

Standard I: 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: *The institution has a mission statement and related goals, approved by its governing board, that defines its purposes within the context of higher education.*

1.1 The UPR-RP Mission Statement

This chapter aims to demonstrate compliance with the five objectives of the Mission Statement throughout the years covered in this Self-Study, 2016-2024. During this period, several leaders have served as Chancellors, with the most recent being Dr. Angélica Varela Llavona, who was appointed by the Governance Board on February 23, 2024, through Certification 104, 2022-2023. By law, this campus must pursue and uphold the general mission of the University as set out in Article 2.b of the University of Puerto Rico Act of January 20, 1966.

The UPR-RP Mission derives from this Act, guiding the institution's development and serving to integrate its numerous activities and contributions to Puerto Rican society since it was officially adopted by our Academic Senate in March of 1990, as reflected in the following statements from [Certification 67, 1989-90](#):

1. To foster the comprehensive education of students through study programs that promote: intellectual curiosity, critical thinking skills, continuous learning, effective communication skills, appreciation and cultivation of ethical and aesthetic values, participation in campus processes, as well as social awareness and responsibility.
2. To provide graduate education of the highest quality whose core elements are research and creation, and that helps strengthen undergraduate education. Additionally, to provide post-baccalaureate programs for the training of high-caliber professionals committed to the ideals and values of Puerto Rican society.
3. To offer excellent undergraduate education that provides a comprehensive view of knowledge. This should include general education and specialized training, and develop capacities for independent study and research.
4. To develop teaching, research, service, and community integration in accordance with Puerto Rico's historical-social reality, in harmony with its Caribbean and Latin American context, projecting itself onto the international community. It will enrich and strengthen the body of knowledge relevant to the consolidation of Puerto Rican nationality, its history, language, and culture. But it will also promote the development and dissemination of knowledge at an international level.
5. To develop innovative and relevant programs in research, community service, and continuing education that respond to and contribute to the academic and professional activities of the campus. These programs must also contribute to the transformation and continuous progress of Puerto Rican society, to the analysis and formulation of solutions for the country's socio-economic and political problems, and to improving quality of life.

The Mission, which was endorsed by the governing body of the UPR System, continues to be pertinent and has been fully complied with through the various governance instances and

changes in leadership during this period. Its five statements emerge from and engage specific historical, social, and cultural circumstances that are central to higher education in the context of public institutions in Puerto Rico. Some characteristics of UPR-RP, including its emphasis on graduate education, research, and community service, and commitment to ideals and values of Puerto Rican society, set the campus apart from the other ten campuses of the UPR-System.

The mission statement's preface offers a brief overview of the institution's history and its most significant principles. Its body, which is aligned with the Law of the University of Puerto Rico, articulates aspirations and core values in five main areas: student learning; graduate education; undergraduate education; teaching, research, and community service; and innovative and relevant programs. These provide a strong and comprehensive foundation for the planning and execution of actions that promote the fulfillment of present strategic goals, as well as the formulation of new goals based on ever-changing external and internal factors.

The five elements included in the Mission Statement effectively guide the institution's main operation, and the initiatives and projects with which they have become associated, are familiar to the various groups that make up the UPR-RP campus community, and many consider them to be its core assertions.

The UPR-RP Mission is the foundation of our campus culture. Its elements are widely familiar to students, faculty, non-teaching staff, alumni, administrators, and others. Found in print publications, on campus websites, and in legal documents, it is crucial to the work of groups such as student government, the UPR-RP Academic Senate, the Administrative Board, and the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs, among others. The UPR-RP Mission has remained unaltered since its initial publication in 1989-90, as it has continued to prove effective for the institution, facilitating its ability to focus on the work that needs to be done, while also inspiring the taking of steps towards the achievement of its strategic goals. As part of the continuous improvement process involving the fulfillment of its five elements, the Mission is being analyzed in the design of the new Campus Strategic Plan 2024-2029, for which the institution has integrated Professor Eduardo Zavala, a planning specialist affiliated with the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Our campus is committed to the academic, personal, and professional development of the Puerto Rican students, in particular the youth, who will be the leaders of the future. Our students are bright and critical thinkers, with innovative and socially conscious knowledge about Puerto Rico and its socio-political and economic realities. The *gallitos* and *jerezanas* have an integral, dynamic, and innovative vision of what the country needs to grow and strengthen itself. A substantial number of students have made their life project a project of and for the country and their education has prepared them to contribute in meaningful and tangible ways.

Furthermore, the UPR-RP's commitment to the campus mission reinforces and upholds the General Mission of the larger, eleven-campus UPR System. The mission of the UPR System is also aligned with foundational tenets that public institutions of higher education must have in Puerto Rico, in particular the University of Puerto Rico Law of January 20, 1966.

1.2 Fulfillment of Mission

The UPR-RP mission serves as a foundation for advancing institutional improvement by serving as a foundation for strategic planning goals associated with specific projects and

objectives. The mission and strategic goals have served the campus and its internal and external constituents well in the face of challenges that have unfolded in recent years. For example, since the creation of the Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB), established as a result of the federal law known as PROMESA¹ that was passed by the U.S. Congress in 2016, the relationship between the UPR System and the Commonwealth government has changed significantly, in terms of state funding for public education, decision-making that impacts its academic programs, and some of our educational and research projects. High-level administrators based in UPR Central Administration, including the UPR President, now directly respond not only to the campuses but also to the FOMB. The five elements of the mission mentioned above underscore the institution's main projects and aspirations, giving them visibility and recognizing them as central pillars of campus culture.

Due to the provisions of PROMESA, our campus has experienced dramatic cuts to the state funding that was formerly guaranteed under Commonwealth law, leading to a series of budgets that have become more restrictive from one year to the next. These cuts and changes associated with them were aggravated by a series of natural disasters that include: hurricanes Irma and María in 2017, various earthquakes in 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic that began the same year during this tumultuous period. The UPR-RP mission and strategic planning goals aligned with it have helped to keep the institution and its leadership on track, contributing to a sense of solidarity and shared purpose among the many who believe firmly in the positive transformations that the institution cultivates in the its student body, in the realms of both personal and professional development, and the university's broader importance to Puerto Rican society. While cuts and natural disasters have negatively impacted the UPR-RP, its mission and goals give visibility and voice to the institution's most important long-term initiatives and present priorities, and thereby helped to minimize challenges and disruptions.

The campus has realigned its planning procedures and resources to ensure they are sufficient for executing and backing strategies, while also allowing flexibility in addressing opportunities and challenges, such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, and being able to continue to fulfill its Mission. In light of decreased local government funding for the UPR system and the complex financial environment on the island, the Río Piedras Campus has enacted several cost-saving initiatives and endeavored to boost external funding channels. The institution's planning objectives encompass securing external funding through grants and services, alongside guaranteeing ample support for academic programs and enriching students' university experiences. As described in Chapter 7 of this Self-Study, resource allocation in this period ascend to more than \$100 million, as well as numerous initiatives through the Continuing Education and Professional Studies Division (DECEP).

Commitment 2018-2023

The current UPR-RP strategic plan, *Commitment 2018-2023*, which has been extended until the end of the first semester of AY 2024-25, is structured around eleven goals related to institutional operations, needs, and opportunities for improvement. These were developed by a multi-sectoral committee that considered the UPR-RP's Mission, its accomplishments as Puerto Rico's leader in knowledge formation, research, and creative activities—art, music, drama, and other types of performance—as well as recent changes in Puerto Rico.

¹ Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (S.2328, 2015-2016)

The latter include the Commonwealth government's declaration of bankruptcy, a process associated with PROMESA that culminated in 2022, and ongoing dynamics related to the economic situation.

In developing the goals of Commitment 2018-2023, the strategic planning committee paid special attention to suggestions and recommendations in the 2016 MSCHE Self-Study findings, the 2016 Exit Report from MSCHE, and the UPR System's strategic plan, among other key documents. Goals were formulated to be achievable, measurable, and highly pertinent to the UPR-RP mission. The committee's work balanced the need for a forward-looking path that implements change and the core vision of the campus found in the campus mission:

A distinguished doctoral university community endowed with first-rate resources, dedicated to research, creative activity, and the dissemination of knowledge; committed to the all-round education of students and their lifelong learning, and recognized for the excellence of its contribution to the development and intellectual enrichment in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. (UPR-RP Mission, as referenced in Commitment 2018-2023)

Goals by Priority Area

Commitment 2018-2023 establishes four institutional priority areas for institutional improvements and resource allocation: (i) research and creative activity, (ii) academic offerings and student support services, (iii) social responsibility, and (iv) sustainable management, effectiveness, and efficiency. Each serves as an umbrella or area for specific strategic goals.

Regarding the first priority area, *research and creation*, the UPR-RP has worked to achieve the following goals:

- (i) Increase the production of innovative knowledge through research and creative activity by allocating resources to support research and creative work;
- (ii) Increase the amount of external funds that the university secures through research and creative activity;
- (iii) Strengthen awareness of academic contributions to society and knowledge locally and internationally.

The second priority area, which addresses *academic offerings and student services*, establishes the following goals:

- (iv) Develop academic and professional offerings of the highest quality in distance learning;
- (v) Renew academic offerings, including specialized services to maintain the highest academic quality and respond to the development of the disciplines;
- (vi) Adopt policies for student success that foster access, inclusion, and respect for diversity.

Social responsibility, the third priority area, focuses on engagement with the external community and provides that the campus will:

- (vii) Strengthen ties to social and physical environment through teaching, research, formulation of public policy, cultural management, and community service;
- (viii) Adopt more environmentally responsible institutional practices.

Finally, the fourth priority area, *sustainability*, aims to promote greater effectiveness and efficiency in administrative processes and strengthen the institution's financial standing. This is particularly important in the current context of ongoing cuts to the funding that was previously guaranteed by law. In this regard, the campus will:

- (ix) Increase its fiscal sustainability and diversify its sources of income, thereby supplementing the resources allocated in the budget;
- (x) Reorganize units, procedures, and services to optimize efficiency and effectiveness;
- (xi) Increase awareness of UPR-RP's many contributions to society and knowledge formation and community service, both locally and internationally.

The Mission and Strategic Planning

The UPR-RP mission has guided strategic planning at both the campus level and at the level of its main units: Offices of Executive Deans, Offices of Deans of Colleges and Schools. These each have their own strategic work plans, which are aligned with that of the campus. In this way, the UPR-RP mission contributes to a cohesive institutional culture based on a shared vision of purpose as well as accountability, which is key to the attainment of academic, social, and fiscal goals.

Goals have been articulated to assist the institution in continuing to operate innovatively and effectively in its traditional areas (i.e., academic offerings, research, service) while also recognizing the importance of improvements that require change (e.g., distance education, sustainable environmental practices, and the diversification of income). In this context, what may seem a top down approach—from the goals of the strategic plan to those of the units' individual work plans—is in fact a bottom-up strategy, as the campus-level plan is advanced by specific activities of units such as the colleges and schools, as noted in their achievement reports and program evaluations. The mission and goals are assessed in conjunction with the creation of strategic plans and when the achievements of a specific plan or goal are tallied and evaluated.

Resource Allocation

Strategic goals have guided members of governing bodies, administrators, faculty, and non-teaching staff in decision-making and actions related to resource allocation, since it is inherent to the fulfillment of the UPR-RP mission. For instance, given the major cuts in the operational budget, emphasis has been placed on securing external funding, from competitive grant-funding organizations, as mandated in Strategic Goal 2 of Commitment 2018-2023.

The work of the Office for the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research is key in this area. Between 2017 to 2022, it channeled a total of \$147,134,975 in funding from a variety of federal programs for initiatives in research and creative projects. These funds have benefited progress related to achievement in the area of Goal 1, which establishes that the institution will support faculty research and teaching, student teaching and training, and thereby contribute to the general well-being of Puerto Rican society.

Success in this area has been bolstered by pursuing and securing complete research collaborations and grants from the most prestigious federal organisms, both public and private, such as NSF, NEH, NEA, NIH, NASA, IMLS, and the Mellon Foundation, among others. Data from Web of Science, SCI, SSCI, A&HCI indicate our campus was responsible for approximately 29% of the research and creative achievements carried out within the UPR System during AY 2016-17, and 31% in AY 2017-18 before a drop in AY 2018-19, second only to the Medical Sciences Campus. More recent data signal that the percentage completed by faculty and researchers at UPR-RP has since increased.

Related to funding, in particular the area of Goal 9, Executive and Academic Deans have proactively sought out and secured funding from different sources, such as federal institutions, FEMA post-hurricane funds, and philanthropic initiatives, among others. Some have signed memorandums of understanding with state agencies and thereby helped to increase the institution's operational budget. In addition, various colleges and schools have developed collaborations with public entities and private NGOs in Puerto Rico, such as the Department of Education and *Humanidades Puerto Rico*. Goals 1 and 7 have guided the allocation of some of these funds (traditional external funds and those obtained from other sources), respectively. While the former goal establishes that they will be used for increasing research and creativity activity, the latter indicates that they will be used to strengthen ties to social and physical environment through a variety of means, including teaching, research, the formulation of public policy, cultural management, and community service. The funding that work towards these goals is important because it has yielded resources that were used to partially replace funds eliminated by the aforementioned cuts to the operational budget of our campus.

During the COVID pandemic, the UPR-RP capitalized on the CARES and HEERF (Higher Education Emergency Relief) funds, for a total of \$12,439,093, to further develop technological infrastructure. Specific initiatives included setting up intelligent classrooms; acquiring PCs and laptops for non-teaching staff, faculty, and students; upgrading technological equipment and software; and training and technical support for online education, among other initiatives. The allocation of these funds was guided by projects associated with strategic goals 4 and 5. Goal 4 calls upon the university to develop academic and professional offerings of the highest quality in the area of online learning. Goal 5 calls for the renewal of academic offerings to respond to the development of the disciplines. Technology has profoundly shaped knowledge production, teaching pedagogies, research methodologies, and access to intellectual resources in the last decade, a fact that underscores how the development of technological infrastructure relates to progress towards the achievement of both of these goals.

Program and Curriculum Development

The pandemic raised awareness of the importance of distance and on-line education and formally allowed for all campus faculty to be trained on the use of technologies for distance education. The number of personnel certified as virtual educators increased exponentially. Also, UPR-RP revised more than a large percentage of its academic offerings so that they included course syllabi for all three modalities of teaching: face-to-face, hybrid, and online.

In addition, academic proposals for online programs and degrees increased substantially. New circumstances as well as students' interests and needs encouraged the creation of self-sustained online graduate programs, such as the [Master's on Information Science \(AS Cert. 80, 2017-2018\)](#), which is the first online program in the UPR System; the LL.M. Orality in

the Criminal System ([AS Cert. 71, 2019-2020](#)); the distance master's on Business Administration ([AS Cert. 83, 2019-2020](#)); and the [Master's on Project Management \(AS Cert. 97, 2020-2021\)](#), as long as others that are in the pipeline of approval, as stated in Chapter III, focused on curriculum and learning experience design, during 2022 to 2024 evaluation period.

Strategic Goal 5, which relates to the renewal and revision of academic programs, has also motivated numerous actions and projects to ensure that academic offerings are updated and current. Every five years, individual academic units undertake the evaluation of their respective academic programs in conformity with Governing Board [Certification 55, 2021-22](#), titled "Regulations for the Periodic Evaluation of Academic Programs at the University of Puerto Rico." The purpose of these periodic revisions is to better the quality of academic offerings by ensuring that the curriculum are updated, aligned with student needs, and engaged with include recent insights, developments, and innovations in the field or discipline at hand. They take seriously the statements in the campus mission indicating that academic programs should be excellent and of the highest quality.

Based on the findings established through the evaluation process, departmental curriculum committees might revise, change or curricula, curricular sequences, program requisites, course descriptions and modalities, time-to-degree expectations, and more, following institutional regulations (i.e., the [General Guide for the Preparation and Presentation of Academic Change Proposals at the UPR](#)). A thorough revision process, some programs make minor adjustments, which do not involve particular modification of the UPR License issued by the PR Office of Registration and Licensing of Educational Institutions or MSCHE. On the other hand, they can implement major changes or innovations, such as a shift in modality from "in-person" programs to online, among others. These major modifications are considered instances of program creation and are covered by the UPR GB [Certification 163, 2022-23](#). As such, these proposals must be presented before the Board of Postsecondary Institutions for the corresponding renewal of the UPR License. Such is the case, for example, of the master's in translation, which changed the modality from face-to-face to online, and is now technically considered a "new program."

The strategic goal concerning program renewal also involves large-scale institutional efforts. In 2019, the Vice Presidency of Academic Affairs and Research completed an assessment of all 270 undergraduate academic programs within the UPR System to compare various parameters over the past ten years. This assisted UPR-RP in identifying programs that could be consolidated and others that would benefit from an improvement plan. It also put forward programs with best practices that could be modeled elsewhere. These actions guided curricular innovation, teaching methodology, resource reallocation and, in some cases, the phasing out of programs. In the past seven years, 41 undergraduate and 28 graduate programs have undergone some kind of revision, thereby aligning the experiences of our students with changes in higher education, the job market, and industry.

Support for Scholarship and Creative Activity

The UPR-RP mission and goals also address research and creative work. In response to Goal 1, which calls for new efforts to support research and creative work, Academic and administrative units such as the Office of the Chancellor, Executive Deans, and Deans for Colleges and Schools, by offering course load reductions per semester for research, institutional research grants through FIPI, and sponsoring collaborations with other institutions, including the Puerto Rico Foundation for the Humanities, New York

University's Faculty Resource Network, the University of Michigan, and the University of Graz, among others. Unfortunately, there is less support for research and travel to attend academic conferences than there was previously, due to budget cuts; however, support for these efforts has positively impacted faculty research, leading to high research activity in numerous disciplines. For instance, between AY 2021-22 and AY 2022-23, professors published a total of 88 books and 308 peer-reviewed articles (34 books and 104 articles in AY 2021-22; 54 books and 204 articles in 2022-23). Also, non-refereed contributions including book chapters, translations, articles, creative work are also substantial, amounting to a total of 97 for AY 2021-22, and 116 for AY 2022-23. Some colleges, such as the College of Social Sciences, stand out for success in distributing resources associated with in-cost funding obtained through grants obtained by their professors. These efforts have also help to support scholarship and creative activity.

Creative work has also benefited from support aligned with Strategic Goal 1. Activity in this area includes concerts, dance, architectural design, plays, musicals, poetry projects, and playwriting, among others. For example, the Museum of History, Anthropology, and Art, has organized many exhibitions, tours, and workshops. In addition, with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the UPR Theatre produced *Canción de Navidad* in December 2022, an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, written by playwright José Luis Ramos Escobar and performed by the university theater company Theatre Repertoire. On the other hand, the Drama Department's Travelling Theatre produced a minimum of two works per semester from August 2017 to May 2022, two of which travelled around the island for the benefit of diverse communities. Moreover, the UPR Choir and *Coralia Concert Choir*, have performed in Puerto Rico and abroad and have won important international awards.

In 2022-23 a total of 122 professors completed in creative work, with a total of 265 activities; the numbers attained 84 and 82 activities for each semester in 2021-22, and 145 and 138 activities in 2020-21, respectively.

An initiative focused on creative writing is the *Poetry Out Loud* national arts program which, in partnership with the NEA, encourages the enjoyment of poetry by offering free educational materials and recitation competitions for high school students. This program helps students learn about literary history and contemporary social life. Students at the University High School (UHS), part of our College of Education, have achieved distinctions and prizes as poet of the year.

As these outcomes suggest, the UPR-RP continues to generate and make available new knowledge, research, art, and other types of creative work even in the face of budget constraints. Moreover, campus leadership has supported scholarly inquiry and creative activity, at different levels, leading to high quality appropriate to the institution. In some instances, this has included support to apply for external funds. As examples from the College of Social Sciences, described in apert IV of this Self-Study, focused on student learning services, the community of the Río Piedras Campus and beyond has benefited from Project PATRIA (acronym for Project to Deliver Mental Health Services to the Puerto Rican population post natural disasters and COVID-19), led by Principal Investigator Doctor Milagros Méndez and Co-Principal Investigator Doctor Roberto Frontera. This initiative secured a grant from the Hispanic Federation totaling \$2.4 million over two years (equivalent to \$1.2 million annually) spanning from 2018 to 2021. Additional financial support was provided by Fundación Comunitaria de Puerto Rico with \$18,000 and

Filantropía Comunitaria of BPPR with \$49,000. This initiative benefitted approximately 50 graduate students each year, allocating \$450,000 annually towards stipends and tuition. The project also employed a team of professionals consisting of four licensed psychologists responsible for supervising the mental health services delivered to the community by the graduate students involved. Services were offered across four campuses: Rio Piedras Campus, Arecibo, Ponce, and Humacao, in collaboration with 12 Non-Profit Organizations operating throughout the island.

On the other hand, Proyecto Título IV-E, under the leadership of Dr. Gisela Negron, received in 2023 an annual funding of \$2.5 million for a duration of five years to support stipends and tuition for a total of eighty (n=80) undergraduate and graduate students over the five-year period. The primary objective is to financially support students in their studies with the aim that upon graduation, they will be eligible for employment within the Department of Family Affairs in Puerto Rico.

1.3 Goals Related to Student Learning Outcomes

The strategic plan links institutional improvement to student success. One of the ways this is done is by improving the assessment of student learning through the platform known as Online Learning Assessment System platform (OLAS), which was designed in house in 2017 to collect and analyze data related to teaching and learning. Faculty and assessment coordinators enter data, perform analysis, and obtain immediate feedback, fostering a detailed and accurate understanding of results. Efforts have been made to link the assessment of student learning in all academic programs to OLAS, which has motivated faculty involvement on a voluntary basis with no major incentives needed.

Since it was first introduced as a pilot program in AY 2014-15, OLAS has evolved into a more dynamic platform in order to more effectively address areas of improvement at the level of the program and college or school. Distinct from its previous version, which was limited to course-level interventions, the new *Dynamic OLAS* provides information on student performance and compliance with the expectations of passing learning outcomes for the entire undergraduate and graduate enrollment of UPR-RP. It also allows for faculty and assessment coordinators to recommend and incorporate transformative actions not just as isolated suggestions, but as an essential component of the assessment process as a whole. Recommendations of this sort are collected through the platform, evaluated and, if considered relevant, instituted. This ensures that the proposed actions are not only relevant, but also effective in closing the gaps between expectations and achievements. This data is highly relevant for actions such as the elaboration of development plans, curricula revision, the creation of new programs, and academic management, among others.

Another initiative that impacts students' learning and research experiences for students is the [Undergraduate Research and Learning Resource Center \(CriiAS\)](#), which received \$3 millions for a five-year period (2023-2027), which promotes mentored research and creative projects for undergraduates using a scholars-in-residence model. Participating students, who are chosen via individual proposals, receive a stipend for this integrated, interdisciplinary research opportunity and are invited to publish in the online student journal *Ingenios*. They are also invited to participate in research-related summer internships and advanced training in their fields of study. External funds are used to sustain the center's programs by subsidizing the human and technological resources needed to keep them in place, and providing funds for the participants. This project offers an impressive number of student support services and has succeeded in expanding them over time; in October 2020

and October 2021, which was in the challenging circumstances of the pandemic, 224 students attended its virtual workshops.

A third example of this kind is the [Caribe Digital](#) initiative, which follows the model established by CiiAS, in order to develop a comprehensive and sustainable plan to promote Digital Humanities in Puerto Rico by (i) creating a capacity building program for professors, researchers, and librarians to conceptualize and develop digital projects, (ii) fostering research activities among UPR-RP students, faculty mentors, and community-based groups; and (iii) creating the first undergraduate minor in digital humanities in Puerto Rico. By its end, this initiative will have benefited over 120 professors and librarians, 65 undergraduate students, and 15 community organizations.

Various similar programs have followed suit across campus, supported both by institutional and external funding, thus increasing and enriching participation in research and creative work among our undergraduates. These include the Mellon Mays scholarships, the IMLS-funded American Latino Museum Internship, and Fellowship Initiative to support a pilot project to foster internship experiences for undergraduate majors enrolled in Humanities and Liberal Arts programs, just to name a few.

At the graduate level, through the Program for Formative Academic Experiences, the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research supports students with research assistantships. Under this program, they receive economic incentives via a stipend and tuition waiver so they can study full-time and conclude their studies successfully in the shortest possible time. In addition, students pursue related opportunities in programs that they learn about through their programs and departments.

Another example is the project CRiiAS. Starting in August 2024, this initiative encompasses the Title V Project STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) aimed at enhancing the Social, Emotional, and Academic Support for Hispanic Students in Puerto Rico within the framework of the Interdisciplinary Research and Undergraduate Learning Resource Center (CiiAS). A summer bridge program has been established to assist students transitioning from public high schools to the College of Natural Sciences. This program enables participants to bolster their proficiency in mathematics and sciences while receiving additional support services throughout their academic journey. The support services include tutoring in subjects such as math, chemistry, biology, and other foundational courses. Although the project commences within the realm of Natural Sciences, there are plans to expand its scope to encompass other colleges and schools on campus within a timeframe of two to three years.

1.4 Internationalization

The fourth element of our mission that is cited above, which requires that the campus community pursue different types of study, research, and awareness-raising work that establishes connections between Puerto Rico and its Caribbean, Latin American, contexts, international community. The strategic plan supports this directive in a plethora of ways, most clearly through Goals 1, 3, and 5. Our campus contributes to the development and dissemination of knowledge at the international level through the organization of and participation in international conferences; by supporting collaborative and co-authored collaborations, scholarship, and projects; by inviting internationally acclaimed scholars to speak on campus; and by supporting visiting scholars and visits made by our own faculty members. This can be seen in the many grants, fellowships, and awards received by faculty members and students, collectively and individually, in all of our colleges and schools.

These efforts complement our long tradition of welcoming academic, scientific, and government leaders from the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world to join its academic endeavors.

To ensure continuous improvement in the internationalization of the Campus, the Directorate of Affairs and International Relations (DARI) was established through [circular letter dated February 5, 2024](#), under the Office of the Chancellor, with architect Luis F. Irizarry Ramírez as director. This office is tasked with developing and coordinating actions aimed at expanding the international presence and projection of our Campus. In line with the challenges facing the country's economy, a revised vision and mission have been outlined for this office to strategically enhance the international presence of students, researchers, and faculty members of the Campus. This transformative initiative has resulted in 11 international agreements during the year 2023-2024, focusing on Spain and other locations in Latin America and Europe.

Community Service

The URR-RP Mission and goals 7 and 8 support the institution's role as provider of services and community resources. These involve supervised teaching, research collaborations, internship experiences, volunteering activities, and a host of educational services. Through these, UPR-RP maintains and strengthens its network while offering an enriching experience for students, faculty, and others. Some of these are available free of charge, such as the Center for Urban Community and Entrepreneurial Action (CAUCE), the pro-bono program of the School of Law, the Mental Health Services of the Center for Psychological Services and Studies (CUSEP), among others. In fact, CUSEP, which is based in the College of Social Sciences, is the only clinic in Puerto Rico that provides mental health services and psychological evaluations without any charge.

Student organizations also make a significant contribute to community service. These include organizations such as Association of Students in Social Work, Friends of Doctors without Borders, International Red Cross Student Association, NeuroBoricuas RP, Patita Amiga, and Sociedad Eco Ambiental. For several years these organizations have dedicated all their efforts to manage numerous initiatives, such as collection of donations for post-disaster relief, community cleanups, community censuses, and workshops on particular social issues, among others.

The Río Piedras Campus also established the first bachelor's program in General Studies for inmates in collaboration with the Department of Correction and Rehabilitation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico from 2016 to 2024. In terms of graduation rates, under this program, 19 students graduated with a rate of 48% (N=25, admission of 20). Faculty members from the Campus visited correctional facilities to offer courses. Additionally, 12 of these graduates came to the Campus in person to take a preparatory course for the Master's program in Cultural Management and Administration at the College of General Studies. In January 2024, an agreement was reached for this cohort to continue their Master's studies on campus. These initiatives are established in the Governing Board certifications 17, 2014-2015; and 109, 2015-2016.

The UPR-RP mission and strategic goals alike encourage students and other members of the university community to participate in the development of alternatives to address serious social, economic, and environmental problems, and, when relevant, to facilitate access to the institution, while fostering inclusion and respect for diversity. This invitation is frequently taken up, as evidenced by initiatives such as the Coastal Research and

Planning Institute, the Afro-Descendent and Racialization Studies Program, the Project for Higher Education in the Prison System, the *Siempre Vivas* initiative, which is aimed at eradicating violence against women, and various collaborations with schools in the Río Piedras area, among others. Ideally, the institution should develop a closer working relationship should be developed with the government so that these experiences and the knowledge that they assist in fostering can play a more direct role in the development of public policy. In addition, systematic attention should be given climate change and its rippling effects in Puerto Rico. This effort could assess those projects and measures that currently exist as well as those that are needed.

Findings & Next Steps

Findings

- The UPR-RP complies with Standard I criteria.
- The UPR-RP mission statement has allowed the institution to adapt to the volatile circumstances in Puerto Rico in recent years and served to reinforce a general consensus about the purpose and importance of programs, research, and service.
- The mission continues to serve the campus well and allows for continuous improvement as it includes aspirational characteristics.
- The current strategic plan, Commitment 2018-2023, aligned with the UPR System Plan 2017-2022, includes goals that directly support achievement in the key elements of the UPR-RP mission and in other areas of current importance, including funding and finances.
- In terms of supporting the student experience and addressing challenges related to internationalization, physical infrastructure, and atmospheric events, the Office of the Chancellor has implemented transformations such as the establishment of DARI and the appointment of Architect Mayra Jiménez Montano as a special assistant for infrastructure affairs.

Next Steps

- Given that the UPR-RP could benefit from the development of a mission statement that is more concise or shorter and the mission's importance to strategic planning, the committee that develops the next UPR-RP strategic plan should consider reviewing the mission and creating a document that identifies and analyzes its main elements as well as its strengths and weaknesses. This process includes ensuring the participation of teaching staff, non-teaching staff, students, graduates, and community members. Furthermore, given that the mission is established by law, it must be approved by internal governance bodies and submitted to local legislative

bodies.

- The committee that develops the next UPR-RP strategic plan should consider the institution's responsibility in two key areas: climate change (e.g., hurricanes, erosion, sea level rise / flooding, earthquakes) and challenges brought about by governmental defunding of public education.
- The UPR-RP's academic leadership and the committee that develops the next UPR-RP strategic plan should consider whether strategic goals related to retention and graduation might assist the campus in better serving its students and Puerto Rican society at large.