Evaluation of Faculty at UPRA*. Data from the evaluations are used to propose topics for professional development.

- As evidenced in interviews with faculty, UPRA is committed to academic freedom and adheres to the mandates of the *Faculty Manual*.

Commendation for noteworthy areas of progress or improvement:

- UPRA is commended for its ongoing efforts in providing faculty with financial and other support for pursuit of doctoral degrees.

### **Standard 11: Educational Offerings**

The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

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

Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the team arrived at the following conclusions about this standard:

- UPRA utilizes assessment data to evaluate educational offerings and their relevance. Each academic department and program has a well-articulated assessment plan, and faculty regularly engage in assessment activities. The results of these activities, collected from various sources and in varied ways, purportedly look to guarantee the content, rigor, and coherence of all educational operations.
- There are a number of evaluative processes used when revising curricula and developing academic offerings/programs. These involve multiple stakeholders and demonstrate a good level of shared governance. The campus curriculum committee includes representatives from multiple departments, and various stakeholders (internal and external to UPRA) are involved in decision-making processes as they relate to curricular matters.
- Academic programs are regularly evaluated by internal and external reviewers. This process includes widespread faculty involvement, as well as work with accrediting bodies. The fact that nine academic programs enjoy external accreditation allows for efficiencies as it relates to demonstrating curricular relevance and allows UPRA to achieve multiple objectives simultaneously.
- Academic programs are supported by facilities and other plans (tutoring and associated support services) to enhance student learning. Despite a challenging economic situation, it is readily evident that the institution supports its academic programs and offerings to a level that is concomitant with its mission. There are ample academic support services

offered through the tutoring center and library; the planned learning commons is further demonstration of institutional commitment to such support.

- Additional support is made available for undergraduate research and experiential learning, as well as for faculty who are interested in distance education or in teaching with technology. Curricula are marked by hands-on, experiential learning opportunities, where theoretical learning is buttressed by its applied counterpart. Internships, cooperative educational experiences, clinical practicums and lab sessions are hallmarks of many UPRA programs. Online offerings are currently limited to individual courses as opposed to full programs, and supported by an instructional designer, who provides directed assistance to individual instructors.
- Assessment data show a high level of student satisfaction with educational offerings. There is an admirable increase in student satisfaction, generally, and the institution should be recognized for its level of responsiveness to issues of student dissatisfaction

Recommendation:

- UPRA should increase its commitment to distance education including assessment strategies relative to online learning.

## **Standard 12: General Education**

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.

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

Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the team arrived at the following conclusions about this standard:

- UPRA has shown a commitment to general education through the Institutional General Education Committee and a well-defined and articulated *General Education Policy*. These initiatives reflect the overall educational mission and philosophy of the institution while concurrently enhancing students' intellectual growth and providing a well-rounded educational experience.
- Each department has an assessment coordinator who is responsible for general education assessment initiatives-- including those related to instructional methodologies--and the institution supports these activities through various efforts, including summer institutes and the Center for Professional Development for the Faculty.

- UPRA has developed a strong and coherent general education program based on assessment as outlined in the *Institutional Assessment Plan of General Education*. The assessment of general education learning outcomes is undertaken by multiple departments and is reflected in course syllabi, departmental assessment plans, and in the self-study.
- A series of interdisciplinary competencies comprises the institutional general education outcomes. These core competencies are regularly and rigorously assessed and in line with the institutional mission of UPRA.
- Assessment of general education competencies is conducted cyclically at the micro (course and departmental) level via a number of direct and indirect methods through a biennial process that involves faculty from across the institution. These competencies are identified, analyzed, and interpreted through a variety of instruments, with corrective actions taken where appropriate.
- Students perceive general education objectives satisfactorily and the results of general education assessment activities are regularly disseminated to stakeholders

Significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices:

- The recent creation of interdisciplinary, cross-departmental Learning Communities is one example of how the institution is committed to an iterative process of continual improvement when it comes to the delivery and assessment of general education.

### **Standard 13: Related Educational Activities**

The institution's programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

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

Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the team arrived at the following conclusions about this standard:

- UPRA has implemented a process by which first-year students with low passing scores on the subjects of Spanish, English and Mathematics of College Board Evaluation and Admission Test, are required to enroll in remedial courses in order to prepare them to be successful in their programs of study.
- UPRA provides students in eight disciplines the opportunity to complement their education in a diversity of external practice centers. The signed agreements with the

practice centers specify the policies, procedures, responsibilities and evaluation practices for learners, faculty and centers alike.

- Other experiential learning opportunities made available to UPRA students include: COOP programs for non-paid, and more recently, paid student internships; the Disney College Program; and the Puerto Rico Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Program, a project funded by the National Science Foundation to attract minority and low-income students in areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
- Through its Division of Continuing Education and Professional Studies (DCEPS), the institution offers programs, courses and events that address the needs of the local community, the region and the business sector. This unit also applies to external funding and has obtained resources from the Puerto Rico Department of Education and Department of Justice.

#### **Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning**

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.

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

#### Summary of Key Evidence and Developments:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the team arrived at the following conclusions about this standard:

- All academic programs at UPRA have developed a formal *Learning Assessment Plan*. Each plan contains clearly articulated statements of expected student learning outcomes for the degree, program, and course levels. Plans are based upon either the [Nichols Content Strategy Template](#) or the requirements of the discipline's specific external accreditor.
- UPRA's student learning assessment processes appear to be well-organized, systematic, sustained, and thorough. The departmental *Learning Assessment Plans* incorporate multiple qualitative and quantitative measures that make use of existing data and information, clearly and purposefully relate to the goals they are assessing, are of sufficient quality that results can be used with confidence to inform decisions, and include direct evidence of student learning.
- The departmental *Learning Assessment Plans* have been developed through a collaboration of faculty and administration (see discussion of CIA in Standard 7) in assessing student learning and responding to assessment results. The *Plans* are thoughtful, well-developed, contain clear, realistic guidelines and timetables, are

supported by appropriate investment of institutional resources, and are reviewed and updated annually.

- There is ample evidence that assessments are being conducted as per the departmental *Learning Assessment Plans* and that the results do provide sufficient, convincing evidence that students are achieving key institutional and program learning outcomes. Information is shared widely and data are analyzed to improve student performance in multiple programs by the Office of Planning and Research.
- There is also evidence that student learning assessment information is shared and discussed with appropriate constituents and is used to improve teaching and learning at the department level and by the Office of Planning and Research as a component of institutional assessment. Departmental and institutional newsletters documenting assessment outcomes and resulting improvements are disseminated to students and the general public.
- UPRA's *Institutional Effectiveness Report* documents use of student learning assessment information as part of institutional assessment.
- UPRA has developed a general education assessment process which is currently being implemented in two-year cycles, beginning in 2014-2015. Student self-perception of general education competencies assessed over a nine-year period (2005-2014) is generally positive.
- General education competencies are embedded within departmental learning outcome goals and are assessed as such. However, there is no integrated institutional reporting of general education outcomes assessments apart from those contained within departmental annual reports.

Significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices:

- UPRA has made significant progress in assessment of student learning in recent years. The institution is clearly committed to improving student outcomes, as well as teaching and curricular offerings.

Commendation:

- The team commends UPRA for attaining professional accreditations for nine of its academic programs.

Recommendation:

- While general education competencies are embedded within departmental learning outcome goals and are assessed and reported as such, UPRA should produce and disseminate an integrated annual report of general education outcomes assessments apart from those contained within departmental reports.

## VII. Summary of Compliance

Based on a review of the institution’s self-study and appendices, interviews, and other documents reviewed during the visit, the team draws the conclusions that:

- The institution continues to meet the Requirements of Affiliation.
- The institution meets all relevant federal and state regulations and the requirements of other Department of Education recognized accreditors.
- The institution seems to meet each of the fourteen individual standards stated in *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*.

The team also makes the following recommendations that require institutional follow-up action:

<b>Standard Number</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
<b>Standard 3: Institutional Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given the challenging financial circumstances, it is recommended that UPRA closely monitor its progress in developing plans to insure adequacy of available resources.</li> <li>• UPR should expedite its issuance of FY2015 audited financial statements in accordance with Title IV regulations.</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 4: Leadership and Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The UPR Governing Board should develop regularly scheduled assessments of its own operational effectiveness in carrying out the Board’s goals.</li> <li>• The UPR Governing Board should develop regularly scheduled assessments of the overall institutional effectiveness of the University of Puerto Rico system.</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 11: Educational Offerings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UPRA should increase its commitment to distance education including assessment strategies relative to online learning.</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While general education competencies are embedded within departmental learning outcome goals and are assessed and reported as such, UPRA should produce and disseminate an integrated annual report of general education outcomes assessments apart from those contained within departmental reports.</li> </ul>