UPR RP
LA IUPI

Self Study Report
2024

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STANDARD I: MISSION & 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.

1.1 The UPR-RP Mission Statement

This chapter discusses the UPR-RP Mission and strategic goals focusing on the period since the last MSCHE self-study, 2016-2024, and current and future improvements related to the standard. During this period, several leaders have served as Chancellors, with the most recent being Dr. Angélica Varela Llavona, who was appointed by the Governing Board on February 23, 2024 and served as interim Chancellor prior to her appointment.

By law, our campus must pursue and uphold the general mission of the University of Puerto Rico System, as established in article 2.b of the University of Puerto Rico Law of January 20, 1966. At the same time, the UPR-RP mission guides the institution's development, and it has assisted in integrating its numerous activities and contributions to Puerto Rican society since it was officially adopted by our Academic Senate in March 1990 (EI 1.1: UPR-RP Original Mission AS Cert. 67, 1989-90, E1.2: UPR-RP Mission & Vision English Translation https://academicos.uprrp.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Strategic-Plan-Commitment-2018-2023.pdf).

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 guide the institution's main operations, and the initiatives and projects with which they have become associated. They are familiar to the various groups that make up the campus community (students, faculty, non-teaching staff, alumni, administrators, and others), and many, if not all, consider them to be its core assertions and the foundation of campus culture.

The UPR-RP mission's five main elements signal that the campus will:

i. 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.
ii. 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.
iii. 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.

iv.   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. It will also promote the development and dissemination of knowledge at an international level.

v.   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.

Some characteristics of the mission, including its emphasis on graduate education, research, 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.

Approved by the governing body of the UPR System (then called the Board of Trustees), in 1989, the mission, continues to be pertinent to the vitality of the institution. Establishing the purpose of our campus within the context of higher education, the mission assists in navigating challenges, contributes to decision-making by bodies such as the Administrative Board and the Academic Senate, serves as a foundation for the development of policies, and when necessary assists in interpreting them. The mission has also facilitated smooth transitions in leadership.

The mission has remained unaltered since it was approved and implemented in 1989-90, as it has continued to prove effective. Important for its role in establishing a consensus about the university's main function, it cultivates a shared vision of the work that needs to be done. Furthermore, commitment to its central precepts reinforces and upholds the general mission of the larger, eleven-campus UPR System, which is also aligned with foundational tenets that public institutions of higher education must have in Puerto Rico, particularly the University of Puerto Rico Law of January 20, 1966 (EI 1.3: UPR System Mission & Vision).

1.2 Fulfillment of Mission

The mission and strategic goals have served the campus and its internal and external constituents well when faced with challenges during 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 PROMESA, which was passed by the U.S. Congress in 2016, the relationship between the UPR System and the Commonwealth government has changed significantly; this is apparent 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, who are based in UPR Central Administration, include the UPR President, now directly respond not only to the campuses but also to the FOMB.

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 operational budgets that have become more restrictive and consecutively smaller from one year to the next.

These cuts were aggravated by a series of events that include hurricanes Irma and María in 2017, various earthquakes in 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic that began the same year. Nevertheless, the mission and the strategic planning goals that have been developed in pursuit of institutional improvement have helped to keep the institution's leadership on track by underscoring what is important to the life of the campus and the services that it offers.

The UPR-RP mission contributes to a sense of solidarity and shared purpose among the many who believe firmly in the positive transformations that the institution cultivates in its student body, in the realms of both personal and professional development, and the university's broader significance for Puerto Rican society. While natural disasters have negatively impacted our campus, and budget cuts and changes set forth by the FOMB continue to affect the university on different levels, it is in this context that the mission gives visibility to the institution's most important long-term initiatives and priorities and helped to minimize the negative impact of challenges and disruptions.

The campus has aligned its planning procedures and resources to ensure they are sufficient for supporting and executing strategic goals that advance institutional improvement, including the creation of new programs, a process informed reference to the mission (EI 1.4: Policy for Program Creation GB Cert. 163, 2022-23). Considering decreased local government funding and the complex financial environment on the island, several cost-saving initiatives have been enacted and external funding has been bolstered. As established below, planning goals encompass securing external funding through grants and the provision of services, and ensuring that academic programs have the support they need to sustain and enrich students' university experiences.

Commitment 2018-2023

The UPR-RP strategic plan, Commitment 2018-2023, which has been extended until the end of the first semester of AY 2024-25, includes eleven goals related to institutional operations, needs, and opportunities for improvement. These were developed by a multi-sectoral committee that reviewed the campus' mission, considered UPR-RP's accomplishments as Puerto Rico's leader in knowledge formation, research, and creative activities, as well as recent changes in Puerto Rico. The latter includes the Commonwealth government's declaration of bankruptcy, a process associated with the law known as PROMESA (the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act) that culminated in 2022, and ongoing dynamics related to the economic situation facing the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

In developing the goals that define Commitment 2018-2023, the strategic planning committee paid special attention to suggestions and recommendations in several key documents, including the 2016 MSCHE Self-Study findings, the 2016 Exit Report from MSCHE, and the UPR System's

strategic plan. Its work was complemented by that of the Academic Senate which evaluated compliance with the mission and goals and assessed them as well. Goals were formulated to be achievable, measurable, and highly pertinent to the mission. The committee's work balanced the need for a forward-looking path that implements change and the core vision of the campus that contextualizes the campus as:

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 (EI 1.5: UPR-RP Strategic Plan 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.

Within the first priority area, *research and creation*, our campus has worked to achieve the following strategic 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 for 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*, includes 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 states 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*, promotes greater effectiveness and efficiency in administrative processes and the strengthening of 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 has worked to:

ix. Increase its fiscal sustainability and diversify its sources of income, thereby supplementing resources to be allocated in the budget;

x. Reorganize units, procedures, and services to optimize efficiency and effectiveness;

xi. Increase awareness of our campus' many contributions to society, knowledge formation and community service, both locally and internationally.

The Mission and Strategic Planning

The mission has guided strategic planning at both the campus level and at the level of its main units: Offices of Executive Deans and Offices of Deans of Colleges and Schools. Each of these units has its own strategic work plan, which is aligned with that of the campus. In this way, the mission contributes to a cohesive institutional culture based on a shared vision of purpose as well as accountability in the attainment of goals in the areas of research, academics, service, and fiscal resources.

Goals have been articulated to assist the institution in continuing to operate innovatively and effectively in its traditional areas while also recognizing the importance of change. Improvements in the latter are apparent in distance education, sustainable environmental practices, and the diversification of income. In this context, the campus-level strategic plan is advanced by specific projects and activities of units such as the colleges and schools, as noted in their achievement reports and program evaluations (EI: 1.6 CBA Example of College Strategic Plan).

Given that the UPR-RP could benefit from the development of a mission statement that is more concise and shorter, the committee developing the next strategic plan has reviewed the mission. It has discussed and analyzed its main elements as well as its strengths and weaknesses and proposed a larger review process that will include the participation of faculty, non-teaching staff, students, graduates, and community members. Of course a revised mission will be approved by internal governance bodies and the process leading to the approval of a new statement would include ample opportunity for input from all campus constituents, leadership, and the public at large.

The working group that examined Standard 1 suggested that the committee that develops the next 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. These topics could mentioned explicitly or specific goals could respond to the future challenges that they present.

Resource Allocation

Strategic goals have guided members of governing bodies, administrators, faculty, and non-teaching staff in decision-making and actions related to the development of academic and professional offerings and the effective resource allocation, since both are inherent to the fulfillment of the mission. For instance, emphasis has been placed on securing external funding from competitive grant-funding organizations, as described in Strategic Goal 2 of Commitment 2018-2023. Success in this area has been bolstered by securing research collaborations and grants from the most prestigious federal

agencies, both public and private, such as NSF, NEH, NEA, NIH, NASA, IMLS, and the Mellon Foundation, among others.

Various reports document the substantial level of research productivity that characterizes resource allocation for research and the place of research within academic life at UPR-RP. UPR-RP is among the top contributors to research publications in the UPR system, matching UPRM at 24%, but still significantly behind UPR-CM at 53%. UPR-RP outperforms smaller campuses by a wide margin, contributing a large portion of the total research output in comparison.

Program and Curriculum Development

The pandemic raised awareness of the importance of distance and on-line education and resulted in circumstances in which technologies in this area were firmly embraced by the institution. Virtually all campus faculty were formally trained in the use of technologies for distance education. In fact, the number of personnel certified as virtual educators increased exponentially. Also, our campus reviewed and redeveloped a large percentage of its academic offerings so that course syllabi were adapted for all three modalities of teaching: face-to-face, hybrid, and online.

In addition, academic proposals for online programs and degrees were encouraged, and their overall number increased. New circumstances as well as students' interests and needs encouraged the creation of self-sustained online graduate programs. Other new academic programs are also in the pipeline for approval, as addressed in Standard III.

Strategic Goal 5, which relates to the review and renewal of academic programs, has motivated numerous actions and projects to ensure that academic offerings are updated and current. Every five years, individual academic units undertake program evaluation in conformity with policy established by the Governing Board (EI 1.7: Periodic Program Evaluation, GB Cert. 55 2021-22). The purpose of these periodic reviews is to improve the quality of academic offerings by ensuring that the curricula are updated, aligned with the campus mission, student needs, and include recent insights, developments, and innovations in the relevant fields or disciplines. 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 development and innovation in higher education, the job market, and industry.

Support for Scholarship and Creative Activity

Our 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, numerous academic units offer course load reductions to faculty per semester for research, institutional research grants through FIPI, and 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, and the Mellon Foundation among others. Though there is less institutional funding overall for research and travel to attend academic conferences than there was previously, these and other

initiatives have positively impacted faculty research, leading to the completion of important projects and collaborations in numerous departments and programs.

Creative work has also benefited from support aligned with Strategic Goal 1. Activities in this area include concerts, dance, architectural design, plays, musicals, poetry projects, playwriting, organized museum exhibitions, tours, and writing workshops, among others. As outcomes in this area evidence, our campus continues to generate new knowledge, research, art, and other types of creative work. Moreover, campus leadership has supported scholarly inquiry and creative activity at different levels. This has included support in preparing applications for external funds.

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 members and assessment coordinators enter data, perform analysis, and obtain immediate feedback, making possible detailed and accurate analyses and the documentation of progress related to the assessment of student learning. Efforts have been made to expand the assessment of student learning in all academic programs to the online platform. Faculty involvement has occurred on a voluntary basis with less incentives needed as understanding of the importance of the initiative becomes more widespread. .

Among other initiatives that impact students' learning and research experiences for students is the CriiAS program (Center for Undergraduate Learning and Research), which received $3 million for a five-year period (2023-2027), and promotes mentored research and creative projects for undergraduates using a scholars-in-residence model. In addition, the Caribe Digital initiative, following the model established by CriiAS, developed a comprehensive and sustainable plan to promote Digital Humanities in Puerto Rico. It has done so by: (i) creating a capacity-building program for professors, researchers, and librarians to conceptualize and develop digital projects; (ii) fostering research activities among students, faculty mentors, and community-based groups; and (iii) creating the first undergraduate minor in digital humanities in Puerto Rico. By the time it ends, this initiative will have benefited over 120 professors and librarians, 65 undergraduate students, and 15 community organizations.

Various programs have followed suit in projects that bolster student success, supported both by institutional and external funding, and have thereby increased and enriched participation in research and creative work among undergraduate students. For example, students have received Mellon Mays scholarships, the IMLS-funded American Latino Museum Internship, and participated in the Fellowship Initiative. The latter is a pilot project offerings internship experiences for undergraduate majors enrolled in Humanities and Liberal Arts programs. Students pursue learn about a plethora of

related and discipline-specific opportunities, summer experiences, and training programs through their programs and departments.

At the graduate level, through the Program for Formative Academic Experiences (PEAF), the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research supports students with research assistantships. As explained in Chapter 3, participants in this program receive economic incentives via a stipend and tuition waiver so they can study full-time and conclude their studies successfully. Moreover, most graduate students complete original research, internships, or professional practicums in conjunction with their coursework and final projects. Success is this area has been recognized repeatedly, and a substantial number of our graduate students complete their degree with significant publications, exhibitions, and projects as part of their record and formation as professionals.

1.4 Internationalization

The fourth element of our mission requires that the campus community pursue different types of study, research, and awareness-raising work that establishes connections between Puerto Rico and its Caribbean and Latin American contexts. These efforts complement our long tradition of welcoming academic, scientific, and government leaders from the Caribbean, North American, Latin America, Europe, and other parts of the world to join its academic endeavors. The strategic plan supports this directive in different ways, most directly 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 co-authored collaborations, scholarship, and projects; by inviting internationally acclaimed scholars to speak at academic events on campus; and by supporting visiting scholars and visits made by our own faculty members. Activity in the area of internationalization is also evidenced in the many grants, fellowships, and awards received by faculty members and students, collectively and individually, across our colleges and schools.

To ensure continuous improvement in the internationalization of the campus, the Directorate of International Affairs and Relations (DARI) was organized under the Office of the Chancellor in February 2024. 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 Puerto Rico's economy, a revised vision and mission have been outlined to strategically enhance the international presence of our students, researchers, and faculty members. This transformative initiative resulted in the establishment of 11 international agreements during the year 2023-2024, focusing on Spain and other locations in Latin America and Europe (EI: 1.8: International Exchange Agreements AY 2024-25).

Community Service

Goals 7 and 8 support the institution's role as provider of services and community resources. These involve supervised teaching, research collaboration, internship experiences, volunteering activities, and a host of educational services, some of which are available free of charge. Through these

initiatives, our campus maintains and strengthens its networks while offering an enriching experience for students, faculty, and others.

Student organizations also make a significant contribution to community service. These include organizations such as the 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 significant time and energy to managing numerous initiatives, such as collection of donations for post-disaster relief, community cleanups, community censuses, and workshops on particular social issues, among others.

The mission and strategic goals encourage students and members of the university community to participate in the development of alternatives to address social, economic, and environmental problems, while facilitating access to the institution and 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, and the *Siempre Vivas* initiative, which is aimed at eradicating violence against women, as well as various collaborations with schools in the area surrounding the campus, in particular Río Piedras, among others. The institution seeks the support of government agencies and non-profit bodies and so that formal research, these experiences, and the knowledge that they foster can play a more direct role in the development of public policy, with more precise attention given to topics such as the links between debt and austerity, migration, as well as climate change and its rippling effects in Puerto Rico and beyond.

Findings

- The mission statement has allowed the institution to adapt to volatile circumstances in recent years and served to reinforce a consensus about the purpose and importance of programs, research, and service.
- The mission continues to serve the campus well and allows for continuous improvement, which is partially due to its aspirational characteristics.
- Interest in the possibility of revising the mission has arisen in the context of work completed for the development of the strategic plan that is slated to begin in January 2025.

Next Steps

- The next strategic plan and or the unit-level plans that support it should consider whether a strategic goal that aligns the fourth element of the mission with goals in the areas of retention and graduation might assist the campus in better serving its students and Puerto Rican society at large.

STANDARD II ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

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

The UPR-RP campus exemplifies its dedication to its mission by consistently demonstrating unwavering commitment, adherence, and fidelity to policies and practices that uphold ethics and integrity in all realms. This commitment to excellence transcends mere guidelines, steering the institution towards a trajectory of credibility, trust, and enduring excellence.

2.1: Commitment to Academic and Intellectual Freedom, Freedom of Expression, and Respect for Intellectual Property Rights

Our campus protects and is committed to academic and intellectual freedom as cornerstones of its mission. Guided by the institution's General Bylaws (S-II 1), faculty teach, discuss, and engage with resources, knowledge, and opinions in their area(s) of expertise objectively and honestly and do so in the pursuit of truth. This commitment, which reflects that they contribute to and remain abreast with the latest discussions, developments, and debates in their fields, extends into the classroom and beyond, encompassing freedom of expression, research, and respect for intellectual property rights and research ethics. These practices are observed in multiple realms. For example, students and faculty frequently debate controversial topics such as climate change, political violence, war, colonialism and divergent perspectives on truth in classroom discussions and other activities, such as forums. Academic and intellectual freedom also shapes research, creative work, and collaboration with other faculty and graduate students in Puerto Rico as well as internationally.

The campus' broader commitment to ethics and integrity is evident in concrete actions that include the responsible use of technology, compliance with copyright policies, and other ethical considerations that are woven into the structure of courses, research, and the dissemination of knowledge. Institutional norms like the Institutional Copyright Policy (S-II 2) and the UPR Policy for Patents, Inventions, and their Commercialization safeguard this keystone of academic innovation (S-II 3). The UPR System's Office of Intellectual Property is the unit that ensures protection for intellectual property (S-II 41). This area is constantly evolving in response to changes in the institutions' environment.

One example of our commitment to ethics and integrity is the recent adoption of the Academic Integrity policy (S-II 4). This policy reinforces the institution's obligation to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on academic integrity and rigor, trust, mutual respect, and peaceful dialogue among the members of the university community. Upholding integrity involves adhering to essential ethical values like honesty, respect, and responsibility. Academic integrity is an essential component of teaching and learning, as well as the relationships and interactions that are inherent to

the educational, research, and administrative processes. Academic integrity permeates all aspects of the university community. Academic honesty is also supported by the UPR-RP Library System's extensive workshop offerings (S-II 39), which have addressed topics such as searching strategies in the sources subscribed by the Library System, writing according to style manuals, academic dishonesty and plagiarism. A total of 767 workshops were delivered between 2016 and 2023 to 12,233 students. These are proactive academic activities that demonstrate some ways that the campus fosters responsibility through experiences that support a culture of ethics and integrity.

UPR-RP faculty are required to include an academic integrity clause in all their syllabi and students are aware of the norms that define the responsible use of information, the avoidance of plagiarism, and the implications and consequences of not abiding by this policy. In 2018, a mandatory reporting process was instituted for professors, requiring them to submit a report to the Department Chair detailing their adherence to the syllabi content requirements set forth by AS

Certification 39 2018-19 (Policy Against Sexual Harassment), GB Certification 33 2020-2021 (Reasonable Accommodation, Academic Integrity and Contingency Plan), and Course Modality. Subsequently, a summary report is compiled by the Dean of Academic Affairs and forwarded to the Academic Senate for review and further action. This process is outlined in S-II 42 and must be meticulously observed by all relevant parties.

Also, the institution has turned to technology to broaden coursework modalities and teaching methods, offering in-person, hybrid, and online classes supported by online technologies. All of these adhere to the standards for ethical and academic integrity set by the Academic Senate as well as policies and laws for higher education. Recognizing the importance of ethics and honesty in all learning environments, UPR-RP mandates that professors offering online courses complete certification covering legal, policy, and ethical components.

Research ethics in areas that require special attention and training are of utmost importance. The Institutional Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (S-II 5) ensures adherence to ethical principles and human subjects protection in research endeavors. Since 2019, over 8,200 professors, students, and personnel have taken courses in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program). Participation in the CITI Program Courses (S-II 40) has been substantial: 4,274 have completed the module for Social and Behavioral Human Research; 1,860 for Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research; 1,182 for Research with Human Subjects, and 934 for Conflict of Interest**.** This program is a web-based platform that equips researchers, faculty, and students with the necessary knowledge to navigate the challenges of ethical regulations within research through customizable modules that address informed consent, data privacy, conflict of interest, and animal welfare.

CITI's impact extends beyond mere compliance. It fosters a culture of ethical research, empowering individuals to make informed decisions throughout the research process. This translates

to tangible benefits for universities: reduced risk of misconduct, enhanced reputation through demonstrably ethical practices, streamlined compliance, and improved research quality due to reliable data and trustworthy outcomes. The CITI Program prioritizes fostering a culture of responsible research conduct by emphasizing ethical principles and empowering informed decision-making. This ultimately safeguards the rights of participants, contributing to trustworthy research that benefits the broader community. In summary, it empowers universities to navigate the ethical landscape while nurturing responsible research, leading to enhanced research quality, strengthened reputation, and a commitment to ethical principles that benefit the research community at large.

2.2: A Climate of Respect Among Students, Faculty, Staff, and Administration

Campus actively cultivates an atmosphere of respect for diversity and inclusivity. This is important for students, faculty, non-teaching staff, and administrators as well as for the contributions that the campus makes to higher education and Puerto Rican society. This commitment is evidenced through a robust set of policies, practices, and procedures which ensure that an atmosphere of dialogue and respect for social, ideological, and epistemological difference is prioritized and valued.

For example, student's rights and responsibilities are clearly established in the University of Puerto Rico Law (S-II 9), which emphasizes the central importance of respectful dialogue and academic integrity. *The General Student Regulations* also provide further resources that help to cultivate and maintain a climate of respect by identifying measures that promote harmonious coexistence within the student body and the other groups that form part of the broader university community. These play important roles in student government and in day-to-day operations and discussions about ongoing improvement.

Also, the Institutional Policy of Coexistence is an important resource. It guarantees all campus constituents the right to voice their opinions and exercise their rights in an environment that rejects violence while prioritizing respect, tolerance, open dialogue, and peaceful exchange. The environment that it values is the basis for the support that the institution offers its student, staff, and faculty associations, which include the General Student Council, the Brotherhood of Exempt Non-Teaching Staff Employees (HEEND), the Workers Syndicate, and the Association of University Professors (APPU).

Our institution has a zero-tolerance stance against discrimination and provides extensive resources for reporting and addressing such incidents. The UPR System's Policy Against Discrimination (S- II 7) prohibits discrimination in education, employment, and service based on race, color, sex, birth, age, social origin, ancestry, marital status, religious and political ideas or beliefs, gender, sexual preference, nationality, ethnic origin, veteran status, and physical disability.

The campus upholds principles of non-discrimination, relevant for all university community members, including students, faculty, and non-teaching staff, regardless of background, beliefs, rank, or position. It is further bolstered by the Policy and Procedures for Responding to Situations of Sex

and Gender Discrimination at UPR**,** which ensures comprehensive protection for those who experience discrimination in these areas and provides effective practices related to problem solving. The anti-discrimination policy that focuses on sex and gender offers protection in the classrooms and all the institution's functions and activities.

In adherence with its anti-discrimination policy, support is provided for pregnant students through a dedicated prevention and management protocol (S-II 8, Article XII). In addition, a chosen name protocol implemented in 2023-2024 allows transgender and non-binary students and others to register a preferred name in various contexts, including course lists, student IDs, and email (S-II 15). Nine gender-neutral bathrooms have been designated across campus, thereby fostering a more Inclusive and welcoming environment for all (S-II 16). In addition, the UPR has established a protocol for handling situations related to discrimination based on sex, gender, or pregnancy as well as sexual harassment, sexual violence, domestic violence, date violence, and stalking at work and in the educational context (S-II 8).

For example, if a person experiences an incident of sex discrimination that violates Title IX at the university, they can (and should) report it to the appropriate office. Employees who want to report an incident should first contact their supervisor, dean, or director of their unit, or the Office of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). These officials will provide guidance and support and will immediately refer the matter to the Office of Human Resources and the Title IX Coordinator for further action. On the other hand, if a student needs to report an incident, they should contact the Office of the Title IX Coordinator or the Office of the Student Ombudsman. These offices will provide information on the investigative procedures and services available to the student. For further assistance, students can visit the https://tituloix.uprrp.edu website or contact the Office of Title IX Coordinator.

If the person reporting the incident is not part of the university community, they should report the situation through the Office of the Title IX Coordinator. The complaint or grievance can be made orally or in writing, depending on the complainant's preference. It should include the complainant's name, residential and postal address, telephone number, witness names (if any), and a brief account of the events and the date they occurred. The university will keep the proceedings strictly confidential within the available resources.

The Office of Students with Disabilities (OSEI) oversees reasonable accommodations and academic support services for students (S-II 13). In addition to facilitating communication between faculty and students in ways that prioritize inclusion and positively impact teaching and student learning, the office also offers students the chance to have their concerns or grievances addressed. The latter is useful for students who feel their requests need to be addressed more adequately and for those who wish to document issues or experiences that can inform future improvement. This office

deals with a relatively large number of students, as shown in Table 2.1. It presents data related to requests for services and the corresponding numbers of complaints.

Table 2.1 OSEI: Reasonable Accommodations for Students

Academic Year	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Requests for reasonable accommodation	2,178	2,250	1,954	1,087	1,198	1,263
Complaints	15**	23	29	33	21	6

Source: Report to UPR-RP Academic Senate.

Our commitment to ethics is also aligned with the Puerto Rico Government Ethics Act of 2011 (S-II 14). An Ethics Committee spearheads ongoing education efforts, ensuring that all personnel complete at least twenty contact hours of ethics-related training every two years through mandatory courses, workshops, and reading materials. While changes have been made to the format, modality, and scheduling of these training courses, further improvements can be made to increase the percentage of employees who comply with this requirement.

2.3: Institutional Grievance Policies

Our campus works toward the fair and transparent resolution of grievances through a variety of practices, procedures, and policies. These practices are clearly delineated and readily accessible to students, faculty, and non-teaching staff. They ensure that all community members have access to resources that allow their concerns to be addressed diligently, impartially, and in a timely matter. There is information available regarding institutional policies and procedures on different webpages such as those pertaining to Human Resources, Title IX, OSEI, and other campus offices.

One example of procedures related to the students' grievances is the AS Certification 118, 2022-2023 (S-II 43) that outlines a standardized process for students to request grade revisions. If a student disagrees with a grade on an assignment, exam, or their final course grade, they can follow specific steps that involve discussions with the professor, the department director, and potentially a committee. Throughout the process, confidentiality is maintained, and the aim is to reach a fair resolution through dialogue. Key elements of this certification are: (1) students have deadlines to initiate reviews, and decisions at each level cannot lower the initial grade; (2) the Appeals Committee serves as the final step for both mid-term and final grade disputes; (3) specific schools/programs with their own procedures may be exempt, provided they guarantee the right to challenge a grade following the general process; and (4) confidentiality and avoiding punitive measures are emphasized. Accordingly, the Law School has a detailed procedure for revising exam results and course grades (EI #).

At the same time, numerous efforts are made to limit challenges and obstacles that students encounter while also providing them resources that allow for these to be addressed should they occur.

For example, new students receive comprehensive information about institutional policies and regulations, including relevant webpages and offices as part of their new admission orientation. This ensures understanding and access to support services from the outset. Graduate programs typically have student representatives that facilitate communication between students and relevant administrators (Graduate Program Coordinators, Department Directors). Students also solve problems in more traditional ways, including meeting with professors in office hours and making appointments with their advisors or their Associate Deans of Student Affairs assigned to their colleges or schools.

Another essential resource to address grievances is the Office of the Student Ombudsman, with staff trained to help students navigate the grievance process and provide guidance and support for various concerns. As shown in Table 2.2, this office becomes more active at times when challenges that students face increase. This can be seen, for example, in the higher number of students who sought support during the AY 2019-20, a period in which students were dealing with both the COVID-19 pandemic and a series of earthquakes that caused substantial damage to some parts of the island.

Table 2.2 Office of the Student Ombudsman: Cases

Academic year	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	*2019-20	2020-21	2021- 22	2022-23
Cases	365	365	105	1,431	219	319	369

Source: Office of the Student Ombudsman

Newly hired faculty and non-teaching staff also receive comprehensive information about relevant policies and regulations (S-II 18 and S-II 19). Various offices handle concerns in accordance with the nature of the grievance. These include the Office of Human Resources, the Office of the Coordinator of Compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) of Title IX, the Offices of the Deans, and the Office of the Chancellor. This multipronged approach ensures appropriate and specialized support for the diverse issues that impact employees.

Our campus is seriously committed to fair and accessible grievance procedures according to established university policies. Through ongoing dialogue and review, UPR-RP strives to continuously improve its policies and procedures and strengthen its commitment to a respectful and equitable environment for all members of the university community.

2.4: Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest

Raising awareness about the significance of avoiding conflicts of interest is crucial to maintaining a fair, just, and conflict-free work environment. The Puerto Rico Government Ethics Act (S-II 14) outlines a set of ethical principles and responsibilities that all public service employees must follow. These principles and responsibilities are aimed at fostering impartiality, transparency, and integrity in all decision-making processes. They also ensure that public employees remain accountable to their

employers and the public. Adhering to these guidelines can help public service employees build trust and confidence in government institutions and contribute to the overall welfare of their communities.

Therefore, the awareness of conflict of interests and the appearances of such conflicts is crucial to preventing them. The UPR reinforces norms focused explicitly on employees engaged in specialized activities, such as research and service (S-II 20, 21, 22). Also, this empowers the Institutional Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (CIPSHI) to monitor compliance with the Policy on Conflict of Interests and Disclosure of Financial Interest in Research and Other Sponsored Programs. Additional oversight measures include:

- Mandatory notification of employment or participation in for-profit or non-profit activities outside regular work hours. This ensures transparency in external activities that may pose potential conflicts.
- Certification of the employment of relatives to avoid nepotism. This measure minimizes potential conflicts arising from family relationships within the university.
- Certification of the absence of conflict of interest of persons responsible for purchasing, contracts, business, and commercial transactions. This safeguards against conflicts in procurement and financial transactions.

These measures demonstrate a commitment to preventing conflicts of interest, but potential conflicts may still arise. To address such situations, clear channels for reporting concerns are maintained. Those with concerns about potential conflicts can seek guidance from relevant university offices and file formal complaints.

2.5: Fair and Impartial Practices

In addition to the UPR General Regulations (Articles 35, 75), our campus has a general guide and rules for recruitment, hiring, promotion, and evaluation (S-II 24). It establishes fair and impartial practices related to hiring, evaluation, and promotion, as well as disciplinary and separation measures and procedures for all university members, detailed in the general bylaws and in the Procedural Guidelines for UPR Personnel.

When a tenure-track faculty position is announced, an internal and external call for applications is issued to guarantee equal employment opportunities, locally, nationally, and internationally. The Communication Office writes and sends to the main media in Puerto Rico, the Chronicle of Higher Education, and other outlets.

Personnel committees that operate at the levels of the department and college or school periodically evaluate faculty members. In this evaluation process, research or creative activity, service, and student perceptions of a faculty member's teaching and courses are considered systematically (SII 25). The Faculty Manual (S-II 26) includes the policies and regulations related to the duties, responsibilities, and functions of faculty members.

In the case of non-teaching staff, norms and collective bargaining union agreements guarantee fair and impartial practices for hiring, leaves, promotion, and evaluation, along with Certification 142, 1994-1995 and Certification 35, 2018-2019 of the Governing Board. The UPRRP Administrative Board assists the Office of the Chancellor in approving promotion, applications for different types of leave, and tenure, as established in the UPR General Regulations. If employees or applicants are not satisfied with a recruitment decision, they can appeal through a three-step internal process that includes:

- A request for process review by the Human Resources (HR) Office
- An petition to the Board of Appeals if unsatisfied with HR's decision
- An appeal to the Board within ten days if still unsatisfied (Certification 93-110 of Higher Education Council). If the Board's decision is unfavorable, they can appeal to court.

Each step involves submitting a written appeal with supporting details. Also, for the appeals process, Certification 80 1988-1989, Higher Education Council is applied. There is also a procedure for addressing and researching complaints dealing with discrimination in employment (EI #).

2.6: Honesty and Truthfulness in Public Relations Announcements and Internal Communications

Open and honest communication practices are required for all campus functions, including announcements, advertisements, recruitment, admissions materials and practices, as well as internal communications. These inform communication efforts, ethical marketing practices, and digital accessibility initiatives, among other types of communication and outreach.

The Office of Communications spearheads strategic communication initiatives under the Chancellor's Office, ensuring authenticity and ethical integrity in portraying the university's image. Clear guidelines govern the dissemination of official announcements, adhering to state and federal regulations. Brand guidelines define authorized colors, logos, and designs for promotional materials, advertisements, brochures, and business correspondence, ensuring consistent brand identification in all contexts (S-II 27, 28).

Recognizing the effectiveness of technological communication tools, our campus utilizes a multi-channel approach, employing email, official social media platforms, and online educational platforms to share information and maintain the university's various sectors informed of news, policies, educational and grant opportunities, among other developments. The institution actively promotes digital accessibility within its communication channels, ensuring inclusivity for all members.

UPR-RP provides prospective students, as well as those who are admitted and enroll, an accurate representation of the institution, its programs, and university life. Crucial to these efforts are information resources like Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogues, brochures, webpages, and promotional materials. Open-house activities on campus are also celebrated to disseminate information about the institution and our programs, along with print and media advertising. This

collaboration between academic programs and service offices empowers students to make well informed decisions about their academic pursuits.

The commitment to honesty and transparency permeates all operations. Moreover, strategic communication, ethical marketing practices, and a focus on digital accessibility all work to foster a culture of trust and engagement. By prioritizing ethical conduct in education and providing accurate information to prospective students, UPR-RP upholds high standards of integrity, honesty, and truthfulness and in so doing attracts some of the most highly qualified students to its competitive academic programs.

2.7: Affordability, Accessibility, and Informed Decision-Making

Campus policies and procedures reflect the belief that limited economic resources and or financial barriers should not hinder access to higher education. It has implemented a multifaceted approach to promote affordability and equip students with the knowledge, tools, and resources to confidently navigate the financial decision-making associated with their education.

The UPR-RP has been effective in promoting affordability and accessibility for incoming and current students. For example, "Open House" events provide clear and comprehensive information about tuition costs, fees, and available financial aid options. The information is also available online. This event and other initiatives empower students to make informed decisions about their educational future and investment, ensuring that they understand the value received for their tuition dollars. Each faculty or college website includes the academic departments and students' services available. Since 2019, a survey is administered to new students for identifying their goals, expectations and needs (https://academicos.uprrp.edu/diia/nuevos-informes-sobre-investigaciones-recientes-febrero-2024). The results are used to provide orientation and support.

Financial literacy is approached as a critical component of informed decision-making and the effective management of student debt. The Financial Aid Office, which is housed within the Office of the Dean of Students, supports students who need guidance related to paying for their education and meeting their financial needs. It offers a comprehensive range of programs, including scholarships, work-study opportunities, and support for applying for the Pell Grant and federal student loans, catering to undergraduate and graduate students alike. The Financial Aid Office seeks to help students maximize their financial resources and minimize their reliance on loans. Each undergraduate student is assigned a dedicated financial aid officer at the time of admission. This personalized approach ensures that every student receives tailored guidance for financial aid applications, the verification of FAFSA forms, and the certification of eligibility for various programs. In addition, a user-friendly Net Price Calculator allows students to estimate their net costs based on their specific circumstances.

Ethical and transparent practices are adhered to in financial aid administration. The University complies with the requirements of the US Department of Education and the Code of Federal

Regulations 34 CFR 600.9 by establishing a clear and accessible procedure for students to file complaints if they believe any violation of policy has occurred. This helps to ensure that student rights are protected throughout the financial aid process.

2.8: Compliance With Reporting Policies, Regulations, and Requirements

UPR-RP demonstrates a steadfast commitment to transparency and accountability by adhering to applicable federal (Title IX, Clearly Act, and IPEDS), state (financial auditing by Comptroller Office), and Middle States Commission on Higher Education reporting policies, regulations, and requirements. Compliance in these areas ensures that information about performance, administrative processes, and operations is disseminated effectively to uphold stakeholder trust and inform decision-making processes.

In addition, data on institution-wide assessments, such as student graduation and retention rates, licensing pass rates (in areas such as law and education), as well as employee profiles are readily accessible through the Division of Research and Assessment. Adherence to rigorous regional accreditation standards assures stakeholders that this University consistently maintains the highest quality of education and that it is dedicated to continuous improvement. The UPR- RP has been accredited by the MSCHE since 1946 and the last reaffirmation was in 2019

Also, the institution responsibly houses 49 accredited programs in the faculty or colleges of Business Administration (15), Architecture (1), Natural Sciences (2), Social Sciences (7), Law (1), Education (17), Communication and Information Sciences (5) and Planning (1).

Recognizing the importance of timely communication, our campus ensures that any substantive changes affecting its mission, programs, or operations are disclosed promptly and accurately. The procedure for substantive changes follows the General Guide for the Preparation and Processing of Proposals for Academic Change at UPR, 2020-21.

Compliance reports are available online through relevant associate office webpages, ensuring convenient access for all stakeholders. Key reports and updates are disseminated through institutional email, directly reaching faculty, non-teaching staff, and students. For in-depth discussions and decision-making, the Chancellor regularly reports on the University's academic and administrative situation to the Academic Senate, as well as to the faculty in annual meetings, fostering shared governance, open communication, and engagement.

By consistently prioritizing transparency and accountability through comprehensive reporting practices, UPR-RP builds trust and confidence among its constituents and externally. This commitment to open communication and ethical conduct strengthens the campus' position as a leading institution of higher education that is dedicated to continuous improvement while meeting the needs of its students and society at large.

2.9: Periodic Assessment of Ethics and Integrity

UPR-RP complies with all the reports required by federal and state agencies, such as the Comptroller Office and the Federal Department of Education. It has also submitted periodic review reports, supplementary reports, and monitoring reports requested by the MSCHE.

In the last year, an Academic Integrity Policy was approved, the first in the UPR System (S-II 4). An Integrity Council was appointed for the implementation and assessment of this Policy. Our campus has also monitored the implementation of other ethics and integrity policies, procedures, and practices over the years.

Findings

- The campus demonstrates a conscientious stance in developing and implementing policies and procedures to ensure inclusion, equity, and respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration from diverse backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives.
- Institutional policies address the grievance procedures and accessibility by students, faculty, and staff for granting fair and impartial practices in discipline, evaluation, promotion, and separation.

Next Steps

- Campus administration will program more professional training in ethics, integrity, diversity, equity and inclusion in order to continue to comply with local and federal laws, as well as enhancement of the university community.
- DTAA will monitor existing technological tools and/or create additional tools for providing easy access to information regarding polices, norms, protocols, and procedures for students, personnel, and the university community.
- Human Resources, Title IX, OSEI, and other campus offices, including Deanships and Programs will establish a practical procedures for recording/archiving the process of complaints, protecting people's confidentiality, to take proactive measures.
- DTAA will monitor and update information on the grievance and complaint process in diverse formats to ensure accessibility on college and school webpages.

STANDARD III: DESIGN & DELIVERY OF THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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

3.1: Coherent and Appropriate Learning Experiences & Degree Programs

As a public research-oriented comprehensive doctoral institution, our offerings include 61 undergraduate programs, 47 master's degrees, 4 postgraduate certificates, 17 doctoral programs, and varied professional development experiences through the Division of Continuing Education and Professional Studies (DECEP in Spanish) (EI 3.1: Certification of Academic Offerings UPR-RP PRCE Cert. 2018-210). To ensure the student learning experience is coherent and conducive to rich, pertinent, and transformative learning opportunities, these degrees are subject to ongoing review. The process of review aligns with requirements established in 2021 by the Puerto Rican Board of Post Secondary Institutions, the body that licenses UPR-RP and allows it to operate as a postsecondary institution of higher education and award degrees (EI 3.2: Renewal of License by Board of Post-Secondary Education Institutions). Its guidelines reinforce institutional compliance with Commonwealth and federal law by establishing requirements for academic offerings with which all of our programs comply. They include minimum components for the course syllabus and a policy ensuring that students who make academic progress and follow the established curriculum sequence can complete their degree within the amount of time the institution indicates that they can (EI 3.3: UPR-RP Sample Syllabi) .

UPR Governing Board regulations also contribute to the rigor and coherence of degrees. Such is the case, for example, with the Guide for the Establishment of New Programs and the Guidelines for Proposing Changes in Existing Programs, (EI 3.4: GB 2018-19, Requirements for Proposing Academic Programs, GB Cert. 163 2022-23). These establish procedures provide guidance by establishing requirements that are similar to or aligned with the agencies that license and accredit individual academic programs and the institution. They also ensure that proposals for new programs and program changes seek to maximize opportunities for student learning as well as meet institutional needs (EI 3.5: Curricular Design Guidelines).

Academic Offerings

As described in the UPR-RP catalogues, our campus offers a substantial number of academic programs at multiple levels: 108 programs with specializations, including baccalaureate degrees (BA, BS, BBA), master's degrees (MS, MA, MEd, MBA, LLM), doctoral degrees (PhD, EdD), a Juris Doctor degree and certificates, both post-master and post-baccalaureate. These are distributed among our seven colleges and three schools.

Our campus is the first in the UPR System to offer degrees that are completely online. While these are a relatively new element of our academic offerings, as of AY 2023-24, there are five online programs, each at the master's level. These are: Master's of Business Administration, Master's of Information Sciences, Master's of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics, LLM in Orality and the Penal System, and Master's in Project Management. Notably, 90% of the program cohorts have met expected initial enrollment targets and efforts are in place to sustain if not increase this rate. Looking ahead, online offerings will expand. Several programs are in the licensing process, with launches slated for August 2025. These include the post-baccalaureate certificate in Applied Linguistics in Spanish, a professional certificate in Interpretation, an MA in Translation, and an MEd in Sports.

While the campus is proud of these online initiatives, they by no means replace or serve as a substitute for the traditional on-site, seated classes. Instead, these modalities are positioned to complement one another and allow the campus to serve some students in specific areas. Moreover, as of August 2024, the overwhelming majority of our sections were face-to-face, with just under 7% virtual (EI 3.6: Course Modality Distribution AY 2023-24, 1 sem.).

Regulatory Compliance

Institutional policies direct the creation of academic programs, establishing criteria for designing coherent learning experiences which are of appropriate lengths according to their objectives. The basic structure of our undergraduate degrees gives it coherence, fosters rigor, and establishes necessary sequencing. It is informed by principles established in the bachelor's degree revision, a major initiative completed in 2006 that, among other things, realigned all undergraduate offerings with curricular changes in higher education and provided students with more options in their area(s) of study. This revision established that guidelines that defined the bachelor's degree is "more than a sequence of courses, underscoring the importance of co-curricular experiences and activities, effective strategies for learning and teaching, and the use of resources to ensure that graduates can contribute to knowledge formation as well as Puerto Rico's economy, professional activities, and sociocultural development" (EI 3.7: Guiding Principles for Bachelor's Degree, AS Cert. 46 2005-06).

Program-Level Accreditation & Quality Assurance

Our campus pursues program-level accreditation to foster practices, policies, and decision-making that will lead its offerings to be characterized by excellence and high quality educational experiences. As of January 2022, 49 programs (34% of our total offerings) were accredited (EI 3.8: Status of Accredited Programs UPR-RP). In fact, virtually all programs and services that can be accredited are.

More generally, since 2018, 69 (41 undergraduate and 28 graduate) programs have been reviewed and updated. A central element of this work, curriculum review, shows a solid commitment to ensuring that academic offerings are coherent, rigorous, and current. The current cycle of program review culminates in 2026 (EI 3.9: 4th Cycle for Programs Completing Review AY 2022-26). While some of these processes are preparation for reaccreditation, others are associated with established cycles administered by the DAA and DEGI (EI 3.10: Examples of Self-Study Curriculum Changes).

<u>Program-Level Accreditation</u>

Accreditation agencies rigorously examine our programs to ensure they meet relevant standards and that learning opportunities are abreast with professional norms and recent developments. This helps to consistently foster learning experiences that are rich, rigorous, and relevant and at the same time contributes to an institutional culture in which curricula are current, in terms of both the knowledge they impart and the practical preparation that students receive through experiences such as internships, supervised practice, thesis and capstone projects. In terms of recent achievement in this area, in April 2024 our Graduate Program in Information Sciences was reaccredited by the American Library Association, for the longest period possible, seven years, and in June 2024 our Graduate School of Public Administration was reaccredited by the Network of Schools for Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration.

<u>Internal Self-Study (Graduate Level)</u>

Degrees that are not subject to accrediting agencies are reviewed every five years as mandated by our Policy on Periodic Academic Program Evaluation in the UPR, (3.11: GB Cert. 55 Regulations for Evaluation of Academic Programs 2023-24). This self-study process was put on pause in March 2022 so that it could be made more cost effective and slightly restructured; however, as of August 2024, the self-study cycle it was once again operative. It now involves review by program faculty as well as the use of metrics, information about research, graduate profiles, and other assessment tools.

Improvements implemented as a result of our internal self-study process make use of research output, graduation rates, student input, as well as assessment findings. Recent examples of specific improvements include updates to exit profiles; descriptions of competencies, learning objectives, course and content; the establishment of surveys, and changes to curriculum sequencing, among others. One of dozens of graduate programs making improvements as a result of review, Educational Leadership decided to transition to a trimester calendar, a change recommended by external reviewers that was supported within the program.

<u>Substantial Changes</u>

Our approach to program review is careful and thorough. Completing the process involves making changes to curriculum sequences and degree requirements, which are known as substantial changes. These occur not only within scheduled cycles but also when they are deemed necessary by programs.

In terms of future improvement, it should be noted that processing petitions for requests for change can be slow. Efforts should be made to ensure that curricular changes identified through program review can be instituted in a more timely fashion so that the process takes less than six months, which is already stated in existing policy. In order to achieve this, limits for the amount of time each body has to review a given proposal might be established. At present, as many as four committees (e.g., department curriculum committee, the Graduate Board curriculum committee, the college's Graduate Board, the college) examine proposals and request modifications to proposals

before they leave a college or school to be considered by the additional bodies that are responsible for review at higher levels.

Disclosure of Achievements & Information About Student Performance

The institution informs the university community and the public at large of program achievements and how well it is achieving its goals by sharing information in reports and on campus websites. Data available to the public in a user-friendly format has become more extensive in recent years and includes offerings, retention and graduation rates, the results of licensing exams, as well as annual reports on strategic planning and institutional effectiveness, among other information about student performance (EI 3.12: Undergrad Cohort Retention 2013-2022, 3.13, Undergrad Graduation Rates 2012-2017, and 3.14 Graduate Level Retention Rates 2013-22). This data shows that retention was stable at a rate of about 84% for 2027, 2018, and 2019 and then decreased about 5% in the context of the pandemic. Information about the student population indicates that these rates have been impacted by movement within the UPR System and external factors such as migration). While graduation rates are stable, efforts to bolster them are ongoing and include: automatic academic progress reports that provide information about outstanding course requirements, the prioritization of registration and access to needed courses for students who are approaching graduation, and initiatives that aim to improve student support services.

Table 3.1: UPR-RP Graduate Licensing & Certification

Professional Certification or License	College or School	Outcome
Architecture (ARE)	School of Architecture	2023: 41%
MA in Counseling & Rehabilitation (PR exam)	College of Social Sciences	2021: 84%
Planning (professional exam)	School of Planning	2021: 75%
Psychologist Licensing (PR exam)	College of Social Sciences	2013-23: 89% avg.
Puerto Rico Teacher's Licensing Exams	College of Education	2023-24: 95%
Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RND)	College of Natural Sciences	Forthcoming
Federal Bar Examination	School of Law	2020: 75%, 2021: 79%, 2022: 78%

<u>Licensing and Student Learning</u>

Institutional commitment to rigor, coherence, and effective learning experiences have helped to ensure high pass rates on student exams for licensing and professional certification. UPR-RP graduates frequently have better results than students of any other institution of higher education in Puerto Rico. For example, the American Bar Association (ABA), the accrediting agency for law schools in the US and Puerto Rico, requires that at least 75% of graduates pass the bar admission exam two years after graduation. The UPR-RP is the only law school that meets this requirement. As shown in Table 3.1, passage rates are high in multiple programs, signaling that our graduates are well-prepared for careers

in their chosen areas of study. Efforts are underway to bolster student preparedness for those taking the licensing exam in Architecture.

3.2: Faculty Profile

The faculty profile for AY 2023-24 shows 1,033 faculty, 52% female and 48% male. The campus has 48% professors in tenure-track or tenured positions, the others in part- and full time adjunct positions (EI 3.15: UPR-RP Employee Statistics). Faculty are sufficient in number and highly qualified, as demonstrated by the 71% with a doctoral degree and 25% of the remainder with at least a master's degree. It should be noted that most of the faculty members with a master's teach at the undergraduate level. The percentage of faculty with a doctorate has risen over the last two decades as the result of hiring practices that increased the number of professors with doctorates. Today student learning experiences are designed, delivered, and assessed by well-prepared professors.

<u>Recruitment and Appointment</u>

Regarding faculty recruitment, the UPR System's Fiscal Plan for tenure-track faculty recruitment allows for new hires. It states that 3% of the total number of tenure-track and tenured faculty can be hired annually. These recruitments are focused on but not limited to filling vacancies in priority areas such as accredited academic programs and student support services, including libraries and professional counseling. However, it is crucial to recognize that tenure-track hires have taken place and will continue to take place even when their programs are not subject to program-level accreditation. Recent examples include hires completed to meet pressing needs in Social Sciences (CGS); History, English, and Philosophy (CH); and Anthropology and Sociology (CSS), among others. As detailed below, a total of 98 faculty members have been hired since the aforementioned formula was established in AY 2021-22.

All new faculty go through a rigorous process where committees at the department and college or school level evaluate applicants' teaching experience and credentials. Ultimately, the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs approves both calls for applications and the hiring of qualified individuals, relying on a set of checks and balances to ensure that qualified faculty are appointed. This is the case for tenure-track, tenured, and adjunct faculty, all of whom are hired to teach in their areas of specialization. Policies related to professional performance as well as growth and innovation are presented in the *Faculty Handbook*, which is updated every five years. Policies and practices in the handbook, the most recent version of which was completed in 2024, show that faculty are supported in ways that support their contributions to institutional effectiveness as well as the continuity and coherence of the institution's educational programs as well as the transfer of knowledge about administration and academics (EI 3.16: *Faculty Handbook* Section 10).

Moreover, the institution provides support for professional development. For example, new professors attend a minimum of six hours in this area, and those seeking tenure or promotion are

required to participate in orientations, workshops, or training in preparation for review. Many of these are offered and certified by the Center for Academic Excellence.

<u>Professional Development, Support, & Training</u>

Various units provide specific opportunities for professional development. The Center for Academic Excellence (CEA), operating under the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs, is a key academic and professional development unit. It sponsors activities for professors, faculty in administrative roles, and non-teaching staff. These include workshops that help faculty stay informed about the latest advances in pedagogy, technology, and research. It also offers webinars and self-led online modules. Participation is substantial in recent years due to a larger number of offerings as well as innovative programing. In AY 2023-24, several workshops related to artificial intelligence which had significant appeal.

An initiative not in place for our last MSCHE self-study, the CEA now offers certificates for virtual learning environments, training faculty in learning management systems, effective online teaching strategies, course design, student engagement techniques, and online assessment methods. Faculty who teach online must earn these certificates. In addition, our Division for Continuing Education (DECEP) offered an online educator certificate during AYs 2020-22. According to an analysis done for this self-study, by the second semester of AY 2022-23, 88% of faculty had earned at least one online teaching certification (EI 3.17: CEA Training Webinars AY 2022-23, 3.18: CEA Training Statistics AY 2022-23).

Additional opportunities include workshops and orientations on grant writing, training related to the assessment of student learning, and trainings for using new technology. These are available through the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research and long-term research initiatives such as UPR Caribe Digital, the Caribbean Conferences based in the Institute of Caribbean Studies, the UNESCO Endowed Chair in Peace Education, and agreements with universities outside Puerto Rico (e.g., U of Florida, U of Michigan at Ann Arbor, NYU, U Complutense in Madrid, among others). These help faculty in remain abreast of activity in their areas of research and professional activity, and assist with networking.

Having professors who are leaders within their fields and up to date on the latest in research and practice in their given field is extremely important for any institution offering graduate degrees at UPR-RP takes the credentials and professional development of graduate-teaching faculty seriously. The Dean of Academic Affairs is required to individually assess the academic background, research and overall preparedness of professors identified to teach graduate courses. While this can lead to delays in hiring paperwork, it is a necessary step to ensure that personnel committees and dean's offices are indeed hiring professors to teach graduate courses that meet the high expectations of the UPR-RP. Furthermore, with the help of the former Dean of Graduate Studies and Academic Research, Certification 95 was passed that provides clear guidelines on the profile of professors of graduate

courses. In addition to requiring that all graduate professors hold a doctoral degree or equivalent terminal degree, Certification 95 requires professors of graduate courses to have an active research agenda demonstrated by academic activity in the past five years. While the active research agenda portion of the policy has been challenging to implement due to budget cuts and the reliance on adjunct professors who often teach in numerous institutions of higher education, with little time and incentive to conduct research, the expectation is that professors have at one point in their career been active and successful researchers.

Course Evaluation & Review Processes

Faculty performance in teaching effectiveness are evaluated regularly through a process that includes peer-to-peer observations and course evaluation. A new online instrument to measure perceptions of faculty performance was recently approved by the Academic Senate. The introduction of the instrument evidences the institution's commitment to improving evaluation methods and to making sure that students can systematically reflect on their experiences and share their opinions.

The outcomes of student course evaluations, which are used in conjunction with peer evaluations, play a significant role in faculty review for promotion and tenure and also figure into decision-making related to the re-hiring of adjuncts. Faculty use this feedback to become more aware of student perceptions and to improve teaching. Course evaluation ensures that feedback is relevant and useful for advancing improvement, regardless of modality. Policies and practices in these areas foster changes that, in turn, contribute to the rigor and coherence of programs and thereby enhance the student experience. Work to make general patterns across course evaluations available to the public in a dashboard is currently underway in the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs.

Faculty Scholarship and Research

Our campus is distinguished by professors with the strongest publication record in Puerto Rico, one comparable to state-side R2 universities. Numerous professors are leaders in their fields and active in professional organizations, having made contributions that contribute to the prestige of our campus. This profile reflects the institution's mandate to position research as well as cultural and artistic production as resources for Puerto Rican society. Part of its role as a public institution, activity in these areas aims to cultivate the sensibilities and knowledge that students need for professional careers as well as academic endeavors and dialogues that situate the institution's contributions to academia and research in the international realm.

UPR-RP's high-intensity research activity is demonstrated by the number of competitive grants received, the dissemination of research findings in conferences and professional meetings, the completion of dissertation research by doctoral students, and the number of publications completed each year by faculty. In the AY 2020-2023, faculty published an average of 54 books, 93 book chapters, 201 peer-reviewed academic articles, and 95 articles in non-peer reviewed journals. As shown in the statistics that document productivity in the areas of research and creative work, this output equates to

at least one publication per year by 43% of the teaching faculty (IE 3.19: Overall Statistics and Works Published by Professors). Research and creative output are especially solid among faculty who teach at the graduate level given that publish regularly and contribute actively to their fields.

In addition, the campus is home to several reputable peer-reviewed academic journals. These include *Caribbean Studies, Fórum Empresarial, [IN]Genios,* and *Sargasso*, which are based in the Colleges of Social Sciences, Business Administration, Natural Sciences, and Humanities, respectively. These are publications with a continuous publication record that are engaged in the broader development of academic activity and recognized for their contributions to the dissemination of research and the cultivation of academic dialogue.

<u>Retirements</u>

Retirement is one of the factors that has impacted strategic planning and faculty recruitment. In recent years, our campus now has experienced a larger number of tenured faculty retiring each year than annual hires. Data about forthcoming retirements are gathered to assist with planning in the area of faculty hires, with the most recent report showing that 84 are anticipated to retire by May 2027 (EI 3.20: Anticipated Tenured Faculty Retirements 2024-2027). In making requests for tenure-track lines, academic programs consider enrollment trends as well as retirements. Budget cuts and the number of students are also factored in. As shown in Table 3.2, the percentage of tenure-track faculty retirements varies considerably across campus. These data show that the largest number of hires has taken place in Natural Sciences, which is also the college with the most students. In Architecture and Law, faculty have been hired to guarantee student-to-faculty ratios and other requirements associated with program accreditation.

Table 3.2: UPR-RP Tenured Retirements Aug. 2020 - Dec. 2023

College / School / Unit	Number of Retirements	TT Hires AY 2021-22 to AY 2023-224
Office of the Dean of Students (DCODE)	2	4
Architecture	3	7
Law	3	7
Business Administration	16	9
Natural Sciences	13	21
Social Sciences	29	14
Communication & Information	6	6
Education	17	8
General Education	28	7
Humanities	17	10
Library System	9	6
TOTAL for campus	143	103

*UPR-RP Office of Dean of Academic Affairs (September 2, 2024).

3.3: Descriptions of Academic Programs & Student Outreach

UPR-RP academic programs are clearly and accurately described in official publications to ensure that students have reliable and easily accessed sources to track their academic progress. One important source of this information, which presents requirements and expected time to degree completion, are our undergraduate and graduate catalogues. These include Spanish-language undergraduate and graduate volumes and an English-language volume that presents all offerings. Direct links to these catalogues are easily accessible to potential applicants and students alike from our main website (uprrp.edu) under the tabs "Registrador" and "Catálogos" (EI 3.21 Undergraduate Catalogue 2023-24 Part I, 3.22 Undergraduate Catalogue 2023-24 Part II, & 3.23 Graduate Catalogue).

Individual academic programs are described in greater detail in brochures, manuals, and guides that present requirements, course descriptions, time to degree specifics, co-curricular activities, career prospects, and related information. Electronic resources help students familiarize themselves with their degrees and plan their progress towards graduation. These are shared on department and program websites and discussed in student orientations and meetings with advisors, among other fora. Mi IUPI, our student services portal, is an important electronic tool for students. Used in conjunction with Next, it allows students to verify course registration, track progress towards graduation, and apply for graduation, among other functions).

In addition to the catalogs and official websites, all undergraduates (with the exception of those in the College of Humanities, which has its own system) are now emailed academic progress reports each semester. This practice, implemented in the first semester of AY 2023-24, helps students to plan and take next steps in terms of course selection, decisions about pursuing minors, and advancement towards degree completion. Students are reminded of these and other support tools in meetings faculty advisors and with non-teaching staff who offer student support services. They are also publicized through UPR-RP's official Facebook, X, and Instagram accounts.

Assessment of Student Learning

Our assessment process contributes to student success in areas such as information literacy and critical thinking skills. The assessment of student learning is faculty-led, data driven, and course embedded. As detailed in Chapter 5, it is an ongoing and systemized effort aimed at improving both teaching and student learning by facilitating faculty access to meaningful information that can be translated to transformative actions. Targeting results that are useful and used, assessment is guided by program-level plans that complement the Institutional Student Learning Assessment Plan.

Aware of the growing impact of artificial intelligence on teaching, writing, research, and learning, the Office of the Chancellor activated a task force to design a policy for the use of artificial intelligence. A team is currently developing guidelines for the ethical implementation of these technologies and the establishment of safeguards which will help to ensure that they do not negatively impact student learning.

3.4: Academic Support Services

Faculty responsibilities include consultation with students in regular office hours. Students can also seek support from department directors, graduate coordinators, and administrators in the Offices of the Dean of Student services in their college or school. Access to these individuals is complemented by the work of several specialized resources:

Advising and Mentorship

Institutional initiatives such as the Program for Student Support Services (PSAE in Spanish) use formalized individual and group counseling with cultural and academic activities to help undergraduate students develop their academic and professional goals. PSAE participants are first generation students, students from families with low income, and/or students with diagnosed disabilities. The program, which is noted for its success in this area, works to ensure that first-year students have a solid foundation in English, Spanish, and mathematical reasoning and offers them a holistic support system.

Writing Support and Tutoring Initiatives

Tutoring and support programs in areas such as math, academic writing, and other core domains offer a personalized learning environment tailored to student needs. For example, the Center for the Development of Linguistic Competencies (CDCL), which is based in the College of General Studies, serves the entire campus, providing on-site tutoring and online workshops related to improving communicative effectiveness in both Spanish and English. The CDCL has seen a major increase in its use over the past three years. For example, annual reports show that text revision appointments increased from 290 in AY 2021-22 to 591 in AY 2022-23 (EI 3.24: Extract from CDCL Annual Report 2023-24).

Active in mathematics and natural sciences, a second resource, the Tutoring Center (Centro de Tutorías), which is based in the College of Natural Sciences, is available for students who need guidance or assistance related to a specific set of courses in areas such as chemistry, mathematics, and biology.

A third initiative that supports student learning is the new Academic Accompaniment Program, which is in the College of Communication and Information. Staffed by undergraduate and graduate students, it provides tutoring for students with identified needs in critical thinking, effective communication, and other domains. The program was created as a transformative action following the assessment cycle for AY 2018-19. Additional tutoring programs existed in General Studies and in the Department of Foreign Languages in the College of Humanities.

Library & Research Resources

Our Library System provides students opportunities to enhance information literacy and academic writing and research (EI 3.25: Library System and Services). This is done through on-site workshops and guided tutorials provided by experienced personnel and by providing access to materials and

electronic databases. These resources complement specialized collections in Natural Sciences, Law, and Architecture and a variety of initiatives as well as workshops and co-curricular offerings provided by the research centers and units on campus. In the College of Natural Sciences, for example, the Information and Technology Center, situated in its library, focuses on services and research resources. Similar units operate in the Schools of Law and Architecture and in the College of General Studies. In addition, small collections, seminar rooms, and archival collections in various colleges and schools make learning resources available, serve as important sites for research, especially for graduate students (EI 3.26: UPR-RP Research Units by College).

3.5: General Education

Our general education (GE) offerings are designed to expand intellectual experiences, promote essential skills, and include the study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives. Combining elements of a free standing approach with one integrated into the disciplines, this curriculum is guided by specific pedagogical principles, ongoing assessment, and numerous support mechanisms.

Requirements

General Education provides the foundation for students' academic growth and personal and professional development. Learning in this area focuses on the acquisition of competencies that are essential to their academic, intellectual, and professional lives. As Table 3.3 signals, all undergraduates are required to take a minimum of 42 credits in general education from eight areas, 12 credits more than the MSCHE minimum. These areas of academic competence are also detailed in our profile detailing (EI: 3.27 Undergraduate Exit Profile) the competencies that students of all majors should acquire by graduation.

General Education Requirements	
Spanish - 6 credits	Natural Sciences - 6 credits
English - 6 credits	Social Sciences - 6 credits
Literature (in Spanish, English, another language, or Comparative Lit.) - 6 credits	Humanities - 6 credits
Logical-mathematical thinking or quantitative analysis - 3 credits	Arts - 3 credits

GE coursework requirements can be grouped into two categories: Group A and Group B. Of the 42 minimum credits, the College of General Studies (CGS) offers courses in Spanish, English, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities. Group A requirements consist of "core" or "threshold" courses given within CGS. These nurture core competencies and provide a foundation for specialization associated with the major(s). In terms of pedagogy, Group A courses are designed to make students better learners and to engage them in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to problem-solving and knowledge formation. Group B courses are offered by colleges and schools other than the CGS. This two-tiered structure allows students to complete a common core and to select additional courses based on their individual needs, goals, and interests.

Students choose from robust selections of courses in meeting Group B requirements. For example, there are over 90 courses to choose from to fulfill the literature requirement, 75% (82/110) of which are taught in the College of Humanities. Approximately a dozen courses fulfill the requirement in the area of mathematical reasoning and/or quantitative analysis. These are distributed across the Colleges of Business Administration, General Studies, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences. In the case of the arts requirement, students choose from over 30 courses distributed across the CGS, the School of Architecture, and the College of Humanities.

The General Education Skills Assessment Project, a permanent project based in the CGS, examines student learning outcomes. Its on-going assessment of student learning has assisted in creating a more balanced distribution of academic competencies, resulting in revamped syllabi, updated rubrics, and strategies for bolstering technological competence and information literacy, among others. This office develops a three-year plan for all departments in the CGS and oversees its implementation; in addition, it offers assessment coordinators and faculty members workshops and trainings on key elements of the assessment of student learning (EI 3.28: Examples of GESAP Rubrics) and works to ensure that insights and findings included in reports are implemented by faculty (EI 3.29: CGS Annual ASL Report AY 2022-23).

Curriculum & Essential Competencies

The General Education curriculum, sketched above in terms of it coursework requirements, fosters students' acquisition of essential competencies in five domains:

i.   Oral and Written Communication: Courses in both English and Spanish are required.
ii. Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning: Study in mathematics and Natural Sciences nurtures competence in these areas.
iii. Critical Analysis and Reasoning: Critical thinking, which involves analysis and problem-solving is discussed as an interdisciplinary endeavor and it extends across various disciplines.
iv. Technological Competency: Learning in this area extends across various disciplines and includes the use of electronic and digital tools, including computer programs and online resources, for the creation, management, and application of knowledge.
v.   Information Literacy: This area includes accessing and using academic databases, familiarity with research protocols and how to integrate prior research findings. At its core, are learning experiences which ensure that students can identify, evaluate, apply, and acknowledge sources of information.

Competence in these domains is monitored and assessed on an ongoing basis. According to a recent report by the Student Learning Assessment Project from within the College of General Studies, most undergraduates meet expectations regarding their oral and written communicative skills in English, though there is room for improvement in Spanish competencies, particularly in relation to grammar and composition in ESPA 3003 Competencies in Writing and Information. Critical analysis and reasoning is an area of strength. Students tend to meet expectations regarding scientific and quantitative reasoning, findings that are corroborated by the data from OLAS with the exception of one semester in AY 2019-20, which was in the context of the pandemic.

Information literacy is a domain of focus, with about 70% of students achieving the goal for this learning outcome. The average achievement score from 2014 to 2021 was approximately 81%, lower than other competencies. Assessment shows that for three semesters achievement was below 70%, a signal that this domain needs more attention and that teaching should consistently include hands-on experiences to bolster learning in this area. At the same time, information literacy given has expanded assessed as an area that includes not only rules for citation but also establishing the relevance and reliability of information and academic sources.

Several programs provide opportunities to enhance technological competencies in students, faculty, and the university community. From equipment (e.g., computers, laptops, tablets, video cameras, audio recorders) to workshops and trainings, diverse resources are available to complement teaching and support students' academic progress. The [Center for Educational Resources and Technology](#), which is ascribed to the CGS, supports academic programs through content development, technical support for the classroom, and online resource design. Outcomes tend to be positive all around. For example, results from an analysis of data related to technological competencies in ESPA 3101, a core Spanish course, showed that 90% of students received the highest score on technology for research and evaluation of information.

3.6: Research, Scholarship, & Co-Curricular Support for the Formation of Knowledge

Research Support

Students take part in professor-led research projects and collaborate in ongoing research. These experiences allow them to gain practical experience, develop research competencies, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge. The [Undergraduate Research and Learning Resource Center](#) (CriiAS) based in the College of Natural Sciences promotes students research and creative projects under the supervision of faculty, specifically STEM projects via Title V funds described in Chapter IV. This provides students with integrated research opportunities for publication and advanced training. An example of how external funds are used to develop projects that have a long-term impact on institutional structures, the project builds on the accomplishments of a prior program known as iINAS that began in 2010 and was funded by the U.S. Department of Education. CRiiAS helps students identify research-related [summer internships](#) and produces the peer-reviewed academic publication *[Ingenios](#),* which showcases undergraduate [research](#)and [creative](#) work.

With recently awarded NSF-EPSCOR E-RISE funds, CRIIAS will enhance engagement and broaden the reach of STEM research, through an outreach plan centered on podcasts. Leveraging the dynamic storytelling capabilities of this medium, the plan envisions collaborating with STEM researchers from CRIIAS and the UPR scientific community, inviting them to share their groundbreaking discoveries, insights, and experiences. Tailored episodes will delve into the intricacies of various scientific fields, breaking down complex concepts into interesting narratives accessible to a diverse audience. These podcasts will not only spotlight the cutting-edge research but also showcase the human side of science, featuring personal anecdotes and the journey behind significant

breakthroughs. Additionally, partnerships with the UPR STEM community, the College of communication and information sciences and popular podcast platforms will amplify the program's visibility, fostering a vibrant community of science enthusiasts eager to explore the wonders of STEM.

The Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research coordinates an important program called [Academic Experiences Training Program](#) (PEAF, in Spanish). Participating students work 9 to 18 hours weekly, serving as research or teaching assistants to professors. Participants receive a tuition waiver and a stipend. From AYs 2020-21 to 2022-23, an average of 419 graduate students participated in the program annually. The stipends for PEAF participants have not increased in several years nor has additional funding for this program been allocated; moreover, as of August 2024 these positions became more limited in number. This has lead some students who would like to study full-time or work on campus to seek employment elsewhere. Nevertheless, the program provides crucial economic support for graduate students by providing employment on campus, usually in areas related to their area of study, and thereby enriches their academic formation.

Another area of needed improvement concerns the processing of applications and the calendar for offering positions to students. Some students receive confirmation that they have a position only days or weeks before the semester begins, if not later. While the budget cycle and funding cuts can make it difficult to process these earlier, at least some of these contracts should be either completed or confirmed earlier. Doing so would make graduate study at UPR-RP more attractive and practical, perhaps especially for newly accepted applicants. It would also make our programs more feasible for international applicant seeking a student visa. Some who are accepted have been unable to enroll due to challenges associated with confirming their position and whether they will receive institutional support. Improving the PEAF program would strengthen the UPR-RP's response to its research mandate and its status as an R2 institution.

Conferences, Hands-on Experience, & Other Co-Curricular Activities

A plethora of additional conference series and co-curricular innovations enrich the education of our students. In addition, the annual [Graduate Student Conference of Research and Creative Projects](#), sponsored by DEGI, allows graduate students to gain hands-on experience and to share research and respond to questions about it. Other initiatives are based in specific colleges or schools. For example, the English Department of the College of General Studies is home to a literary contest as well as a student conference. Architecture students give public presentations of laboratory design projects at the end of each semester. The English Department in the College of Humanities runs two conferences, the bi-annual [Caribbean Without Borders Graduate Student Conference](#) and the Eastern Caribbean Islands Conference, which takes place in the Eastern Caribbean. School of Law students gain hands-on experience by working with recently developed initiatives such as the Integral Center of Victim Support and the DNA Sentencing Project; the latter allows them to visit jails, work with evidence, and interview witnesses. These are a few of dozens of examples of co-curricular initiatives.

Such initiatives contribute to the culmination of degrees and like degree-final projects prepare our students for lifetime learning. Graduate programs culminate in either a thesis, capstone project, or research paper. By the time students reach this stage of their degree they have had access to various opportunities to develop research skills and conduct their own research or participate in research projects linked to those of their professors or mentors.

Study Abroad, Internships, & Career Services

<u>Internationalization</u>

Through collaborative agreements with other institutions, the <u>Office of the Assistant Dean of International Relations</u> (DARI) promotes undergraduate students with diverse internship and scholarship opportunities abroad. Furthermore, the office oversees campus participation in the National Student Exchange (NSE) and the International Student Exchange Programs (ISEP) which provide students opportunities to study abroad, thereby giving students the opportunity to learn from educators in contexts with different social and academic traditions. Through these initiatives, our students move for a semester or an academic year to any of the universities affiliated with one of our agreements through Bilateral Agreements, ISEP, NSE, or MICEFA. There are also summer study programs as well as course-based short terms experiences that students are encouraged to take advantage of in the trajectory of their studies.

In addition, DARI works with international students who come to UPR-RP on student exchange, helping these students in their transition to Puerto Rico and with their integration into campus life. Finally, DARI facilitates processes related to bringing international faculty to the campus, thereby giving students the opportunity to learn from internationally renowned researchers and professors.

<u>Internships</u>

Through the *Enlace* Program students have the opportunity to participate in practical experiences that contribute to the learning process about business management in local and global contexts. The program allows students to explore various internship, employment, scholarship or competition opportunities.

<u>Career Services</u>

The Employment Office, attached to the Auxiliary Dean of Programs and Initiatives of the Dean of Students, supports students in searching for jobs, professional improvement and training, and in practical exercises such as preparing of interviews and correcting resumes. In this way, it makes it possible for students to compete successfully. It also serves as a link with professional leaders, locally and internationally, to increase the placement possibilities of graduates and recent graduates.

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3.8: Evaluation Instruments

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Over the last five years, assessment coordinators at the graduate level throughout our colleges and schools have worked diligently to align program specific rubrics associated with culminating coursework so that the learning outcomes of all graduating students can be documented and

compared. Nevertheless, ongoing work needs to be done to obtain 100% compliance from all graduates. Now that the data has been collected and analyzed through the process of program evaluations, assessing the effectiveness of efforts to improve teaching and learning and potentially revising them must be considered.

Feedback & Evaluation of Results

The institution adopts a dual approach to formative and summative evaluation. While the former provides instant feedback for immediate adjustments, the latter provides a more comprehensive view of student achievement. In addition, using the OLAS platform, some programs create focus groups to discuss assessment results, as well as surveys of alumni and the employers of alumni to document and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their particular programs. These initiatives are largely organized in conjunction with guidelines provided by a specific body program level accreditation. They are not standardized across campus, but some could serve as models for programs that do not have program-level accreditation. Regarding OLAS, various programs continue to situate the result of assessment in terms of specific courses. These should discuss results as they relate to broader contexts, in particular program-specific graduate profiles and data that generalizes about learning at the level of the college or school. In addition, the campus would benefit from an office or unit that was directly engaged with alumni and industry to assess how our programs have prepared them for the current work.

Oversight & Support

Our campus continues to provide students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence in all programs, certificates, and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences, program pace/schedule, level, and setting are consistent with higher education expectations. This is evidenced by rigor in our hiring practices and systematic program revisions along with continued success of our programs. Specific accreditations are evidence that UPR-RP is providing rigor and coherence across all programs. Furthermore, the multitude of curricular changes that have come because of recommendations from outside evaluators demonstrate that programs are keeping up with the times and continuing to reinvent themselves. Given that few graduate students work as graduate teaching assistants, we rely on our hiring practices of adjunct faculty to ensure that qualified individuals are teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses and that there are ample resources for professional development on campus as offered by the CEA.

Looking ahead, our academic programs will continue to foster in students the competencies that will serve them best in a changing and interconnected world, making them critical and ethical thinkers, social leaders, researchers and creators, as well as professionals and entrepreneurs. This requires that the institution continue to prioritize a holistic experience focused on student success, one enriched by the provision of transformative learning experiences and increasingly effective and robust student support services.

Findings

Academic programs have been regularly monitored to ensure that they are rigorous, appropriate in length, coherent, and effective and that their graduates acquire the competencies included in student exit profiles.

- Program-level accreditations effectively bolster program quality and excellence; they foster important dialogues, foment actions that address challenges proactively, and raise awareness about opportunities for improvement.
- Most faculty have taken advantage of training opportunities that have a direct impact on teaching; while some of these took place in the pandemic in conjunction with the pivot to online learning, they resulted in the acquisition of knowledge and skills that have proven useful not only for online classes but also for traditional face-to-face classes. This is evident, for example, in the innovative use of Moodle as a resource that complements face-to-face classes.

Next Steps

- The PEAF program should be recognized as a priority that directly assists in maintaining the institution's R2 status and this recognition should serve as a basis for its improvement.
- Data used to calculate statistics for faculty by type of appointment should be developed to distinguish between the number of enrolled graduate students who teach as adjuncts and adjunct professors who are not enrolled in a program at UPR-RP.
- Information about internships and different types of opportunities for research outside the classroom (e.g., volunteer, summer, paid) should be centralized and made available for both undergraduate and graduate students.

STANDARD IV SUPPORT OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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

4.1: Student Recruitment

Student recruitment processes follow the admissions policy and procedures established for the UPR System. Our ongoing commitment to recruiting a diverse population is demonstrated in various policies and outreach initiatives directed at public and private schools, homeschoolers, first-generation applicants, and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The Admissions Office and the Student Recruitment Program in the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs work together on the annual undergraduate student recruitment plan. It includes an annual Open House and several island-wide recruitment events. During these events, assistant deans, department directors, professors, financial aid personnel, and current students engage and provide information about the admissions process, academic programs, financial aid, and extracurricular opportunities. Data from the period 2018-2023 included in the Office of the Dean of Students' Development and Assessment Plan demonstrates a steady increase in school visits and other recruitment activities from 139 to 203 between AY 2019-20 and AY 2022-23 (EI: 4.1 XXX). Activities are assessed regularly to bolster institutional improvement and provide potential students with the information that they need concerning how to apply and enroll as well as how to select the program of study that is aligned with their area(s) of academic interest.

Regarding new initiatives, in November 2023, the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs inaugurated the "*Soy futuro gallito*"/"*Soy futura jerezana*" ("I'm a future rooster/I'm a future hen") initiative. Consisting of school visits, tours of units such as the Radio Station and the College of Education, it has increased the visibility of our campus among students and educators in elementary schools and encouraged youth to see higher education as part of their future. This effort presents higher education as positive experience that is part of personal growth at the same time that it strives to counteract the reduction in the size of our student populations, a trend impacted by higher migration rates, lower birthrates, and socioeconomic change.

Corollary strategies for recruitment that have proven successful include discipline-specific summer camps for middle and high school students. They include: Explore the Humanities, the School of Architecture's Summer Workshop, the Law School's Summer Legal Workshop, Cyber camp, Film Scriptwriting, Career Planning Camp, and Podcast Production, among others.

To promote opportunities in graduate studies, representatives of the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research (DEGI) and different graduate programs visit various other UPR

campuses, participate in annual graduate study fairs, as well as offer orientations on different graduate programs. DEGI participates in the UPR-RP Open House as well as educational fairs in private agencies and universities. Additionally, different graduate schools conduct their own Open Houses and prospective student orientations. In October 2024, the College of Social Sciences organized a Research and Graduate Studies Fair, sharing information with graduates of the college and other groups with interests in its areas of specialization. More generally, department directors and graduate coordinators work to improve online resources about their disciplines, related career opportunities, and make sure that potential students can have their questions answered before applying.

Applications

High school students can access these resources through their guidance counselors or independently. The admission application is active online at the UPR-RP website from October through the third week of January. Recruitment initiatives follow institutional policies and begin with student orientations on how to complete admissions applications. Relevant admissions policies are explained in several certifications, such as BT Certification 25 2003-04, which is known as *University of Puerto Rico Admission Policies and Standards for Students Coming from High Schools* (EI 4.2: UPR Admissions Policies and Standards).

Regarding online admissions resources available at the System level, information about the two routes (traditional and non-traditional, both of which are explained below) is easy to access so that the applicant can identify which one best suits them. Some resources are either directed at parents or designed to be read by the applicant with a parent or school counselor. While this is effective in some cases, additional resources (in particular videos) directed specifically at potential students should be added, including some that assume little to no knowledge about university life, its benefits, how to cover costs and related aspects of decision-making. A separate page could be developed specifically for school counselors and other educators who assist students in making informed decisions about their future education.

User-friendly videos and other relevant resources are available on an admissions websites for both undergraduates and graduates as well as international candidates. One of the resources that stands out on our campus page is an 8-minute video directed at beginning undergraduates that was published on our campus admissions webpage and the UPR-RP YouTube Channel in 2023 EI: 4.1). It would be useful to expand the availability of dynamic resources of this type to include user-friendly explanations of topics such as financial aid, housing, and registration.

Since 2017, admissions applications have been completed online using the platform Next. This has improved the processing of applications and resulted in faster institutional responses, thereby assisting those who have been accepted in making early decisions about enrollment and those UPR units that process applications.

Admissions Policies & Processes

From AY 2015-16 to AY 2022-23, the admission process has expanded in responses in accordance with various policy guidelines. Consistent with the institutional mission, these have sought to ensure greater access for applications from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and to diversify enrollment in other ways that are detailed below. Consistent with our institutional mission to ensure social equity, these actions have resulted in the enrollment of 2,849 in AY 2021-222, 2,492 in AY 2022-23, and 2,482 in AY 2023-24, (EI 4.3: Undergraduate Enrollment AY 2021-22 - AY 2023-24). While these numbers demonstrate a slight decline over three years, efforts to improve admissions policies have prevented the decline from being more substantial.

Also notable is that in recent years admission processes have also been adapted to responded to shifts in applicants' social context. For example, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, applicants with the necessary IGS could be admitted even thought they did not take the SAT II given that it was not available to many. Similarly, requirements for the electronic application were waived when some segments of the country were without power for several months in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and María.

UPR-RP continues to implement initiatives that promote a more diverse student body and a more inclusive campus. Applicants with academic profiles would find it difficult to be admitted now enroll and succeed. The Governing Board further revised admissions policy in GB Certification 33, 2022-23 to include both traditional and non-traditional admission criteria for undergraduate students (EI 4.4: Admission Criteria). Non-traditional admission accounted for X% of our most recent first-year cohort and traditional X %.

Traditional Admission

While the traditional admission process considers the IGS, the formula for calculating it has changed. The IGS is now based on 60% GPA and 40% entrance exam scores. Each year, academic programs establish a minimum IGS, considering their quota and demand for such programs. To facilitate placement, information on IGS requirements is published on the Central Administration and UPR-RP webpages so that applicants can determine their likelihood of admission to their program of interest. Applications can be submitted to three programs at any of the campuses within the UPR System.

Regarding the steps in the process, applicants rank their programs of choice. Applicants who meet the minimum admission index are admitted in descending order, beginning with highest IGS and first-choice programs, until available spaces are filled. The applicant receives notification of admission or non-acceptance by the end of January. Traditional admission includes non-resident (foreign) applicants. In these cases, evidence of having completed an education equivalent to secondary education in Puerto Rico with a 2.0 minimum GPA and an entrance exam are required.

Non-traditional Admission

For non-traditional admission, the entrance exam is not required. Applicants must have a minimum 2.0 GPA and qualify for one of the following categories: (i) students with special talents or abilities (e.g., artistic, athletic, and/or academic), (ii) participation in the "University Articulation" program; (iii) participation in "Dual Enrollment" program, (iv) study in specialized schools, (v) socioeconomically disadvantaged background, (vi) international students, (vii) adult population (students over 23), or (viii) students applying to the UPR Utuado campus. Campus-level policy provides more information on the procedure to be followed for the implementation of GB Certification 33 and includes descriptions for each of the aforementioned categories (EI: 4.5 AS Cert. 86, 2022-23). Useful explanatory materials available that are likely to resonate with the experiences of potential applicants are available the UPR System website (EI 4.6: Materials on GB Website).

Policies and procedures followed in non-traditional admission are the result of a pilot project that provided results that were assessed and used to improve policy before the non-traditional admissions policy was institutionalized. As these currently stand, applications are evaluated on the basis of evaluation criteria established by a committee in each college or school. These criteria include the consideration of: essays, portfolios, interviews, and letters of recommendation. Each college or school makes a recommendation for admission to its academic programs, and the Admissions Committee Coordinator, which has members who are appointed by the Chancellor, certifies these recommendations then oversees the evaluation and referral of applications.

The evaluation of applications through the non-traditional route is carried out after the traditional admission process, which takes place in January. Non-traditional route applicants are identified in February, and referrals are made to the colleges. Applicants are informed about the final decision via e-mail in April.

Applicants with Functional Diversity

Applicants with functional diversity may apply for admission when they believe that their academic record does not reflect their potential for academic success (EI 4.7: GB Certification 111, 2014-15). Their applications undergo a distinct evaluation process in which their academic skills are evaluated and areas of improvement that can help them succeed are identified. An institutional committee consisting of representatives of various units and groups (the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities, Admissions, the Dean of Students, the Dean of the College, and faculty members from the requested area of study) evaluates these applications. Subsequent to admission, students receive support from both OSEI, one of the units that ensures students with functional diversity have access to the services they need, and the academic programs in which they are placed.

Undergraduate Student Enrollment

On average, 2,086 incoming students enrolled in the first semester from 2017 to 2023. Students admitted in recent years have reported IGS differently than in the past and most students obtained an

IGS of 320 to 201 (EI 4.8: IGS Statistics). Natural Sciences and Business Administration are the colleges with the highest number of students. The Colleges of Business Administration and Communications and Information are the only two units to increase their enrollment in the same period. Also notable are units in which enrollment has declined. For example, the 48% reduction in the number of students enrolled in the College of Education. In addition, as shown in Table 4.1, fewer students are opting to major in Humanities programs.

ADD: Table 4. 1 and commentary on table.

As suggested above, student enrollment since 2021 has declined for several reasons. Among the most significant causes of this decline are natural disasters, the pandemic, emigration, school dropouts, and demographic changes caused by a lower birthrate. Hurricanes Irma and María caused many Puerto Rican families to emigrate to the U.S. and other countries, with an estimated 97,000 emigrants in 2017 alone, including school-aged children and youth. According to the Puerto Rico Institute of Statistics migration continued thereafter, with 2,919 young people aged 18 to 19 emigrating in 2022 alone. Another factor contributing to challenges in this area is that a larger percentage of public high school students have discontinued their studies. According to the Department of Education, in AY 2020-21, 7.13% of high school students dropped out prior to graduation. In AY 2022-23, this figure was 4.67%.

UPR-RP has been one of the campuses with the highest percentages of applicants and admissions; for example, in 2023, X percentage of applicants selected UPR-RP as their first or second choice, and 87.39% of applicants were admitted.

Looking ahead, closer attention should be paid to persistence to the third-year. Since 2017, the third-year persistence rate has been decreasing. For instance, for AY 2021-22, persistence to the third year decreased 4% to 69%. As established by SA Certification 15 2021-22 the campus can set goals for increasing retention and persistence. In addition, retention rates should be recorded alongside the number of students who have opted to change their major in order to document the percentage of students who remain enrolled without contributing to retention rates.

Graduate Admissions Policy, Procedures, & Enrollment
Graduate studies are regulated by institutional policies framed in UPR-RP AS Certification 95, 2019-20. These policies delegate the responsibility of processing all admissions applications to the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research (DEGI).

Students who want to be admitted to graduate programs must have a bachelor's degree, a 3.00 GPA, and be fluent in Spanish and English. Some academic programs establish additional admission requirements. Students complete an online application and submit all required documentation. The application is validated for compliance with all requirements and referred to the graduate committee of each program, which evaluates and determines the admission's decision. When the decision of acceptance or denial is issued, the NEXT platform notifies students by letter. There are two

admissions periods during the academic year, one each semester. Although the admissions process is carried out each semester, fewer graduate programs open admission in the second semester. Table 4.4 presents all graduate admissions for AY 2016-17 through 2023-24. As it shows, over 900 students are admitted each academic year. In addition, ADD: EXPLANATION OF TABLE AND ASSESSMENT OF ADMISSION PROCESS (EI: 4.9).

As of AY 2023-24, 2,648 graduate students enrolled: 56% female and 44% male. Most new students in our graduate student population ranged between 21 and 23 years of age and were from San Juan and neighboring municipalities such as Bayamón and Carolina. Fifty-one percent stated that they are employed full-time and are the primary income earners in their households. Regulations allow these students to study with full-time or part-time status and provide guidelines for each. This distinction is taken into consideration for the time limits that are in place for master's and doctoral programs (EI 4.10. XXX).

DEGI provides an online orientation course for new admitted graduate students. It provides information for all students who are completing online academic programs. Additionally, each year DEGI prepares webinars and workshop orientations about graduate policy for students and program coordinators.

ADD: Analysis of existing services and plans for improvement

Financial Aid Services
The Financial Aid Office strives to maintain effective communication with students before and upon admission and FAFSA submission. Prior to admission, prospective students are invited to visit institutional facilities to receive assistance with the FAFSA application and to learn about other financial aid opportunities. Regarding the standard steps in this process, after a student submits a FAFSA application and an Institutional Student Information Record (ISIR), an academic student record is created. Next, a student's eligibility is evaluated for all federal and institutional aid. Communication with students takes place through email, telephone calls, social media, and an official online interface accessed through portal.upr.edu, where users can promptly find news and related information student aid. Information is updated every 24 hours. This central portal accesses the web application NEXT, which students can use to upload all documents needed for the completion and verification of their FAFSA application. If an original paper document needs to be reviewed or a student needs to sign a document in the presence of their financial aid advisor, this is done during a short visit to the office. Original paper documents are scanned and returned, to maintain a completely digital file.

These processes improve on prior ones in which the processing of forms was not centralized and digital technology under utilized. In addition, assessment exercises signal that satisfaction has increased among students who receives support services in this area. In addition, support has shifted from a

focus on immediate financial assistance to a more holistic approach that aims to cultivate financial literacy among all students.

At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the institution enforces a policy of reviewing academic progress to determine eligibility for federal financial aid (EI 4.11: GB Certification 108, AY 2018-19 and GB Certification 55, AY 2016-17). Students can learn how to apply for academic progress review on the website of the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs.

Cost of attendance, including tuition, fees, and other expenses, can be found on the UPR System's webpage and the UPR-RP's financial aid webpage. Approximately 65% or 7,250 of both undergraduate and graduate students receive financial aid, namely federal and institutional and/or state funds.

Among undergraduate students, 72% are Pell Grant recipients. Approximately 77% of this group can cover full-time tuition costs without other aid. The number of Pell Grant recipients is on the rise, with a 12% increase observed since approximately ten years ago. Of Pell Grant recipients, 62% qualify for the maximum allowed under FAFSA guidelines.

Other programs complement grant programs, such as the Work Study Program that employs approximately 300 students each year. It provides students with job experience and income that can help them pay for their studies. Approximately 6% of our undergraduates receive direct loans. This totals some 550 students who borrow an average of $1,600 each academic year. Concerning graduate students, a larger percentage, about 31%, receive direct loans. This totals some 800 students who borrow an average of $6,600 annually. The institution's Cohort Default Rate for the last three years reported is XXX%. VERIFY RATE IN PRIOR DRAFT AND ADD DEFAULT RATE.

Practices & Support Services to Increase Undergraduate Retention

Aligned with new undergraduate admissions policy to promote inclusion and greater access for a wider array of applicants, including members of non-traditional populations, educational practices and support services to enhance retention are undergoing ongoing improvement. The Office of the Dean of Student Affairs oversees campus-wide services offered by counselors, psychologists, social workers, and peers who serve as mentors. Accordingly, it collaborates with college and schools to carry out various activities to impact retention. These include services offered by orientation officials, assistant deans of student affairs, and academic advisors. Placement at the proper level is one area that has recently received special attention. This requires identifying students who appear to not be adequately prepared for study at the level for which they have been admitted, ensuring that they are directed to the proper courses, and facilitation of swift course movement for any student incorrectly placed at the beginning of the semester. In addition, students who are accepted as non-traditional admission processes have to be carefully placed in general education courses given that some (e.g., Spanish, English, Mathematics) are organized by level.

Enrolled students' College Board or SAT scores in Verbal and Mathematical Reasoning are also examined to identify those who are likely to benefit from additional support. A policy related to general education establishes that students with a score of 459 or less in English are to be placed in Intensive Basic English; unlike higher-level course this one is accompanied by a non-credit lab; similarly, students with a score between 237 and 430 in Spanish are placed in intensive basic Spanish course with an additional lab. The strategy in these cases is to use the lab to strengthen areas of weakness while also ensuring that the student learns the relevant materials for standard first-year courses. This has proven successful for some students, but a recent pilot project that analyzed the performance and retention rates of students who took courses with labs showed that a substantial number of them do just as well, if not better, when they are made aware of the need to bolster their competencies, introduced to existing support services, and mainstreamed in higher-level courses without a lab.

Two colleges coordinate summer programs that provide students opportunities to improve competence in math. The College of Natural Sciences offers its incoming students the chance to reinforce their math skills and take advanced mathematics courses through a Summer Math Immersion Program. The Mathematics Department administers a diagnostic test to determine math skills and competency levels, then students are placed in different courses depending on their results. This allows the those students who might need additional academic support to additional support to be identified and referred to the appropriate resource (e.g., tutoring services, academic counselors). Similarly, the College of Business Administration invites incoming students with a math score equal to or less than 610 to take a mathematics basic skills course (MECU 1000) in person or through a hybrid modality during the summer. These initiatives bolster students prior to the beginning of the academic year, preparing students for a successful first year that will end well and culminate in their retention and to continue on to a successful second year.

Regarding retention, Table 4.5 shows that from AY 2017-18 to AY 2020-21, 82% or more of first-year undergraduate students continued to their second year. This rate is comparable to that reported by IPEDS for comparable four-year public universities in the U.S, which is 81%. While our campus strives to increase this rate, our relatively solid performance in this area in the midst of challenging circumstances can be attributed to effective support services, careful placement in general education courses, and students' dedication to their studies, among other factors. However, it should be noted that retention for the AY 2021-22 cohort was 78%. This decrease appears to be due to the effects of the pandemic and economic pressures that lead some students to work full-time rather than complete their studies.

Retention rates and studies of the challenges and obstacles that negatively impact retention should be discussed at multiple levels, not just in the Offices of Deans but also in department meetings and faculty meetings, especially those attended by faculty who teach first-year general education courses. The discussion, which could cultivate greater awareness about the student experience, should address the classroom experience, red-flag mechanisms that alert faculty and program directors when student

grades drop below established guidelines, and key aspects of student life such as student housing, employment, and transportation.

The closure of student housing in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and María has made it more difficult for students from towns and cities far from San Juan to study on our campus. It has probably also indirectly impacted retention given that it provided low-cost housing to a substantial number of undergraduates and that few other options have become available since the doors of the residence halls were closed.

Intra-System Transfer Policies and Student Success

The UPR Governing Board has implemented institutional policies designed to enhance student success in the area of achieving educational and professional goals, degree completion, transfer to other institutions, and post-completion placement. For example, GB Certification 128, 2022-2023, *Institutional Policy on Student Transfers and Reclassifications at the UPR* pertains to transfer programs and the movement of students between campuses to ensure they have access to academic offerings that will contribute to their overall success. In some instances, this means students begin their studies on a campus closer to the place of residence and then participate in articulated transfer initiatives. Articulated transfer facilitates movement between campuses with minimum obstacles when stipulated conditions for transfer are met. The certification ensures that transfer students do not lose credits or end up with credits that cannot be counted at the receiving campus or experience, time requirements have also been adjusted to make transfer a more attractive option for interested students.

The other element central to this policy is reclassification, which can be thought of as non-articulated transfer. This option, which concerns, movement within the System, helps those who change their minds about continuing to study in a particular campus or program and switch to another campus. It assists with such transitions so that students can purse their academic and personal interests.

Improving Persistence through Student Services

DCODE

The Counseling Department for Student Development (DCODE in Spanish), a unit under the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs, works to help students smoothly adapt to university life, make decisions that are in their best interests, and successfully complete their degrees. DCODE personnel provide counseling and related student support services, including our Peer Orientation Program. DCODE's contributions to higher rates of persistence has been augmented in recent years given that since 2017 a greater number of students have sought its services and guidance that allows them to navigate obstacles that have proven challenges (EI 4.12: DCODE SERVICE COUNT).

DCODE personnel provide individual and group counseling sessions through a personal and direct relationship with students. The methods and strategies it relies on are supported by scientific knowledge that prioritizes their holistic development and well-being. Its menu of services include

career counseling, outreach activities, one-on-one consultation, and crisis intervention. DCODE counselors may refer students to academic advisors and the Assistant Deans of Student Affairs for academic orientation and advising. In addition, faculty and administrators sometimes refer students directly to DCODE services or ask for consultation regarding issues that arise in the classroom.

During the pandemic, DCODE services were offered remotely; the latter proved effective in many cases and for this reason they are now offered face-to-face and remotely, according to the student's preference. Due to the high volume of students requesting reasonable accommodations at OSEI and DCODE services, an automated system to handle requests, respond to students, and coordinate appointments was completed in YEAR using Microsoft 365 infrastructure.

OSEI

The Office of Services to Students with Disabilities (OSEI in Spanish) conducts a summer orientation for first-year students and their parents or guardian. This orientation, which is directed at those who request reasonable accommodation, facilitates the transition from high school to the university. It also includes students admitted through GB 2014-15 Certification 111, which requires a Student Retention Plan for Students with Disabilities or Functional Diversity (EI 4.13). OSEI supports these students by ensuring that they receive the technological and personal resources that they needed to perform on equal terms with their peers and thereby achieve their academic goals.

OSEI is also responsible for ensuring institutional compliance with policies that protect the rights of students with functional diversity. The unit provides services such as: evaluation and coordination for reasonable accommodations, academic aids, sign language interpretation, early course enrollment, and mediation in conflicts related to reasonable accommodations, among others. It also coordinates conferences and workshops on topics related to functional diversity for the broader campus community. OSEI recently implemented an innovative support service called OSEI Bot. This virtual assistant, currently in the testing phase, was designed to guide users and answer questions about the services its provides. This tool assists students, faculty, and the entire university community by providing answers about programs, resources, and procedures.

Personnel at OSEI, like those at DCODE, have found that despite the virtual tools traditional working hours limit their access to students who work or are unable to seek support during the day because they are in class. This matter needs to be given more attention to ensure that all students have access to the student support services that they need, regardless of their scheduling preferences or the modality of their course or program.

PSAE

The Student Support Program (PSAE in Spanish), which is part of the federal TRIO Programs, supports incoming undergraduates through a summer bridge program of basic English, Math, and Spanish courses. PSAE offers Introduction to University Life workshops and a variety of different cultural and social activities. Once the academic year starts, student participants are enrolled in a once-

a-week course where orientation, advising, and counseling are provided along with their regular courses. Every year, PSAE accepts an average of 100 students and follows up, specifically evaluating their retention and offer guidance that assists them in making decisions that promote persistence and their academic success, until graduation.

Other Practices

When students take a semester off they are typically contacted by academic coordinators or others who inquire about their situation. The Registrar's Office assists in identifying inactive students, transfer applicants, and those who skip a semester. Such students are contacted in order to assess the reason that they have not continued with their program of study and offered support to facilitate the continuation of their studies and the completion of their degrees. Going forward, these efforts should become more systematic, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Practices & Support Services to Enhance Graduate Level Persistence

At the master's level, persistence rates have remained relatively stable in the last few years (EI 4.14: UPR-RP Persistence Rates). This is the case despite challenges stemming from the natural disasters in Puerto Rico, budget cuts, and the COVID pandemic in which many programs had to move online. These rates should be compared to time to degree in the same period given that some curriculum changes have worked to make programs more attractive by aligning them with changes in higher education, such as the streamlining of course requirements, the inclusion of more hands-on learning experiences, and the substitution of the traditional thesis with the research monograph. In addition, enrollment should be examined for each program as well as at the level of college in order to establish a proactive response factors that lead students to pause their studies.

ADD: Section on Graduation Rates

Career Guidance, Preparation, & Planning

One of the components of one of UPR-RP's Title V Projects, STEM: Strengthening the Social, Emotional and Academic Needs of Hispanic Students in Puerto Rico, offers career advising early on, in the sophomore year. It ties the academic curriculum to work-based learning experiences and internships and operates a Career Counseling Center that includes the participation of local business leaders and mentors. The project provide workshops and seminars on topics related to having a work/life balance, time management, how to choose a thesis topic, career planning, and internships, among others. Similar support structures should be developed by other colleges or individual programs to benefit students in other areas.

DCODE counselors are also active in the area of career guidance and orientation and the scope of their work includes all programs on campus. DCODE collaborates with the Employment Office by offering career development workshops (e.g., Resume and CV preparation, preparing for job interviews, and career planning, among others). DCODE also offers support services that target graduate students. For example, it runs three support groups for graduate students who are working

on their thesis or dissertation. Specific webinars and workshops in these areas are offered in collaboration with the Graduate Network (RG) and the Center for Academic Excellence (CEA).

The Campus has an Employment Office for students who are making plans related to their careers and finding a job after graduation. One of the initiatives of the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs, it assists student, in preparing for job searches, obtaining tools for professional development and training, and reviewing resumes. In addition, this unit serves as a liaison between students and professional leaders, inside and outside Puerto Rico, to increase post completion placement in different employment opportunities. In this way, the Employment Office enables students to successfully integrate and compete in the world of work. The office coordinates career development workshops, job interviews, and responds to queries related to job searches It also organizes the Annual Job Fair and coordinates the visits of different employers that offer information sessions to prospective employees. Every year, an average of 500 students and alumni participate in these, with an average of 50 local and U.S. employers.

Concerning post-completion placement, it is vital to strengthen all the components that help prepare students to meet the challenges of professional sustainability and to increase awareness about the emerging scenarios of the job market. All academic program should survey or interview outgoing students to collect reliable and specific data about their plans after graduation. As appropriate, it is vital to gather information about the company, agency, or organization where they will be employed, the position they will fill, or the university to which they will be admitted for graduate study. Programs should confirm the personal email address they will use after their institutional email expires so that the Alumni Office and others can follow up with them, as the Senior Exit Interview does not collect this more specific data. The Registrar can provide a list of graduation candidates to units. To ensure students participates in the interview, each department should devise a creative incentive or way of encouragement. This information will assist in answering questions about our local and international positioning, better understanding what areas need to be strengthened, and to identify the programs where our graduates tend to continue their studies.

4.2: Transfer Data

Admission processes comply with policies of the UPR-RP Academic Senate, such as the Certification 150, 2013-2014 (EI 4.15). This certification describes the traditional admission processes as well as the rules for readmission and transfer. It also considers student exchange programs. Students coming from other local institutions, the United States and abroad file the application in the Admissions Office. Requirements and instructions to complete the transfer admission application are available on the Admissions Office main webpage and online brochure. Transfer admission is granted by the college of interest on a space-available basis.

A transfer student's course evaluation process is validated when they have completed at least 12 credits on campus. Only courses with a minimum grade of "C" and no more than 50% of the

transferred major courses are validated. In the case of incoming students who have participated in the "Dual Enrollment" program, they must have passed a minimum of 9 credits with a minimum grade of "C" before admission to UPR-RP. These credits count towards the completion of the high school degree and are then transferred to the university transcript. Incoming students who participate in an "articulated" transfer program are credited with the minimum number of credits approved with a C, after admission.

At the graduate level, only new admissions are offered. However, GB Certification 95 2019-20, allows 1/3 of the total number of courses from outside the institution. These courses must be passed with a grade of B or A no more than five years prior to admission. Once students are admitted, they submit evidence of courses they want to have approved for evaluation. When the graduate program determines the courses can be credited, a letter and transcript are sent to the Registrar's Office, so the courses can be validated.

4.3: Policies & Procedures Regarding Student Information

The Registrar's Office safeguards student information and manages the processes that show students are in good standing, in addition to ensuring that both active and inactive students and university officials have access to updated and relevant information related to academic records. Units follow the Institutional Policy on Privacy of Educational Records, and they comply with the provisions of the Buckley Amendment and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 as amended.

Our Medical Services Department follows the protocols and privacy regulations established by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA). All procedures and records evaluations are confidential and unavailable without the patient's authorization. Since 2019, the collection of medical documents is completed through the digital platform NEXT, where students upload their documentation. Electronic medical records comply with the confidentiality parameters of the HIPPA Act and the Access to Privileged and Confidential Information Act.

The Financial Aid Office safeguards financial records on a secure online platform that can only be accessed by authorized personnel. The financial information pertains to scholarships, grants, loans, work study, academic progress revision records, and information entered by a financial aid officer.

4.4: Extra- and Co-Curricular Activities

Most of the units and organizations that contribute to extracurricular and co-curricular activities, university life, and athletics are under the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs. These and other programs, including musical groups and the UPR-RP Theatre, and the Center for Academic Excellence, among others, are highly respected and central to campus culture. They are integrated into the universities structure and budget and subject to the same principles and procedures as other programs, including academic programs. Moreover, their funding and high quality have been maintained in the face of ongoing budget cuts.

Especially active in this area is the Social, Recreational, and Institutional Events Unit, which produces more activities than any other unit on campus and promotes students' active participation in campus life. It coordinates the UPR Tuna, the UPR Dance Team, and the Abanderadas Team in addition to organizing events aimed at recruiting new students, welcoming admitted students, and introducing them to university life. These and other events, include the Athletic and Sports Festival of Puerto Rico, musical concerts, and workshops and fairs, among many others. Likewise, it coordinates another important event in institutional life: the annual commencement ceremony. These activities foster dialogue, interaction, and countless opportunities for learning, and they thereby contribute to the coherence of the student experience as cornerstones of institutional life.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the unit transformed some events to enhance co-curricular events and help to maintain the sense of belonging that is important to campus life. In 2021, for example, it celebrated the first *Semi Open House*, which included a car tour inside the campus accompanied by a recording that future students and families could access from their cell phones. Similarly, that year, it held a virtual graduation and a *Drive-In* for the graduates with music and artistic entertainment by traditional stilt walkers. Through social media and virtual presentations, these activities fostered student success by taking learning outside of the virtual classroom and highlighting the talent of music ensembles and creative and artistic work by our students.

It should be noted that all student support services are provided directly by the campus and that no third-party providers are used in any area. Regarding the assessment of student services, improvements can be made in terms of both student satisfaction and institutional effectiveness. While all units are assessed and faculty and non-teaching staff evaluated, some do not assess the effectiveness of their services on a regular basis. The institution needs to implement a mechanism to receive both employee feedback and student input regarding improvements they deem necessary in these units.

Findings

- The Admissions Process has become more inclusive and changes that have made this possible have been accompanied by campus-level practices that facilitate the successful integration of students who apply via the non-traditional route.
- While data about retention and graduation rates has long been documented and shared among administrators, department directors, and academic coordinators it is now more readily available to the campus at large and has contributed to a general awareness that student support services play an important role in promoting student success and increasing these rates.
- The limited availability of various institutional support services outside the traditional hours in which campus offices operate is an area of potential improvement can help to bolster student retention and make non-traditional programs, including those that are online, more attractive to potential applications. However, the expansion of these services would benefit traditional students as well given that those who take classes during the day are likely to access student services made available outside current hours of operation.

Next Steps

- Providing affordable housing to students should be recognized as a campus priority and linked to actions that seek to bolster student support services. It should be publicized in a timeline that culminates in the reopening of Resi Campus and Torre del Norte.
- A comprehensive instrument that allows students to evaluate all support services, those within their colleges and schools as well as those within the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs (DSA) and the Registrar's Office, should be developed and integrated into institutional assessment cycles.
- The Academic Senate should assist the Campus in establishing specific retention and graduation goals. These could be specific to programs and colleges as well as demographic profiles and build on existing analyses and knowledge about practices that have already proven effective.

STANDARD V: EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT

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

5.1: Clearly Stated Educational Goals at the Levels of Institution, Degree, & Program

Campus assessment of educational effectiveness is grounded in references to learning outcomes from the mission, which refers to "the integral development of students through study programs that promote: intellectual curiosity, critical capacity, continuous learning, effective communication, appreciation and cultivation of ethical and aesthetic values, participation in the processes of the campus, as well as social awareness and responsibility," and to "graduate education of the highest quality whose core elements are research and creation, that helps strengthen undergraduate education."

Academic programs in colleges and schools are responsible for the assessment of student learning, the dissemination of findings, and transformative actions aligned with the eight undergraduate and six graduate learning outcomes, or those objectives included on course syllabi.

Undergraduate learning outcomes are described in general terms in the list of competence areas included in the Undergraduate Profile (Certification 46, 2005-2006, of the Academic Senate). These are information competencies, effective communication skills, content of the discipline (integration of knowledge), research and creation (intellectual curiosity, ability for independent study, teamwork), critical thinking (continuous learning), logical and mathematical reasoning, social responsibility (ethical and aesthetic sensitivity, appreciation of and commitment to the ideals of Puerto Rican society, the Caribbean, and international contexts), and technology. This list provides a basis for assessing undergraduate learning across majors and programs of study.

Similarly, areas of student learning outcomes at the graduate level are included in the Graduate Profile (Certification 104, 2016-17 of the Academic Senate): effective communication skills, research and creation, critical thinking (continuous learning), content of the discipline (integration of technology; teamwork), information competencies, social responsibility (ethical sensitivity, leadership). These facilitate the clustering of learning across graduate programs, each of which has an exit profile specifying the competencies students should achieve by the time they graduate.

Learning outcomes provide a common foundation for the 123 academic programs and are configured in the Online Learning Assessment System (OLAS) . Each year from 2016 to 2023, all learning outcomes met expectations established by the institution's assessment plan, as shown by data presented on the DIIA institutional website. It illustrates the levels of student learning outcomes by academic year.

Learning objectives and assessment data related to general education are key tools for assessing at the undergraduate level, given that they identify levels of competency that should be achieved prior to coursework completed in the students' chosen majors. The College of General Studies is the main unit responsible for general education; however, some coursework in this area is also offered by the College of Humanities, the College of Education, and the College of Business Administration. All the syllabi for general studies courses detail the learning objectives associated with general education that students achieve over the duration of their learning experience.

The College of General Studies is a space dedicated to the cultivation of knowledge about the arts and sciences. It promotes undergraduate education aimed at fostering the integral educational training, providing a general core curriculum for all majors that assists them throughout the remainder of their undergraduate careers. In addition, the college is charged with enriching the cultural and intellectual environment through co-curricular activities, establishing service links with the community, and developing international consortiums and alliances.

In general, the 123 academic programs disseminate their missions, visions, and goals to the university communities and the public through their webpages, catalogs, curricular sequences, curricular offerings, and brochures. Each program or department also has printed information regarding the curricular design, consistent with the campus mission, vision, and goals. Academic programs should present their entry and exit profiles on their websites and consider using the latter as a resource that assists users, whether potential applicants, current students, or future employers, in answering questions about the program and what it offers. Through guidelines, meetings, and presentations, this material is shared with students. Self-studies of accredited programs also include this information, which is available on their websites.

5.2: Organized & Systematic Assessment of Student Achievement

In most academic programs, student learning experiences at all levels and modalities of instruction have been assessed by faculty in a rigorous and consistent manner during most semesters of the period under review. The exception was during the pandemic (2020-2021), when these processes were completed with alternative methods, and their publication was not systematic, for reasons of public health. Assessment of student achievement has been completed in accordance with institutional policy, using a platform with learning outcomes and other objectives that are designated at the program level.

Assessment results have led to the identification of distinct levels of student achievement, serving as a basis for developing actions that will lead to improvements in teaching, more effective learning opportunities for students, more resources, and professional development for faculty. Assessment results have also been used as a reference for faculty development plans, the institutional strategic plan, and the development of institutional regulations and policies. An example of the latter is the set of regulations developed during the period of the pandemic by a Special Committee appointed by the

Academic Senate in 2020, for the purpose of promoting student learning using alternative modalities. This committee reviewed documents and institutional policy and administered questionnaires to learn about student and faculty experiences related to distance education in the context of the COVID pandemic. Its findings and recommendations are presented in the Academic Senate Certification 43, AY 2020-21.

These findings have also been used as a reference for the development of circulars and regulations that establish the guidelines for the creation and offering of distance education courses, as well as the training and continuing education of professors in assessment and decision-making about the infrastructure and equipment necessary for making these offerings available.

5.3: Units Dedicated to the Assessment of Student Learning

The Division of Institutional Research and Assessment (DIIA) manages, receives, analyzes, safeguards, and disseminates data produced through three fundamental sources: institutional research, assessment of student learning, and the operational systems of the campus. This happens within the framework of the evaluation of programs and services. The DIIA's range of actions supports campus academic and administrative planning processes. In this way, the unit nurtures an institutional culture that is based on evidence, transparency, and accountability. The DIIA website centralizes the collection and dissemination of assessment data and information about transformative actions. Each college and school has a distinctive structure to address the assessment of student learning aligned with its areas of academic specialization and with DIIA stipulations and institutional plans to ensure that all programs follow policies and procedures for effective assessment.

The DIIA builds on the work of the Office of Assessment of Student Learning (OEAE), which was in place from 2008 to 2019, and coordinated assessment of student learning efforts through the implementation of the Institutional Student Learning Assessment Plan. The OEAE was responsible for collecting and analyzing data for assessment and for contributing to the development of an integrated student learning assessment process. This required identifying the competencies to be assessed as domains of learning, and the identification of transformative actions. This office promoted the culture of learning assessment by including educational efforts for the teaching community in workshops offered by the Center for Academic Excellence (CEA).

Tools

The Online Learning Assessment System (OLAS) was implemented in May 2019 under the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs (DAA). This online platform facilitates the assessment process by collecting information on student performance through assessment rubrics developed by administrators, assessment coordinators, and teaching faculty. It allows for the collection of assessment data and automatically calculates the percentage of students who meet the minimum academic performance levels (passing expectations) for each learning outcome. OLAS also produces reports of outcomes at the student, course, program, school, and faculty levels. Access to OLAS is

provided to all faculty, who are responsible for entering assessment data for their courses, which, in turn. are organized in the tool. Since 2018, the OEAE and subsequently the DIIA made a guide available so that faculty could use this resource to teach their courses.

Dynamic OLAS is the transformation of the OLAS program that began its testing phase during AY 2022-23 and continues in the process of calibration, dissemination of information, and training of university community members. This program provides information on student performance and compliance with the expectations of passing learning outcomes for the entire undergraduate and graduate populations. The analysis of this data is useful in the elaboration of development plans, curricular revisions, and proposals for new programs as well as academic management, among others.

The Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs (DAA) and the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research (DEGI) have developed learning assessment plans, respectively. The goals of the student learning assessment are to comply with the institutional research activity, the assessment of learning, and the dissemination of data using accessible and reliable computer platforms. The data obtained enables academic and administrative planning and transformation that promotes institutional effectiveness and accountability. It aligns with one of the four regulations in Certification 50 Governing Board 2016-17: Technological Culture, which aims to strengthen the processes of program assessment and student learning to support their sustained improvement through the integration of systems and complementary technologies and the articulation between the levels of programs, undergraduate and graduate, academic units, and the UPR System. It is articulated in terms of the following aims:

- To develop online program assessment and student learning resources, as well as the collection, analysis, and dissemination of data and performance reports, which should serve to make informed decisions and sustained improvement of programs and student learning.
- To integrate online audit mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of program assessment practices and student learning, articulated between the system level, units and programs, as evidenced by the strengthening of programs and complementary technologies applied.
- To strengthen the development of communities of practice with peer networks and online repositories that support the processes of assessment and sustained improvement of programs and student learning.

The goals of Academic Senate Certification 68, 2005-06, include, among other components, developing a continuous institutional system for gathering evidence that demonstrates whether academic programs are achieving what they set out to achieve in relation to student learning aligned with the institutional mission, goals, and objectives of their curricula. The DIIA compiles the information on a semester basis and presents data derived from institutional research, learning assessment, and institutional effectiveness assessment on its website, in addition to validating and calibrating rubrics and informative reference material for the university community. DEGI, for its part, publishes its learning assessment plan on a webpage with access to the mission and vision of the

campus, a collection of rubric models, presentations and reports, and a collection of satisfaction questionnaires. The webpage also defines the assessment plan and its importance.

As for student evaluations of professors, they are already being systematized in compliance with certifications 34, 2022-2023, of the Academic Senate (SA); 115, 2022-2023, SA; and the letter to the DAA by Chancellor Varela dated August 11, 2023. Together with the Central Administration, the DAA achieved the entry of course section data into the UPR Next system, an access platform for faculty and students with service provision, in which the student community electronically evaluates their professors at the end of each semester. The results of the evaluations are available to department directors, deans and other academic management positions who can make decisions using this data.

The process of implementing the institutional learning assessment is a priority for the institution despite the delay it has faced in recent years. The reason for the delay is attributed to the passage of hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2017, barely a semester after the approval of the strategic plan. However, since 2019 the campus has benefited from OLAS and also Dynamic OLAS instituted in 2022. DAA and DIIA are coordinating the preparation of an annual assessment plan for each program in three-year cycles, whose guidelines are available online, and, as suggested above, the restructuring and transformation of the OLAS platform into what is now *Dynamic* OLAS.

Other ways in which programs report on student assessment include the publication of reports and self-studies. As an example, the Department of Mathematics in the College of Natural Sciences publishes its assessment reports on its website. The School of Architecture conducted a self-study subject to external evaluation in 2019, to which assessment recommendations are suggested. The Graduate School of Planning developed a strategic plan for the years 2018-23 in which it proposes improvements to assessment. For its part, the College of Business Administration publishes its assessment data on its website. The Department of Social Work, part of the College of Social Sciences, also publishes its assessment data on its website. Meanwhile, the Master's Degree in Information Sciences of the College of Communication and Information publishes an assessment rubric collection on its website and a student performance report since 2019. As part of its accreditation process by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the College of Education publishes annual reports that demonstrate how the college provides a successful life experience within the field of education and uses direct and indirect assessment data to transform educational practices.

5.4: Use of Assessment Results for the Improvement of Educational Effectiveness

The results obtained in the assessment process provide the programs and the institution with a portrait of the student in terms of strengths and challenges. Consistent strengths include the fulfillment of disciplinary competencies, information literacy, ethical and social responsibility, critical thinking, communication, and research skills. During the period 2016 to 2023, UPR-RP incorporated the curricular changes illustrated in the previous section at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. These revisions respond to processes of accreditation or reaccreditation of accredited programs and

systematic evaluation of non-accredited programs. During the period of 2016 to 2021, 66/68 undergraduate programs evaluated complied, as well as all the graduate programs.

The assessment data obtained also facilitate planning and academic and administrative transformations that promote institutional effectiveness and accountability through periodic semi-annual and annual reports that can be accessed through the pages of the DIIA, the DAA and those of colleges and schools. Programmatic determinations take these results into consideration for academic management, program creation, curricular revisions, and fiscal determinations. It is a unique process for each program. During the self-study, because of student learning assessment, periodic program evaluations, and accreditations and reaccreditation processes from 2016 to 2021, multiple proposals were submitted. These were evaluated at different institutional levels and the majority were approved to add minor concentrations, new program creations, combined programs, and double majors, which achieve reduction in time-to-degree to improve retention. Online professional certifications, among other initiatives, were also approved. Specifically, during the year 2021, 70 undergraduate and graduate proposals were submitted to the consideration and approval of institutional authorities on different levels. Most of them were approved and others are in evaluation. All the accredited programs that were expected to submit their self-studies did it on time or during an authorized extended period.

For example, the College of Business Administration submitted multiple changes in its undergraduate programs such as changes in curricular sequences (Operations and Supply Marketing Management and Human Resources Management); creation of minor concentrations in face-to-face and online modalities (Marketing, Human Resources Management, Entrepreneurship, Information Systems and Data Analytics); and the inactivation of the Office Management Program. It also submitted a proposal for the establishment of an accelerated online program for the master's degree in Business Administration. The School of Architecture submitted the creation of Professional Certificates in Architecture and Landscape Architecture in Tropical Climates and in Conservation of Architectural and Urban Heritage, as well as a proposal to offer a dual program between the Graduate School of Planning and the School of Architecture.

Similarly, to help students improve their learning, the DIIA and the Center for Academic Excellence (CEA), has developed workshops emphasizing the training of faculty and teaching assistants in the development of assessment activities, use and development of rubrics to help students improve their learning, teaching strategies, and curriculum design. These workshops are offered to new faculty on a mandatory basis by provision of Certification 101, 2000-2001, of the Academic Senate, whose purpose is to develop a teaching-learning curriculum for new faculty and the rest of the faculty through the CEA. Examples of workshops include a Certificate in Student Learning Assessment; Strategies for Formative Assessment in the Classroom; Educational Accommodations for Learners with Functional Diversity: Fostering an Inclusive Environment in the University Community; Andragogy Teaching and Learning Cycle to Address the Adult Population; among others.

The list of training offerings is included in the CEA annual reports. A total of 233 professors have successfully completed these trainings.

The institution also evaluates the student support services provided by the Deanship of Students and colleges and schools that have an impact on the process and academic success of students, emphasizing the factors that promote retention and improve their learning. Of the programs that have been successful, the Graduate College of Rehabilitation Counseling (CORE) stands out since they developed a Guide for the Student Learning Assessment Plan (2020). It presents a Personal and Professional Development Plan for students who score below the expected average on the learning assessment. This program is already being applied to students who need it in a systematic and individualized manner with a professor acting as academic advisor.

For its part, the College of Communication and Information (FaCI) created an Academic Accompaniment Program (peer mentoring), which is active and accessible through an announcement on its institutional webpage, and which publishes reports of direct evaluation of the mentoring and indirect evaluation of the experience, which have led to transformations in mentoring strategies. The accompaniment method places graduate students and advanced undergraduates to offer individualized tutoring to students with identified needs in Effective communication skills, critical thinking, content of the discipline, and other institutional learning outcomes. This is the result of a transformative action that was proposed in the 2018-2019 student learning assessment cycle and is coordinated within the Deanship of Student Affairs of the FaCI.

Other programs that have successfully developed initiatives or used mentoring, tutoring, or academic advising models include the College of Business Administration, College of Education, College of Humanities, the School of Architecture, the Graduate College of Planning, and the Graduate Programs in Public Administration and Social Work, attached to the College of Social Sciences. Most of the academic programs from these units are accredited. These experiences are being used as references to develop a model that meets the needs of all the programs framed in the institutional reality and in accordance with the safeguarding of intellectual diversity contained in the institutional mission. This project is currently under development following Certification 134, 2023-2024, Governing Board, which identifies the Rio Piedras Campus as the unit in charge of a pilot project to improve student services.

Other processes and procedures designed to improve the academic experience and that contribute to the success of our students include the creation of tutoring programs in the Colleges of Natural Sciences and Business Administration, changes in the assessment processes in accredited programs, modifications in the teaching processes at the classroom level as a result of the learning assessment, and implementation of new teaching-learning strategies and syllabi revisions, among others. These achievements are the result of continuous, systematized, and sustainable efforts to assess and improve

student learning, displayed on the undergraduate and graduate transformative action dashboards on the DIIA website.

Student assessment results are also used to plan, conduct, and support professional development activities, particularly through undergraduate and graduate internships and practicums that are guided by accreditation standards and learning outcomes. In addition, DEGI maintains a summer immersion program for undergraduate students who are about to graduate to strengthen research and writing skills, as well as to provide information on the graduate offerings available on campus. Other programs derived from the assessment for the continuous improvement of the student experience are the Training Program for graduate students, offered during the summer to develop the skills and competencies necessary to achieve success in their studies and professional development; and the internship program called *My First Work Experience* that provides their first foray working in their academic discipline, receiving a monthly stipend, among other initiatives. Another example of these initiatives can be found in the College of Education, with the purpose of strengthening knowledge and skills that have been identified for improvement through the Teacher Induction Program (PIM). This College informs about the activities that are carried out per year on its webpage, and the benefits for participating students.

The DIIA webpage also presents data on compliance with learning assessment goals, cohort profiles, retention rates, and graduation. Specifically, the Institutional Effectiveness Report contains comparative data for the years 2016-2020. Program websites present specific information on assessment results and graduation rates by faculty. Some programs include transfer and placement information. However, it is more common to locate these data on the pages of accredited programs.

With the desire to improve student success indicators, such as retention, graduation, transfer, and placement rates, the Academic Senate created working committees to conduct research and present proposals for improvement. One example is Certification 115, 2021-2022, of the Academic Senate, whose purpose was to request from the DAA and DEGI a study to establish viable readmission offers for students who dropped out of the university during the pandemic accompanied by a student mentoring plan that helps them to meet their academic and graduation goals. The findings established that the causes for dropping out of college were multifactorial, but to help them achieve their goals, systemic support initiatives and services outside of daytime hours are needed, in addition to other processes designed to improve programs. The achievement reports submitted to the Academic Senate, meanwhile, serve as an instance of verification of compliance with institutional goals at the Office of the Chancellor and at the Executive Deanships, that is, the Deanships of Administration, Academic Affairs, Students, and Graduate Studies and Research, with a forum open to the university community for discussion and public information data that is constantly updated (Academic Senate webpage).

At the curricular level, each program has a curricular committee in charge of ensuring the optimal functioning and continuous updating of the study plans for their courses. This committee, led by a

coordinator elected by their peers, together with student representatives from the programs, has the mission of strengthening the student graduation profile, thus guaranteeing that study plans are aligned with current trends and demands, both national and international. The curriculum committee has the responsibility of designing and reviewing the study plans, ensuring that they are in constant alignment and evaluation through systematic processes of measurement and adjustment. Likewise, it develops tools such as rubrics and evaluation matrixes, implementing actions that promote the achievement of the learning outcomes defined in the graduation profile.

For each accredited degree program, a specific graduation profile is prepared that clearly establishes the educational objectives, organizing the expected learning progressively and guiding the curricular activities involved in alignment with the institutional Undergraduate or Graduate Profile. This specific profile guides the evaluation processes within the curriculum. Study plans are created collaboratively, specifying the sequence and subjects of the different areas of the training process. These plans seek to achieve the desired graduation profile for students in each program, detailing the structure of subjects and the organization of the curricular sequence. The curriculum committee also considers fundamental aspects such as the contributing training areas, the prerequisites of each subject, and the grading system.

Analysis of the evidence suggests that the priority from 2016 to 2023 has been the use of the learning assessment results to improve the complementary educational experience; that is, the academic mentoring of students and the formative workshops for professors. Thus, in the next assessment cycle, the use of the results should be balanced to link more continuously and explicitly the evaluation of learning and effectiveness with the transformations in program curricula that go beyond the creation of online programs or the change of modality from face-to-face to online.

The Office of Institutional Transformation (OTI) of the University of Puerto Rico and the Vice President for Student Affairs favorably recommended the Río Piedras Campus to the Board of Governors to be the site of a student services renovation project to be implemented throughout the UPR system. The recommendation was achieved after presenting three emblematic projects of our campus that are aligned with the transformation milestones of the Fiscal Oversight and Management Board, which were the Academic Accompaniment Program (PAA) of the School of Communication and Information (FaCI); the Title V Project: Strengthening STEM Careers; and the reformulation of the Educational Innovations Program (PIE) of the School of General Studies.

Regarding the FaCI Academic Accompaniment Program, the impact on the retention rate of the baccalaureate programs was highlighted. Between 2013 and 2018, the program maintained an average of 73% of its students and has gradually increased from the implementation of the project in 2019, with 89%, reaching 92% in 2021. In this accompaniment system, mentors from the master's degree - through the Formative Academic Experiences Program (PEAF) - and third and fourth year of bachelor's degree - Program of Study and Work (PET) - provide new students with individualized

mentoring in the learning domains of effective communication, critical thinking and continuous learning. In this way, the program relocates student talent to avoid budgetary impact.

Also, the $3,000,000 five-year federal Title V grant obtained by the campus has been reconfigured to incorporate artificial intelligence models and increase the academic performance of the undergraduate STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) student population. The relevance to student life of the activities organized by the Center for Undergraduate Research and Learning (CRiiAS), a student success center located in the School of Natural Sciences, made a strong case for illustrating our campus's capacity for innovation.

Along with these projects, a new proposal for the Educational Innovations Program (PIE), which integrates social responsibility and sustainable development, earned our campus its unique candidacy for the Board of Governors to provide support in maximizing student services. At the moment, we are waiting for this body to issue the corresponding certification in order to begin work. With these three initiatives and their inclusion in the OTI pilot project (Certification 134, 2023, 2024, GB); our campus has responsibly responded to the recommendations included in the Final Report Certification 115 SA-DAA-DEGI.

Finally, the monitoring initiatives of each academic unit will serve as a guide so that, in the next accreditation cycle, there will be a Monitoring Model at the campus level that has the support of all those involved, as well as the human and fiscal resources to carry it out. In terms of assessment services by third-party providers, the institution does not allocate funds to execute these external evaluations, so this criterion does not apply.

5.5: Periodic Assessment of Processes for Educational Effectiveness

The effectiveness of an institution is based on the contribution of each of its programs and services to the achievement of its programmatic goals and objectives. Curricular changes are also evaluated by other bodies such as the Board of Postsecondary Institutions (JIP). Revised or newly created programs approved by the JIP are posted on the DAA and DIIA websites. Once approved, the Central Administration of the institution and the academic programs are notified so that they can be offered at the institution. The JIP issues a certification that DAA and DIIA make available to the public. Non-academic programs offered through the Division of Continued Education and Professional Studies (DECEP) carry out informal evaluation exercises. To demonstrate the excellence of their offerings, they are carrying out a market plan to develop a strategic plan for the Division and a formal plan for the assessment of student learning and evaluation of the programs they offer.

The development and changes of the two structures dedicated to the organization and systematization of the assessment previously described, OEAE and DIIA, show continuous improvement in the assessment processes. In particular, the collection and dissemination of data has been centralized on the DIIA webpage. Even so, the institution has respected the spirit of intellectual diversity imbued in its mission by maintaining, in the colleges and schools, the autonomy to propose

key projects that link student services with the needs identified in the assessment of courses and programs, the use of assessment data to make curricular decisions, and the implementation and evaluation of transformative actions.

To complete the analysis on institutional compliance with this standard, a survey was conducted aimed at corroborating the student learning assessment initiatives and transformative actions implemented by academic programs during the AYs 2016-17 to 2022-23, to evaluate the effectiveness of assessment initiatives in comparison with the material found on the DIIA website.

The sample included 14 participants from five different colleges: Humanities, General Studies, Natural Sciences, School of Law, Business Administration, and Education. Between 78% and 85% of the sample (11-12 participants) claimed to have conducted learning assessment between the 2017-18 and 2021-22 academic years. The academic units that did so stated that they had conducted an assessment process during the years covered by the consultation (2017-18 - 2021-22) and that they disclosed their results.

Almost all the colleges identified the need to implement transformative actions, in addition to those reported on DIIA through OLAS, based on the data obtained. These actions, incorporated mainly in the areas of learning resources, courses, and curricular sequences, revealed successful and tangible results, such as an increase in the passing percentages that allowed students to reach their expected achievements. The results of the transformative actions also spurred the revision, approval, and implementation of curricular sequences, as well as progress in the evaluation and approval of new master's degree programs and professional certificates.

The main challenge identified in this period is technology and the lack of enough training to effectively manage the OLAS platform, which houses the assessment data and reports. However, in 2023-2024, the training sessions were resumed as the office was reinforced with two new coordinators. Three workshops were held in the second semester of 2023-2024. Changes in hiring conditions and adjustments in the academic program for regular and adjunct faculty were also mentioned, as well as the abrupt changes in course modality caused by the pandemic in classes that already had their respective activities and assessment instruments designed for a particular modality.

During the period covered by the survey (2017-18 to 2021-22), four of the five colleges that conducted assessment stated the need to implement transformative actions every year (except for Education). The level of participation was variable; in years such as 2019-20, the incorporation of transformative actions amounted to 67%, while, in 2021-22, it dropped to 33%. The variation in the level of participation is evidence that not all departments in the same colleges saw the need to take transformative actions. However, in the responses, it is not clear whether there was no implementation because the assessment yielded excellent results or whether the assessment is limited to a first part of data collecting without an analysis that would lead to transformative actions. The areas of greatest implementation of transformative actions were, in descending order, learning resources, courses, and

curricular sequences. The other areas of action—curricular revision, learning activity modification, rubric revision, and information competencies—were only mentioned once each.

The most frequently implemented transformative actions are directly related to modifications in the academic offerings of the programs. Curricular revisions were the most frequently implemented transforming action by the academic units, followed by the creation of new courses, professional certificates, as well as the modification of existing courses. For example, the College of Business Administration added a specialization and a new basic course in entrepreneurship to its undergraduate offerings. In addition, it implemented a 21-month accelerated online master's program in Business Administration (iMBA). In classes that were already part of the academic program, actions related to the improvement of teaching-learning strategies, the use of bibliographic resources and the enrichment of learning resources for students were also implemented. In some cases, the transformative actions were directly aimed at addressing deficiencies related to oral and written communication skills, as in the case of the School of Law, which implemented the elaboration of a written research paper as a requirement for the completion of its program. The College of Business Administration, for its part, developed new rubrics to reflect new competencies in diversity, equity, and inclusion in ethics and communication courses, and to emphasize entrepreneurship in introduction to management, marketing and strategy, among other courses. It also created a mega rubric for its doctoral programs.

The implementation of the transformative actions resulted in an increase in goals achievement (passing expectations). In the most notable cases, this increase caused students to reach the expected achievements in domains such as knowledge integration, critical thinking, and effective communication. The results of transformative actions also allowed the revision, approval, and implementation of curricular sequences, as well as the drafting and progress in the evaluation and approval of new master's degree programs and professional certificates. Other concrete results of the implementation of transformative actions were compliance with accreditation standards in academic programs, greater communication scope between professors and students, program consolidations, and adjustments in program compliance requirements.

Challenges in Implementing Transformative Actions

The main challenges regarding the learning assessment process are related to technology and the OLAS platform. Some academic units pointed out "accessibility and availability" as a recurring problem but did not specify whether they were referring to the instructors in charge of the courses subject to assessment, the assessment coordinators, the OLAS platform or DIIA. Changes in hiring conditions and adjustments in the academic program of regular and adjunct faculty were also mentioned by the participants, who indicated that, on occasion, the task of coordinating the evaluation falls to adjunct faculty who do not necessarily perform it on a continuous basis due to their employment situation. Another challenge noted was the change of modality caused by the pandemic in courses that already had their respective activities and assessment instruments designed for a

particular modality. In the opinion of the respondents, these changes prevented the implementation of the strategies suggested by the transformative actions during the 2019-20 academic year.

Associate Deans for Academic Affairs also recognized difficulties in following up with faculty to complete assessment tasks, as well as the lack of agility in the approval process for large-scale transformative actions in academic structures at the institutional level, which delays their implementation. Technological training for professors and support to improve the instructional design of complementary activities were some of the suggestions mentioned to overcome some of the challenges mentioned.

Disclosure strategies

Of the samples that carried out the assessment during the period, 100% indicated that they disclosed their results. The most used assessment dissemination strategies included departmental, program and faculty meetings, reports sent by e-mail, and their publication on the webpage of the academic units. In addition, participants indicated that periodic meetings were held with the curricular and assessment committees to develop course content according to the learning objectives established and curriculum-based assessment. Other dissemination strategies incorporated to a lesser extent were through the academic advisors, who transmitted the results to the students of the programs. Some responses pointed to the annual faculty reports and the semester and annual assessment reports. A meeting by faculties was scheduled for April 3, 2025, with opportunities to share, discuss and receive feedback related to assessment results and transforming actions.

Findings

- While initiatives in accompaniment, mentoring, and tutoring strategies created by colleges, schools, and programs are successful, our campus would benefit from the development of a systemic accompaniment initiative and further improvement in service areas, such as the need for more evening and distance support services.
- Areas of challenge in the assessment process include logical-mathematical reasoning skills, among others.
- Although outreach activities are carried out, the DIIA webpage is updated, and DIIA participates in congresses at a systemic level, the dissemination of these results and the relation between learning assessment and programmatic changes need improvement.

Next steps

- Complete the transition to Dynamic OLAS and continue faculty training in coordination with DIIA and CEA to establish an explicit relationship between assessment results that are useful and used.
- Continue disseminating assessment results to each faculty on a regular basis, in activities in which the university community participates and spaces that transcend administrative management, as well as in national or international congresses.
- Preparation of a bulletin to disseminate evaluation data and an opportunity for programs to disseminate their results and transformative actions with the possibility of receiving feedback from constituents of the community.

- Work on increased integration of the student community in the evaluation processes to help strengthen the learning experience.
- Assessment results and transforming actions will be taken into account when revising the areas of competence outlined in the Undergraduate Profile (Certification 46, 2005-2006, of the Academic Senate), in line with identified trends and changes in the undergraduate curricula.

STANDARD VI: PLANNING, RESOURCES, & INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

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

6.1: Institutional Objectives

The UPR-RP's main institutional objectives are clearly identified in guiding documents that describe actions at three levels: (i) the UPR System's Strategic Plan 2017-2022 (EI 6.1: UPR System Strategic Plan); (ii) the UPR-RP Strategic Plan, Commitment 2018-2023 (6.2: UPR-RP Strategic Plan), which has been extended to December 2024; and (iii) the various development plans and annual reports that academic and administrative units created for the period 2018-2023 (EI: 6.3 CBA Example of Development Plan, 6.4 CE Example of Annual Report 2024). These are aligned with each other and linked to fulfillment of the campus' mission and ongoing institutional improvement. Over the last few years the institution has faced large-scale challenges due to constraints imposed on the UPR System by the Fiscal Oversight Management and Control Board (FOMB). These constraints have made a variety of constituents more aware of institutional goals and their function as tools that can minimize problems and instill stability.

The campus strategic plan, Commitment 2018-2023, focuses on allocating resources to address the challenges following massive reductions in the institution's state funding. Until 2017, the Government of Puerto Rico was required by law to set aside 9.6% of the General Budget and allocate it to the UPR System. However, the FOMB rescinded that provision and conditioned the allocation of $102 million to the UPR System's compliance with several operational and public policy requirements. The FOMB has implemented successive cuts to state funding, as detailed below, leading to a situation in which operations are impacted at the campus level and debt is accumulated by the UPR System. While these challenges have had a negative impact on multiple realms (e.g., on staffing and infrastructure), they have been met with reductions of expenses in numerous areas, practices that assist in making the best use of available funds, and the pursuit of new collaborations with external partners. These responses evidence that the institution that has continued to work towards its goals and objectives. In addition, the Chancellor has periodic meetings with the President to request an increase in the distribution of the budget to reduce the shortfall caused by the PROMESA Act.

6.2: Strategic Planning at the Campus Level

Our strategic planning process is inclusive and extensive, allowing a variety of constituents to support institutional improvement. Diverse and multiple structured efforts ensure that all sectors are aware of the goals and implementation of the plan as well as its links to their college of school. Regarding the process leading to the current plan, at the end of AY 2014-15, the Chancellor activated the Strategic and Fiscal Planning Work Group, also known as the *Think Tank for Strategic Planning*,

which included the Dean of Academic Affairs, faculty members, specialists with relevant professional experiences, and representatives from the Office of Strategic Planning and Budget.

The *Think Tank* produced a report that identified strengths and challenges in the implementation of the previous campus strategic plan, University Vision 2016, recommendations from the findings of the *UPR-RP Self-Study Report* (January 2016), and *the MSCHE Peer Evaluation Committee Report*. The report served as a guide for the visualization and discussion of institutional improvement to be considered in developing the new plan. The assessment exercise resulted in a list of strengths and weaknesses regarding prior work in the area of strategic planning at the campus level, and it served as a resource for developing the plan at the center of the current cycle (EI 6.5: Strategic Planning Strengths and Weaknesses). The colleges and schools were directed to keep these strengths and weaknesses in mind as they developed their respective development plans (EI. 6.6: Standard Form for Development Plans 2018-2023).

Creation & Approval of Current Plan

Embraced as a planning tool, these strengths and challenges and related discussion guided the design and development of the next campus strategic plan. In the period leading up to its approval, the Office of the Dean for Academic Affairs established the Ad-Hoc Working Group for Strategic and Financial Planning (GTAH), composed of faculty as well as student representatives from the Academic Senate. Additionally, within the Academic Senate, the Special Committee for Institutional Effectiveness and the Ad-Hoc Committee to Evaluate Recurring Funding were established. In December 2017, the Dean of Academic Affairs presented the GTAH report and the new strategic plan 2018-2023 proposal to the Chancellor, who, after review, submitted the final proposal to the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board for discussion and final approval. In May 2018, the plan was adopted as AY 2018-19 SA Certification 17. These steps represent the general process for the approval of our strategic plans.

Commitment 2018-2023 recognized the difficult economic, social, and demographic scenarios facing public education at the tertiary level in Puerto Rico and the profound changes that it has led to in our institution. Considering these challenges, planning aimed to maximize areas of opportunity in support of new developments and continuous improvements that could boost efficiency and effectiveness in institutional processes. Four areas were prioritized for an effective balance between meeting goals and fiscally sustainable approaches to management and resource allocation: (i) research and creation; (ii) academic offerings and support services for student success; (iii) social responsibility and community networks; and (iv) sustainable management, effectiveness, and efficiency.

In July 2018, the then Acting Chancellor, Dr. Luis Ferrao Delgado, informed the campus community of the creation of an Institutional Committee for the Implementation of the Strategic Plan: Commitment 2018-2023. Subsequently, the Division of Institutional Research and Assessment (DIIA) assumed the task of monitoring the plan and ensuring that data are used to advance related processes

for institutional improvement. In addition, all major academic and administrative units (colleges, schools, offices of executive deans) elaborated and later implemented five-year development plans that integrated recommendations made by faculty, non-teaching staff, students, as well as internal and external collaborators, with specific projects and initiatives for each of the four priority areas. Unit development plans, annual achievement reports, annual reports on institutional effectiveness, and the informed financial and academic decision-making at multiple levels are shared with the campus and general public on the webpages of DIAA and the respective units.

Achievement Under Commitment 2018-2023

Overall, the Strategic Plan Summative Evaluation Report 2018-2023 demonstrates that our campus made substantial advancement in all priority areas (EI 6.7: Draft of Summative Evaluation Report 2018-2023). Outcomes signal the degree to which resources were used effectively to accomplish goals and reinforce fulfillment of the mission. Examples of exemplary outcomes include:

- Major awards received for successful applications to competitve external funds to support research
- Dissemination of publications by faculty and students, locally and internationally
- Creation of new graduate programs and professional certificates, online and quarterly
- Conversion and approval of near 500 of traditional face-to-face courses to virtual and hybrid modalities
- Creation of undergraduate and graduate programs
- Renewal of academic offerings (e.g., majors, minors, second majors, areas of emphasis) and adjustments and revisions of programs of study
- Institutionalization of UPR-RP Education Project for Inmates
- Expansion of joint bachelor's and master's degrees
- Partnerships / collaborative alliances for the generation of proposals and service projects with government agencies and private and non-profit entities
- Participation in commissions, ad-hoc committees, special projects, and other public policy efforts
- Establishment of the College of Communication and Information
- Innovative strategies for the sustainability, effectiveness, and efficiency of academic and extracurricular activities
- Optimization of efficiency through unit reorganizations
- Energy saving and renewable energy projects

Significant efforts have been made to consistently support research by students and professors, with initiatives aimed at increasing the production of innovative knowledge through research and creative activity, and the recruitment of professors of excellence (Goal 1). All units evidenced successful projects and increased external funds coming from competitive proposals, with notable achievements by the College of Natural Sciences, including 42 patent applications during the period under evaluation (Goal 2). As established in the Annual Achievement Reports, for the period 2015-2020, resource allocations to support research and creation at the campus level increased from $8 to $106 million; with additional allocations reported for 2021 and 2022, $36 and $21 million, respectively. During the COVID-19 pandemic, from March 2020 to June 2021, 160 external funding proposals

totaling $94,226.294 million were submitted. Moreover, during that period faculty and students actively disseminated research and creative production at the local and international level, including publications in peer-reviewed journals, papers published in conference proceedings, research monographs and edited volumes, books and film reviews, and the sponsorship of annual conferences and congresses (Goal 3).

Our campus shows significant achievements while strengthening its recognized longstanding excellence in undergraduate, graduate, and professional education. This includes meeting the specific strategic goals (Goals 4, 5, & 6), as well as launching several projects and initiatives. Moreover, the campus has continued to make great strides in its public service and outreach community goals of the Strategic Plan (Goal 7). Partnerships with government entities and non-profit organizations for research and consulting opportunities, and an extensive list of outreach collaborative community projects have been embedded into academic programs (practical and internship courses, volunteer urban, community, and entrepreneurial work, tasks assigned or led by students), quality of life projects, and student organizations activities. Through the development of congresses, forums, expositions and cultural initiatives (virtual during the emergency periods), the campus has led the discussion of public affairs and the formulation of public policy proposals, allowing for humanistic and creative reflections.

Our campus is committed to the implementation of environmentally responsible institutional practices (Goal 8). Recognized as an institutional priority, a six-phase project for improvement to the air conditioning system of the central cooling plant was 100% completed, resulting in savings of $500,000 annually. In compliance with the UPR's energy policy, proposals have been submitted to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Puerto Rico Department of Housing, for expected savings of over 50% of electricity consumption. Another notable project is the LED lighting system installed in 145 buildings, resulting in a 35% reduction in electricity consumption. The Office of the Dean of Students have lead multiple collaborative and innovative projects to promote the participation of student organizations and employees in an array of community services, social and cultural management activities [i.e. beach clean-ups, blood donations, visits to homes for the elderly, animal shelters, Julia de Burgos Protected Home, and hospitals, among others].

To enable an environment for research, creation, teaching, and service with greater fiscal sustainability (Goal 9), in addition to proposals for external funds, other sources of income implemented by the academic units include, intramural practices, trusts and donations, continuing professional education services, collaborative alliances with governmental and private, local and international organizations, and reduction in operational costs. The Office of the Dean of Students institutionalized a payment collection mechanism for specific services (e.g., medical services, medical plans, summer camps, guided tours).

During AY 2018-19, to support an organizational culture change with a holistic experience focused on student success, UPR-RP established the Online Education Unit under the Division of Continuous

Education and Professional Studies (DECEP, in Spanish). Also, it provides distance learning education services to faculty and students and offers support in the creation of online programs and courses. In conjunction with this initiative, DECEP reorganized its operations and strengthened online structures and services to attract nontraditional students and new external funding sources as well as to establish alliances for innovative projects (Goal 10). DECEP is a successful income-generating entity due to its collaborative alliances with local and international organizations, other universities, and the UPR System units.

To optimize operations efficiency, the campus focused on the reorganization of units, updating procedures, and imrpoving services (Goal 11). The Office of Human Resources, under the Office of the Dean of Administration, completed the evaluation and administrative reorganization of units' requests implementing reclassifications, updating of classification questionnaires and/or granting of differentials to reduce temporary and/or substitute appointments, achieving an estimate payroll reduction of $3.7 million in institutional funds. Efficiency was improved through sustained monitoring to ensure that services are provided by suppliers quickly and payments are processed within the stipulated time. Also, an analysis of the purchasing process was completed, and changes were recommended and implemented to increase efficiency. To improve external funds management, the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research successfully implemented an action plan for the transformation of the post-award processes.

Academic and administrative restructuring has been one means of optimizing operations and re-allocating available resources. A significant achievement in this area for AY 2020-21 was the consolidation of the School of Communication with the Graduate School of Sciences and Information Technologies, which led to the new College of Information and Communication (AY 2020-21 Governing Board Certification 125). This development maximizes the use of faculty and non-teaching staff as well as bibliographic and physical resources; it also sets the stage for more interdisciplinary research.

Undoubtedly, the UPR-RP has confronted challenges during the six-year period of the strategic plan while also reallocating available resources to take advantage of opportunities to move forward into the established priorities. Among the challenges faced were:

- Consecutive cuts to the UPR-RP's operational budget.
- Elimination of tuition exemptions (waivers) for students as well as employees and their dependents.
- Increase in tuition costs and student fees, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.
- Reductions in the size of the student population.
- Adjustments to campus resources (e.g., reduction in the number of graduate student assistantships, fewer bibliographic resources).
- A new approach towards faculty recruitment by the UPR System, which reduced the number of hires as of AY 2019-20.

6.3: The Financial Planning & Budgeting Process

The financial planning and budgeting process facilitates the fulfillment of the campus mission while making possible an ongoing institutional improvement effort using resources from the budget approved by the UPR Governing Board since FY 2017. This plan includes annual cost reductions and revenue measures that the institution needs to implement and comply with, respectively. The UPR Central Administration establishes the distribution for each campus based on: (i) the funding level that the FOMB approves for the UPR System and (ii) decisions about allocation based on the UPR System's budget model and data previously requested from each campus. In the last few years, the budget process between the FOMB and UPR Central Administration has secured additional funds for the UPR based on itemized goals and projects, funds that are dependent on the realization of requested changes, and specific milestones requested by the UPR. Campuses do not have direct communication with the FOMB. Thus, funding to meet operational needs and strategic planning projects are dependent on communication that takes place between UPR Central Administration and the FOMB. At the campus level, available funds from the annual consolidated budget (General Fund budget and restricted funds) are used to support projects related to the strategic goals as well as goals established in the units' strategic development plans.

6.4: Fiscal & Human Resources

Despite fiscal challenges, our campus has the minimum human resources necessary to ensure the continuity of its academic offerings. Human resources have faced an increase in the number of non-teaching personnel retiring. Areas susceptible to internal controls, such as payroll, HR transactions, budget analysis, and contracts, among others, experienced a significant reduction of employees, which resulted in slowing down processes and loss of efficiency. In response, in FY 2023-24 our campus requested additional fiscal resources from the General Fund budget to recruit personnel in two areas: (i) administration and (ii) maintenance of physical facilities and infrastructure. In the interim, the campus opted to reassign existing personnel to better meet the institution's needs. However, in the very near future, as more employees retire, the operations might be seriously affected.

A second area of concern has been retention of non-teaching staff. An outdated compensation structure and reduced employee benefits making it difficult to be competitive in attracting and retaining temporary personnel. In this situation, the Central Administration is developing a new classification and compensation plan for non-teaching personnel in the UPR System. In fact, the Graduate School of Public Administration and its research center CEMGAP, was responsible for its design. Also, they will design the compensation structure for teaching personnel. Approval of the FOMB is required before the funds for implementation are assigned.

Personnel statistics from January 2024 show that there are about 2,100 employees with a ratio of about 1:1 for faculty and non-teaching staff. The net decrease in employees in both areas over the past seven years is of approximately 797 employees. The ratio of tenure-track and tenured faculty dedicated to teaching versus faculty hired annually to offer courses is roughly 1:1 (EI 6.8: Faculty & Non-

Teaching Staff FY 2015-16 to FY 2023-24). Tenure-tracked faculty hires are guided by policy discussed in Chapter three of this report.

More generally, as an additional initiative to strengthen campus finances in the mid- and long term, an external consultant is analyzing academic and administrative data to identify institutional opportunities for improvement and sustainability.

6.5: Decision-making & Responsibility: Annual Budgets (FY 2016-17 to FY 2023-24)

The chronology that follows offers a summary of the most significant events and adjustments to the UPR-RP General Fund budget for FY 2016-17 to FY 2024-25. In addition, it highlights institutional responses that allowed our campus to minimize the adverse impact of budget cuts. As shown in Figure 6.1, the operational budget has undergone a significant adjustment of $69.5 million ($241.5M - $174.8M) during this period.
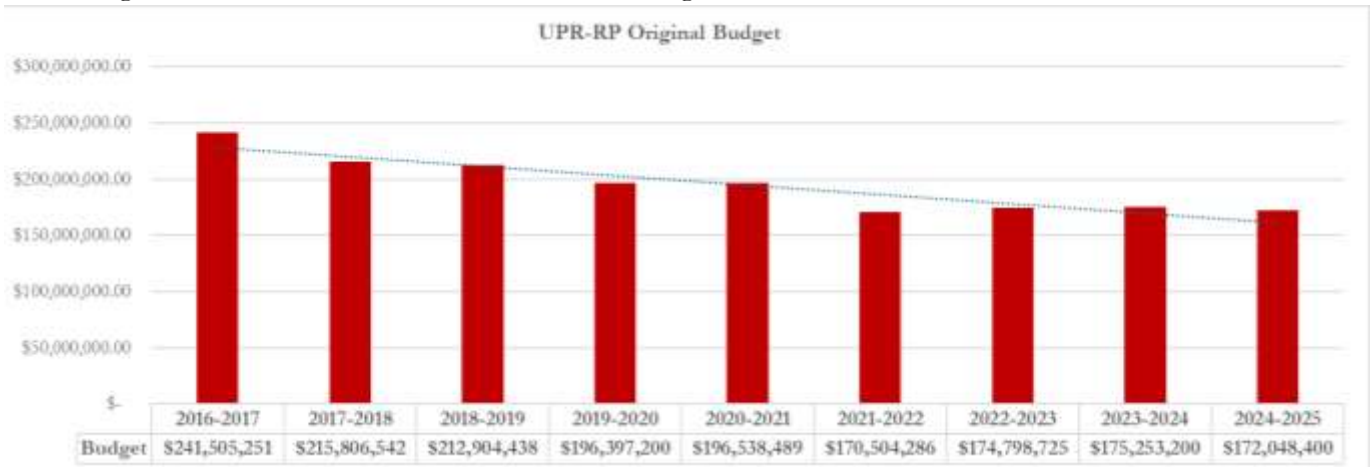
FY 2016-17

The PROMESA Act was implemented as a federal response to the bankruptcy of the Puerto Rican Government and the creation of the FOMB. Upon beginning its work, the FOMB established that the UPR System would be under its fiscal supervision even though the institution, distinct from other public institutions, at the time had little debt. Therefore, the UPR Governing Board initiated the drafting and approval of the first UPR Fiscal Plan under PROMESA.

FY 2016-17 was the last year our campus received a general fund budget allocation of $241.5 million. This funding allowed the institution to continue regular operations by allocating funds for projects in the colleges, schools, and offices of executive deans according to an established model. The latter was a participatory budget process that redistributed fiscal resources to the units that aligned their work with the strategic goals of the campus. In addition, it supported priority projects, including accreditations for programs and services, research projects, student support services, and t0he maintenance of the physical facilities and infrastructure.

FY 2017-18

This year began with adjustments to the campus' original operational budget that amounted to a decrease of $25.7 million. The combination of budget adjustments and the increase in tuition costs initiated at this time resulted in a reduction of 3.3% fewer students as of August 2017.

Figure 6.1: UPR-RP General Fund Annual Budgets FY 2016-17 to FY 2024-25

UPR-RP Original Budget

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Budget	$241,505,251	$215,806,542	$212,904,438	$196,397,200	$196,538,489	$170,504,286	$174,798,725	$175,253,200	$172,048,400

Board of Governors Cert. 17, 2024-25

The budget cut eliminated access to the funds for vacant teaching and non-teaching positions, along with employer contributions and other benefits. However, campus administration was authorized to continue with the recruitment of faculty for research projects that were previously approved. Prospectively, faculty recruitment was guided by the provisions of the UPR Fiscal Plan (2018), which limited the recruitment of new teaching positions to the equivalent of 3% of existing faculty (this new faculty recruitment model would be first activated in FY 2019-20, after progress was made in recovering from the Hurricanes Irma and María and resulted in 35 tenure-track hires).

Regarding non-teaching positions, the fiscal plan established that all positions that were vacant due to retirement would be eliminated as part of the annual adjustments to make operations more efficient. Campus administrators moved forward with the processes of relocating non-teaching staff and consolidating functions of administrative personnel to maximize human resources. With a budget of $215.8 million, the campus was able to cover costs associated with academic offerings, the maintenance of physical facilities and infrastructure, student support services, support for program accreditations, and community service.

In September 2017, Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico, damaging and destroying a significant amount of the physical facilities and infrastructure, as well as downing trees and power lines. An initial recovery phase extended until December 2017 with emergency funds approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Structural damage was estimated at $243 million, an amount based on costs at that time. Administrative work and academic offerings were initiated in October 2017, with a revised academic calendar and schedules that permitted continuity of operations.

FY 2018-19

The original operational budget (general fund) for this year was $212.9 million. This marked a net decrease of $2.9 million for the second year in this sequence of cuts. The FOMB eliminated tuition waivers for students and employees while also implementing tuition increases for undergraduate and

graduate students: from $57 to $115 and from $143 to $160 per credit hour, respectively. Fees for maintenance, technology, laboratories, and graduation, among a host of others, also increased significantly. The increase in tuition revenue created somewhat of a cushion for the institution, and operational costs were covered satisfactorily, but these measures affected student enrollment. Both the relocation of non-teaching staff and administrative reorganization continued.

FY 2019-20

The original operational budget (general fund) approved for this year amounted to $196.4 million, reflecting an additional decrease of $16.5 million when compared to the previous year. The FOMB required the UPR to increase its contribution to the UPR Retirement System, and the budget was adjusted to meet this objective. In the second semester, specifically in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began. Due to the closure of on-site operations, costs decreased and the projected budget shortfall of $7.4 million was avoided.

FY 2020-21

The original operational budget (general fund) for this year began with an allocation of $196.5 million approved from UPR Governing Board, of which $31 million was earmarked for UPR Retirement Fund payments. The latter included the regular and increased employer contribution required by the FOMB. This scenario resulted in an operating budget of $165.5 million with an initial shortfall projected of $7.4 million. In consequence, the campus could not cover important budget items, including graduate assistantships, bibliographic resources, security services, and other minor operating expenses.

At the beginning of this financial year, our campus received federal funds to address the fiscal needs related to problems associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. They included financial aid for students and funds that secured the continuity of academic offerings and services to students. These funds were disbursed after an institutional committee was formed to request, receive, and discuss proposals made by the Offices of Executive Deans and other units. Subsequently, federal recovery funds were used to cover expenses allowed by the pandemic grants. Other internal fiscal resources were used to complete the total operational cost.

FY 2021-22

This year, the fifth year of cuts to the UPR Fiscal Plan, the original operational budget (General Fund) totaled $170.5 million, of which $29.6 million was earmarked for contributions to the UPR Retirement System. This left an allocation of $140.9 million for regular operations. The initial budget deficit was projected to be $16 million. However, due to effective short-term planning, the deficit was covered with a combination of complementary funds. These included loss of federal revenue funds secured in the context of the pandemic, earnings from DECEP projects, funds from indirect costs, and funds resulting from reduced expenses.

The budget distribution model that the UPR Central Administration applied for this year was based on internal revenue generated by each of the campuses (i.e., tuition, charges and other revenues from services offered and restricted project funds). A modified zero-based budget method was used as a basis for formulating the budget for each campus, based on the number of projected students; estimated tuition revenues; funds from maintenance, laboratory, and technology fees; the recovery of indirect costs; and miscellaneous revenues. One of the serious challenges that resulted from the implementation of this model is that it instituted significant cuts without considering outstanding needs or overall operational costs. For example, campus fiscal shortfalls and deficiencies had accrued because of a lack of repairs and maintenance to the physical facilities. In addition, it was necessary to recruit non-teaching personnel as well as employees responsible for general administrative services.

In June 2021, our campus presented a report that documented the shortcomings of the model and its adverse effects to the Office of the President. Nevertheless, the model was again implemented without changes that would address these concerns in the forthcoming budgets. As a result, the fiscal capacity of the campus was adversely impacted, and it became more difficult to meet the needs of academic and administrative units. In response, the internal budget process focused more directly on identifying alternative sources of funding to cover the costs of regular operations and to redistribute a portion of these to meet the basic needs of its annual operations.

In light of the large cuts to the operational budget and limited financial resources, the general focus of the allocated budget was to secure funds for: (i) guaranteeing the academic offering, (ii) covering the additional contribution to the UPR Retirement System required by Central Administration, (iii) supporting research through the allocation of funds received as the recovery of indirect costs, (iv) utility payments, and (v) the maintenance of physical facilities, laboratories, and technology for which students pay a fee. Budget allocations for other items such as graduate student assistantships, bibliographic resources, deferred maintenance of physical facilities, and other recurring operational costs were only partially covered by the original budget assigned to the campus and needed to be fully covered with supplementary non-recurring funds.

One of the changes that took place during this year is that the FOMB's UPR System Fiscal Plan integrated a new level of funding approved under Law 53 of 2021. This legislation established that the UPR System, the Government of PR, and the FOMB would fix the annual contribution of the Government of PR to the UPR at a minimum of $500 million for five fiscal years (from 2023 to 2027). Law 53 of 2021 helped to restrict further budget reductions but did not fully end continuation of the 2018 fiscal plan's detrimental cuts.

FY 2022-23
The original operational budget (general fund) for this sixth year under the FOMB was $174.8 million. The increase of $3.3 million was allocated to electrical energy and other items due to cost increases. The gains that were anticipated to result from Law 53 of 2021 were not reflected in the

budget for this year. In fact, the year began with the accumulated deficit projection of $10.2 million. UPR Central Administration explained it had used the cash-to-bank mechanism in previous years' budgets to supplement past periods and that part of the $500 million was used to replace that mechanism, which meant that it was unable to apply larger increases to campus budgets.

Nevertheless, the projected $10.2 million budget deficit was once again covered due to effective decision-making. This involved a combination of supplemental funds from the loss of revenue balance obtained from pandemic funds, earnings from DECEP projects, funds from the recovery of indirect costs, and savings from decreased expenditures in various operational costs.

FY 2023-24

Our campus began this year with a budget of $174.8 million, the same as the previous financial year. It did not reflect any increase or funding allocation associated with the $500 million that the UPR System was to receive under Law 53 of 2021. Said funding was slated for academic and administrative transformation in the five-year period before a possible future round of substantial budgetary cuts.

The UPR Governing Board invited campuses to submit documentation of their budgetary needs. Our campus submitted a $48.5 million request to address the strengthening of the campus infrastructure and the elimination of the budget insufficiency generated by the –$26 million reduction applied in FY 2021-22. This request was also presented to the University Board's Budget Committee, the System-level body that advises the President.

Of the $174.8 million budget, $26.1 million represents employer contributions that had to be paid to the UPR Retirement System, leaving a net $148.7 million for operations from the general fund. This budget began with a projection of using supplemental funds and internal redeployments estimated at $12 million to cover operations. Like prior years, the supplemental funds were identified from funds remaining from the pandemic loss of revenue mechanism, DECEP proceeds, the recovery of funds representing indirect costs, leftover funds from summer activities, and decreases in the costs of minor budget line items.

In October and December of 2023, our campus presented its projection of additional budgetary funds that were needed to maintain a realistic level of operations from FY 2024-25 with its funding requests. The depletion of supplementary resources was noted in this projection. The response to this proposal was that the President and Central Administration would request additional funds from the FOMB so that it can provide campuses with larger budgets.

Overview of Funding Sources & Revenues

Table 6.1 identifies the various funding sources and revenues that have supported operations and sustained the implementation of the Strategic Plan from 2018 to 2023. As it shows, various combinations of fiscal resources have been maximized while managing financial adjustments and cuts to maintain operations, in compliance with university regulations.

<u>External Funds</u>

Funds received from the CARES Act and ARPA, both associated with pandemic recovery, have proven noteworthy given that they assisted in formulating a response to budgetary shortfalls. These funds were used for purchases that strengthened areas such as technology (including improvements and adaptation of the physical and internet infrastructure), equipment for teaching and students, access to software, and faculty training. They were also used to complete changes in course modality and support for the review of various on-site and distance learning academic programs.

For FY 2016-17 to FY 2023-24, the UPR-RP remained focused on obtaining federal grants for research (see item line federal funds–grants and contracts), federal funds for financial aid to students, and income from summer activities, among others. Researchers, colleges, and the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research are proactive in terms of identifying and securing external funds for financing and supplementing research projects. This activity is distributed across 40 departments, evidence of the comprehensive research agenda (EI 6.9: DEGI External Funds Overview).

Table 6.1: UPR-RP Budget Appropriations & Revenues FY 2016-17 to FY 2023-24

UPR-RP CONSOLIDATED BUDGET FY 2017 - FY 24 (P)	Base Year FY 2017	1st Year FY 2018	2nd Year FY 2019	3rd Year FY 2020	4th Year FY 2021	5th Year FY 2022	6th Year FY 2023	7th Year FY 2024 (P)	TOTAL (7 years)	%
GENERAL FUND BUDGET	$241.51	$215.81	$212.90	$196.40	$196.54	$170.50	$174.80	$174.80	$1,341.75	80%
%	90%	90%	83%	86%	78%	70%	78%	79%	80%	
DECEP PROJECTS GAINS	$.00	$.00	$.00	$.00	$.00	$2.05	$4.69	$2.80	$9.54	0.57%
FEDERAL FUNDS - GRANTS AND CONTRACTS	$12.65	$10.49	$14.31	$15.50	$13.77	$16.51	$18.79	$21.00	$110.37	6.60%
CARES ACT AND ARPA FUNDS	$.00	$.00	$.00	$.00	$27.07	$21.75	$8.30	$.00	$57.12	3.42%
LOSS OF REVENUE FUND FROM CARES ACT	$.00	$.00	$.00	$.00	$.00	$11.82	$.00	$.00	$11.82	0.71%
LEGISLATURE AND UPR SCHOLARSHIP FUND	$3.38	$3.38	$6.86	$2.77	$2.09	$2.61	$2.49	$2.50	$22.70	1.36%
STATE GOVERNMENT GRANTS AND CONTRACTS	$2.96	$1.03	$1.44	$.98	$1.95	$2.33	$.38	$3.50	$11.61	0.69%
CORPORATIONS AND PRIVATE GIFTS	$1.55	$1.26	$3.22	$1.29	$3.17	$3.96	$1.42	$1.50	$15.82	0.95%
FACULTY PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	$.57	$.08	$.17	$.19	$.12	$.15	$.40	$.60	$1.72	0.10%
ENDOWMENT INCOME	$.30	$.07	$.13	$.50	$.37	$2.49	$3.56	$2.60	$9.71	0.58%
REVOLVING FUND INCOME	$1.39	$2.38	$2.98	$3.56	$2.73	$4.58	$4.45	$4.70	$25.38	1.52%
OTHER SPECIAL PROJECTS	$2.08	$.79	$10.63	$6.47	$1.06	$2.71	$1.52	$3.80	$26.98	1.61%
CAPITAL PROJECTS	$3.40	$5.19	$5.31	$1.87	$4.46	$2.22	$4.34	$4.00	$27.39	1.64%
RESTRICTED FUNDS	$28.27	$24.66	$45.05	$33.13	$56.78	$73.20	$50.35	$47.00	$330.17	20%
%	10%	10%	17%	14%	22%	30%	22%	21%	20%	
CONSOLIDATED BUDGET	$269.78	$240.47	$257.96	$229.53	$253.32	$243.70	$225.15	$221.80	$1,671.92	100%

Note: The UPR-RP does not consider the student grants received from Pell Grant revenue. Only tuition paid with Pell Grant is considered revenue, and it forms part of the General Fund allotment.

Recently, proposals have also been submitted to federal and local agencies for additional funds to improve the energy infrastructure and other projects. Other activities meant to generate funds include DECEP professional development and online academic programs. In addition, the Chancellor has made progress in efforts to obtain donations and external contributions from alumni and citizens in order to strengthen institutional finances in four main areas: scholarships, colleges and schools, infrastructure, and special projects.

6.6: Comprehensive Planning for Facilities / Infrastructure: Repair & Maintenance

Since FY 2018-19, the UPR Governing Board established a budget allocation for infrastructure maintenance based on funds obtained from the maintenance fee charged to students. This annual allocation has recently fluctuated between $2.4 to $2.6 million, an amount that is insufficient, so it has been supplemented with internal savings from the budget itself and with funds obtained from the pandemic, profits from DECEP projects, and other residual sources. The total combined regular maintenance funds used annually have ranged from $5 to $7 million and were augmented on a non-recurring basis by contributions from pandemic funds to support projects associated with the return to face-to-face teaching and operations following the health emergency.

Major repairs, permanent improvements, and infrastructure projects are considered capital projects. For these, our campus submitted a funding request to UPR Central Administration in February 2024. Funds for these projects are allocated from the capital improvement plan, which is established and managed by the UPR Governing Board. Both the Central Administration's Office of Physical Development and Infrastructure and our campus manage the portfolio of permanent improvement projects that are approved. In years prior to the UPR Fiscal Plan mandated by the FOMB, the UPR issued bonds and incurred loans with the Government Development Bank to address system-wide permanent improvements. Since the implementation of the UPR Fiscal Plan in 2017, the institution continued with the payment of its bond debt but was forced to stop issuing new debt in the bond market that would have allowed it to finance its permanent improvement plan. In recent years, capital projects were serviced with the remainder of these funds along with other items from insurance policy claims, institutional set-aside funds, federal construction grant allocations, and funds allocated by the FOMB.

The capital permanent improvement fund for FY 2017 through FY 2024 reflects a direct allocation of $30.7 million, including projects administered by UPR Central Administration on behalf of our campus. This amount does not include pending projects that received FEMA funds for Hurricane Maria and Hurricane Fiona recovery efforts.

In February 2024, our campus submitted a funding request for an estimated $99 million for capital improvement multi-year projects (not including FEMA-funded projects) and more than $8 million for corrective and preventive maintenance. The outcome of this request depends on the FOMB funding

request made by the UPR Central Administration, which will be part of the FY 2025 budget approval process.

Regarding FEMA funds claimed for hurricane damages, funds were received from Central Administration to begin the restoration of the student dormitories in the Resi-Campus building and the student medical services facilities. In addition, a review process for the restoration of the student dormitories in the Torre Norte building was implemented. These are important projects, part of a plan to continue providing accessible housing facilities to local and foreign students.

Some projects have already been carried out with FEMA funds, such as the repair of the medical services building and the demolition of the School of Communications building. Other projects (more than 130 projects with an estimated cost of over $450 million) are awaiting evaluations of the design and permit processes and the identification of funds between the UPR Central Administration and the PR Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction, and Resilience (COR3).

In addition, the President's Office approved $15 million from the UPR's capital improvement funds for two important projects: $10 million for the first phase of repairs to the electrical energy infrastructure and $5 million for the first phase of major repairs to the chilled water plant that provides air conditioning to several buildings.

Regarding technological tools for, a topic also addressed in Standard VII, the UPR currently has an agreement with the Puerto Rico Treasury Department that will result in the replacement of the existing financial information systems. The project responds to the consolidation of accounting platforms and practices to improve the completion of financial statements for the institution and the Commonwealth Government. Funds to finance this new system will be provided by the PR Treasury Department.

Preparing for New Metrics

In January 2024, UPR Central Administration initiated a study to review its budget model using metrics for indicators such as funds allocated by the Government of PR, tuition revenues, number of students (FTE students), retention and graduation rates, the efficiency of academic offerings, and the efficiency of administration. The purpose of this study is to obtain input that will identify modifications to the model used for determining the budget allocation of campuses within the UPR System. Preliminary analysis of the proposed new model, conducted by the campus Budget Office, emphasizes the need to include an additional indicator that will recognize budgets needed for community service.

Additionally, the maintenance of campus infrastructure is left out of the model under the premise that the UPR will request additional and separate funds from the FOMB to address this component. The proposed new model does not recognize the budget insufficiency of the operational fund, which

is estimated to be $12 million. Given this scenario, our campus leadership is preparing for new budgetary and operational challenges in the coming fiscal years.

To address institutional concerns about funding and future budgets, in March and April of 2023, the administration presented documentation specifying operational needs and recurring accumulated budget adjustments to the UPR President Office, the University Board, and the UPR Governing Board. Thereafter, no response was issued nor has any commitment yet been made to address these concerns. The documentation included a proposal for an additional $52.7 million to cover costs associated with campus operations, specifying special operational needs for FY 2024 totaling $52,715,607 (EI 6.10: UPR-RP Budget Requests for FY 24).

6.7: Annual Independent Audit

The UPR financial statements have been issued on time for the past six years (EI 6.11: Audited Financial Statement June 2023). The UPR issued its audited financial statements and the single audit for fiscal year 2023 before March 31, 2024, the deadline established by the U.S. Department of Education. The work plan to achieve this objective is based on actions and initiatives that have been successful in the past. It includes a calendar of information-gathering activities to keep track of the progress made in preparation for the audit, integration of the necessary and appropriately trained human resources, face-to-face and virtual meetings with campus leadership and campus-level Finance Directors, and meetings with the UPR external financial consultants in charge of the three major campuses (Río Piedras, Medical Sciences, and Mayagüez) to resolve issues that will expedite the audit process. In addition, external professionals are hired to support completion of the financial management tasks related to internal compliance issues with the Governmental Accounting Standards Board and other specialized areas of the institution's fiscal matters. Going forward, these processes will continue.

UPR Central Administration will also continue with the practices and improvements implemented in the past few years related to accounting, in particular monthly and quarterly accounting. These practices allow it to keep up-to-date data and internal reports for cash flow statements, liquidity reports, budget to actual reports, among other areas related to financial matters. These reports are useful in responding to information requirements of the FOMB, as they form part of the evidence required under the UPR Fiscal Plan.

Our campus has not had any findings in the Single Audit regarding the administration of federal funds. The Office of Finance and the External Funds Division Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research have made operational changes in accordance with all requirements related to the administration of federal funds. The most important improvements that have been implemented by the Office of Finance to comply with the issuance of financial statements are:

- Completion of and adherence to accounting closing schedules
- Monthly bank reconciliations

- Quarterly General Ledger account closings
- Coordination by the Finance Director with officers and units to maintain the flow of documents and the recording of transactions in the accounting system.
- Digitalization of documents and supporting documents showing transactions
- Help desk for students and employees concerning student debt balancing processes, insurance claims, collections, and payroll, as well as student financial aid payments
- Provision of official information to users concerning their files and transactions in process

6.8: Measurement & Assessment of Utilization of Institutional Resources

Progress toward the attainment of strategic goals and objectives is reviewed annually in terms of established measurable institutional indicators and unit metrics. Annual achievement reports are revieweded in the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs and the Academic Senate. They provide evidence of the evaluation of the work of all units and the campus. The findings of these reports are used by the administration for the institution's annual planning and resource allocation. Moreover, the Chancellor periodically communicates about planning and institutional improvement in reports to the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board. In addition, assessment data and findings are shared with university constituents and the public at large through the DIIA's dashboard. In addition, the use of funds at the campus level is closely monitored by the UPR's Central Administration and the FOMB. While efficiency is required at both of these levels, it is also a baseline component in the UPR-RP's pursuit of strategic goals and its ongoing commitment to its mission in the midst of ongoing budget cuts.

6.9: Periodic Assessment of Strategic Planning Practices

Our campus assesses planning processes at the campus and unit levels. Over the course of the five-year strategic planning cycle, these processes and practices have been enhanced by an integrated model of planning, resource allocation, management, and outcomes assessment. Performance is periodically monitored using measurable indicators and metrics, institutional research, annual /progress reports, and development-assessment plans.

A sequence of six main practices continue to guide current processes:

- Formulation of goals and objectives: All academic, administrative, and support units prepare five-year development plans that are aligned with the campus mission, the unit's mission statement, and the strategic plan of the campus.
- Allocation of institutional and supplementary resources based on alignment between goals and the objectives and projects proposed by units.
- Identification of success indicators and performance metrics in strategic plan and units' development plans to ensure that progress toward outcomes is evaluated.
- Progress reports: Shortly before the end of the fiscal year, the DIIA collects units' annual reports and prepares a campus-level report on institutional effectiveness that documents overall progress and how the budget has been used.
- Dissemination: The Chancellor presents the campus-level report to the Academic Senate. Discussion and analysis of reports helps units connect their roles and contributions with

broader campus-level goals and facilitate the identification of strategies for addressing challenges, including those that arise unexpectedly.

- Data-driven decision-making: Recently collected data are used to arrive at efficient and practical decisions about resource allocation and planning for the next operational period.

Further Improvement

The implementation of our current integrated model of planning, resource allocation, management, and outcomes assessment has demonstrated that some practices can modified to support the more effective allocation of budgetary resources decisions. Efforts must be focused on realistic long-term goals with tangible objectives in the next cycle. Baseline and target campus metrics for mid-term assessment of strategic goals should be consistently established and progress towards them monitored. In terms of improvement related to planning, more emphasis should be placed on the discussion of annual achievement data reports and their relationship to goals as well as key components of institutional life such as enrollment, student success, and research productivity, not only within the Academic Senate or Administrative Board but also in meetings of colleges and schools.

Findings

- Progress has been made in the ongoing assessment of strategic plans, improving on prior processes which tended to focus assessment on retrospective assessment of plans.
- The budget decision-making process is centralized, limiting the effective input mechanisms that would allow for a more adequate consideration of campus needs.
- Budgeted resources have been managed strategically on an annual basis to responsibly cover minimal operational expenses and ensure the availability of funds needed to comply with the institutional mission.
- Federal funds (grants and contracts) have increased significantly in the period 2018-2024, totaling $110.37 million dollars and averaging $15.76 million annually during this same period. Restrictions on how this funding can be used has limited the campus administration's capacity to act in several areas, such as recruiting non-teaching personnel, among others.

Next Steps

- Our campus must continue the analysis of opportunities initiated through an external consultant so that it can request the necessary support from the Office of Institutional Transformation (OIT) for its implementation.
- To respond effectively to challenges related to infrastructure, improvements to the campus electric grid and water plant, projects for which some funding has been made available, should be prioritized.
- DECEP, the Office of UPR-RP Alumni, DEGI, and various university enterprises (e.g., the Theater, the Museum, the University Press, and sports facilities) should develop mechanisms that allow them to monitor and set goals related to the intake of revenue and thereby strengthen their operations in the realm of external funds.

STANDARD VII: GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP, & ADMINISTRATION

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

Institutional governance involves various bodies, including the Academic Senate, the Administrative Board, the University, the Office of the President, and the UPR Governing Board. Each deliberative body has a set of regulations that define their respective areas of action and influence, as well their operations and membership. They facilitate the effective creation and implementation of institutional regulations as well as their ongoing refinement and progress towards the achievement of strategic goals.

7.1: General Governance Structure

The Law of the University of Puerto Rico (Law 1 of 1966, as amended) establishes the foundation for the institution's governance structure, guidelines for policy development, and decision-making roles and responsibilities of the UPR System and its eleven campuses. At the level of the UPR's Central Administration, governance is the responsibility of three complementary bodies that operate not only to serve UPR-RP but all 11 campuses within the UPR System: the Governing Board, the Office of the President, and the University Board. System-wide policies organized from Central Administration include: the management of admissions, the approval of new academic programs, finances and budgeting, and some aspects of technological infrastructure.

At the campus level, the Office of the Chancellor is responsible for academic and administrative leadership. This office oversees the Administrative Board, the Chancellor's main advisory board, the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs, and the Offices of the other Executive Deans (i.e., Dean of Students, Dean of Administration, and Dean of Graduate Studies and Research). The internal regulations of the Office of the Chancellor and the Administrative Board establish, among other norms, specific responsibilities and guidelines for the scheduling of periodic meetings, including assemblies that provide a space for the participation of students, non-teaching staff, and faculty. These regulations guide campus leadership in making informed decisions about academic and administrative issues that benefit the institution and those it serves.

At the same time, central policies important for all campuses in the UPR System are presented in a key document titled *General Regulations of the University of Puerto Rico,* which is referred to colloquially as "*The Reglamento*" (EI 7.1: General Regulations of the UPR). First filed with the Commonwealth Government in 1988, it establishes general provisions, describes the composition of the University System, and identifies those aspects of governance that are the responsibility of Central Administration

and those that are under the purview of our campus. It also presents policies and guidelines for the organization and operation of campuses as well as personnel regulations for non-teaching staff, faculty, administrators, and other employees. Updates to this document are made through certifications that are issued on an ongoing basis by the Governing Board. These create, replace, or amend existing policies and are periodically compiled as an updated version of *The Reglamento*.

The review completed for this analysis indicates that Governing Board policies and regulations are clearly articulated and transparent, and that when additional comment or information about a policy or change to policy is requested, it is provided through updates to published policy or explanation to the body or unit responsible for implementation. Equally important, it is clear that the publications of certifications allow the relevant governance bodies to execute new policies and thereby respond to plans and challenges as well as to act proactively. The latter is clear in the UPR-RP's responses to developments in higher education (e.g., online teaching, institutional assessment, training and continuing education, reductions in state funding) as well as trying situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, socioeconomic and demographic changes in Puerto Rico, and cuts to the university's state funding. Table 7.1 presents examples of some recent Governing Board certifications that have proven effective in mitigating challenges and comments on their outcomes.

Table 7.1: Recent GB Certifications / TRANSLATION IN PROCESS

Certification	Topic	Outcome
	Program evaluation	
	Budget	
	Appointments	
	Revision to policy	

The regulations and procedures currently in place as well as those that have been recently approved can be easily identified on the institutional websites of the UPR Governing Board and the bodies central to governance at the campus level (i.e., the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board) (EI 7.2: Overview of GB and AB Websites). Moreover, policies related to academic and administrative issues and amendments to the same are disseminated to all sectors of the university community through e-mail and institutional portals. They can also be found through searchable databases that are available to the public. This is the case for both the campus and the bodies based at Central Administration.

7.2: The UPR Governing Board

The Governing Board is the highest-ranking governing body of the UPR System (EI 7.3 GB Certification 100 2013-2014). According to the University of Puerto Rico Law, the work of the Board is to supervise the general functioning of the institution as a system. It is responsible for formulating, examining, and approving the stipulations that govern its development. With respect to membership, it consists of 13 members: an undergraduate student; a graduate student; two tenured professors from

the UPR System; the Secretary of Education (ex officio); a professional with extensive knowledge and experience in the field of finance; a resident of Puerto Rico distinguished for their social and community leadership; five residents of Puerto Rico distinguished in artistic, scientific, or professional fields; and, a citizen residing in Puerto Rico who is connected to Puerto Rican communities abroad. In addition, the law establishes that the Executive Director of the Financial Advisory Authority and Fiscal Agency of Puerto Rico (AAFAF) is a member given that the Governing Board functions under the supervision of the body responsible for implementing policy derived from the federal law known as PROMESA. This was determined by the Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) that since 2017 has been in control of the finances of various public institutions in Puerto Rico.

Most members of the Governing Board are appointed by the Governor of Puerto Rico, with the advice and consent of the Puerto Rico Senate. The exceptions are the two student representatives and the two faculty representatives, who are elected by peers, and the AAFAF representative. All members serve staggered terms and should remain in their posts until their successors are appointed, as established by the Law of the University of PR, Article 3.B.

<u>Responsibilities</u>

Relevant to governance on our campus, the Board is also responsible for approving the appointment of Chancellors, executive deans, and the deans of colleges. The Board is also responsible for approving the strategic plan of the UPR System and for ensuring that progress in meeting its goals is evaluated and assessed. Furthermore, the Board represents the public interest in the University and is charged with ensuring the institution's protection against partisan political interests and any other interests that undermine its autonomy. It should also protect the institution against anti-intellectual tendencies that oppose academic freedom, promote critical awareness as a strength, and contribute to the full development of the virtues of the student body.

The Governing Board is empowered to formulate policies affecting the campuses of the UPR System. Among these are financial policies that may affect the viability or ability of a campus to execute and fulfill the mission and achieve its goals and objectives. As such, the Governing Board approves the annual operational budget for each campus within the UPR System and adopts standards regarding the rights and duties of university personnel. As addressed in Chapter 6, in recent years, the Board has submitted a consolidated budget for the entire UPR system to the FOMB. Once it is approved by the FOMB, the Governing Board certifies the annual operational budget.

Noteworthy considering concerns about ongoing reductions to the UPR's annual budget, official regulations establish that the Governing Board is obligated to ensure the financial security and fiscal solvency of the UPR System. Board members and the President are to work to create, update, and implement policies supporting the effective functioning of institutional units, addressing challenges and ensuring compliance with regulations and standards in the areas of both academics and administrative services.

The necessity of avoiding conflicts of interest on the Governing Board is established by internal regulations, which emphasize that members will prioritize commitment to the institution's needs over personal interests. This is meant to guarantee integrity and transparency in all decisions made by the Board, to bolster professional ethics, and to ensure that its members make decisions that are aligned with the interests of the institution and, more broadly, the constituents that it serves. The review completed for this chapter suggests that current members are well aware of these rules and consider them central to effective and responsible governance. It also showed that there have not been any problems in this area during the period under review.

<u>Committees, Meetings, & Access to Information</u>
The Governing Board establishes standing and special committees to organize its work. Standing committees include:

- Appeals, Law, and Regulations
- Affairs in the Areas of Academics, Research Students and Innovation
- Financial Affairs and the Retirement System
- Audits
- Development
- Infrastructure and Technology
- Accreditation

The Committees on Academic Affairs, Research and Innovation, and Student Affairs work to ensure the university's commitment to guarantee high quality teaching and learning.

Both standing and special committees meet to approve and when necessary make improvements to policies, actions, and determinations of the body. As established in the Governing Board's internal regulations, the full Board holds ordinary meetings monthly, and it can also hold extraordinary meetings. In accordance with institutional policy amended by Law 25 of 2014, the Governing Board broadcasts its ordinary and extraordinary meetings. These are scheduled according to the calendar published each semester (EI 7.4: GB 2022-23 & 2023-24 Calendars). Meetings are broadcast on its You Tube channel and archived online. The transmission and recording of meetings ensure ongoing transparency and allows the UPR community and the public at large to remain abreast of current discussions and decisions made by members of the body.

In accordance with its regulations, all Governing Board minutes are available for public examination, subject to the limitations and procedures established in the Regulations on Access to Official Documents at the UPR (EI 7.5 Certification 139 CE 1992-1993, 7.6: GB Recent Minutes). In addition, the Executive Secretary files all certifications and makes them available for public examination by electronic publication. The review completed for this report indicates that these are up to date. Anyone with a question regarding a certification may contact the Board's Minutes and Records Office.

Until 2017, the Board submitted an annual report to the Governor and the Legislative Assembly concerning its management and the state of UPR finances. However, this practice was put on pause once the FOMB was established and thereafter submitted to its representatives.

Additionally, the Governing Board monitors compliance with legal and regulatory provisions regarding audit reports by the Office of the Comptroller of Puerto Rico, the Internal Audit Office of the Governing Board, and external auditors (7.7 Recent Audit Reports). The Audit Coordinator of UPR-RP also periodically monitors administrators and units at the campus level in order to address issues or deficiencies outlined in internal and external audit reports, such as outstanding information requests and necessary administrative changes.

The UPR President

The President of the UPR System is appointed by the Governing Board after consultation with the university community. As the chief executive officer of the entire UPR System, the president has a wide range of duties which include enforcing existing objectives, rules, and regulations. In addition, the president represents the institution at public functions and legislative hearings, chairs the University Board, and oversees budgetary and development plans. The President maintains a continuous dialogue with the eleven chancellors of the university system. Likewise, an open and frank dialogue is maintained with the FOMB, the Governor's Office, and the Legislative Chambers. The president also presides over or is a member of the public corporations attached to the UPR.

Our current president, Dr. Luis A. Ferrao Delgado, was appointed on July 1, 2022. He worked as a faculty member in the Department of Social Sciences of the College of General Studies since 1988. After holding the position of Dean of the College of General Studies, he served as UPR-RP Chancellor from 2017 to 2022.

The University Board

The University Board, as specified in Article 2 of the Law of the University of Puerto Rico, establishes that its main function is to keep the university system integrated with respect to its overall planning and to advise the President in coordinating the operation of the different institutional units with respect to academics, administration, and finances. The University Board has a set of internal regulations that governs its functions and duties (EI 7.8: UB Internal Regulations) .

The University Board consists of thirty-eight members: the President, eleven Chancellors, eleven faculty representatives elected by the Academic Senate of each campus, eleven student representatives elected by each Student General Council, the Finance Director of Central Administration, and three officials designated by the President. Its main responsibility is to advise the President in coordinating the operation of the various institutional units in the areas of academics, administration, student affairs, and finances.

The University Board holds ordinary and extraordinary meetings. With respect to meetings, ordinary meetings are held monthly in person between the months of September to June (excluding January). In case of emergency situations, meetings are held virtually. Extraordinary meetings are called by the president or at the request of an established percentage of its members. (EI: Example of recent activity)

Among its essential responsibilities and functions are to evaluate the systemic UPR strategic plan submitted by the president; to formulate recommendations that it deems pertinent for consideration; and to evaluate the integrated budget draft for the University System, as formulated by the president, to be submitted to the Governing Board. In the past decade, the Board's regulations have been amended nine times, as evidenced in its certifications.

The UPR-RP Chancellor
Regarding campus-level governance, leadership, and administration, Article 4 of the University of Puerto Rico Law describes the Office of the Chancellor as an institutional unit with academic and administrative autonomy that will act within the bounds of its regulations, those established at the campus level, and the resolutions of the UPR Board of Trustees (now called the UPR Governing Board).

The UPR-RP Chancellor, who is appointed by the Governing Board after being nominated by the President, is the chief executive officer at the campus level, where the Chancellor exercises both administrative and academic authority. The General Regulations and Article 7 of the UPR Law details specific responsibilities for chancellors, including the following:

- Guiding and supervising the university staff and the teaching, technical, research and administrative functions;
- Formulation of the budget proposal;
- Representing the campus at events, ceremonies, and academic activities;
- Presiding over the Academic Senate, the Administrative Board and faculty meetings;
- Appointment and hiring of staff and officials (deans, department directors, and other dependencies assigned to colleges); and
- Resolving appeals filed in response to decisions made by deans.

Our Chancellor, Dr. Angelica Varela Llavona, was appointed on an interim basis on July 1, 2022, and ratified by the Governing Board in February 2023. Dr. Varela Llavona, who completed postdoctoral work at Harvard, holds a doctorate from Ohio State University, a master's in Public Administration and Social Work, and a bachelor's in Psychology from the College of Social Sciences at the University of Puerto Rico. She has served as a member of various working committees, such as the Accreditation Committee for Middle States Council of Higher Education, the Council on Social Work Education Accreditation Committee, the Public Administration Reorganization Project Committee, and the Comprehensive Sustainable Strategic Development Planning Committee for Puerto Rico. In the realm of public service, she has served as Secretary of the Department of Family

Affairs, Sub-Secretary in the Department of State, and Executive Director of the Center for Specialized Government Management Studies in the Office of the President of the UPR. Additionally, Dr. Varela Llavona has held several positions in the Municipality of San Juan, such as special assistant to the mayor, Department of Human Resources Deputy Executive Director, Director of the Division of Program Evaluation and Analysis, and Social Services Specialist.

The Chancellor has the support of administrators with formal authority, among them the deans of our colleges as well as the executive deans. These members of her team provide direction regarding day-to-day operations; they also work to ensure compliance with institutional regulations and making progress towards the goals in annual and long-term strategic plans.

The Chancellor discusses issues related to the campus in monthly meetings with the President. Topics such as budget, infrastructure (including recent power outages on campus), and special projects related to research and internationalization (including memorandums of understanding with institutions of higher education in Spain) have been discussed recently. Also, in compliance with the UPR System's General Regulations, the Chancellor submits annual reports on institutional activities to the President and Governing Board (EI 7.9: Office of Chancellor Annual Report). The Chancellor's performance is evaluated in intervals of four to six years.

The General Regulations of the UPR, which establish the provisions applicable to all appointment consultation processes, delegate the campus-level tasks associated with selecting the Chancellor to the Academic Senate. The process begins with the establishment of a seven-member search committee, six elected academic senators, and one student senator. One of the consultation committee's main responsibilities is to establish the evaluation criteria for candidates. For consultations carried out on our campus in 2018 and 2022, the following eight criteria were established: minimum requirements in research or creative work, experience in academic management, teaching experience, effective communication, administrative management, leadership and service. These criteria ensure that the candidates have appropriate credentials and professional experience. In addition, they facilitate the comparison of each candidate's credentials. Each candidate presents a work plan in a set of public presentations that take place on campus; this allows them to identify the priorities and strategies for institutional improvement that they would undertake. Non-teaching staff also play an important role in the process of selecting the Chancellor, as they form a consultation committee of three elected employees to consider and evaluate candidates. Both consultation committees present a report on the advantages and disadvantages of the candidates to the Governing Board and the President for their analysis and final decision.

As a whole, the process promotes the participation of the entire university community (students, faculty, and non-teaching staff, among others) through a variety mechanisms: forums, public hearings with candidates, surveys, and circular letters disseminated by email. The assignment of specific roles and functions to different groups (participants who provide their input, consultants who report

objectively, and those who approve the appointment) contributes to the participatory nature of the process.

The Administrative Board

The Administrative Board consists of the Chancellor, the four executive deans, the college deans, two senators elected from among its non-ex officio membership; and an elected student. As the Chancellor's primary advisory board, it oversees the preparation and approval of the operational budget to be submitted to the Central Administration, approves the strategic plan, and oversees the granting of tenure to faculty and non-teaching staff, in accordance with article 8 of the UPR General Regulations. At the end of AY 2022-23, the Administrative Board began a discussion about the impact that recent changes, in particular the process by which the campus operational budget is approved, have on its responsibilities as a governing body.

The Academic Senate

The Academic Senate is the university community's official forum for discussing general issues of interest concerning campus operations and for matters over which it has jurisdiction (Article 11.C of the UPR University Law). Its members establish academic standards, collaborate with other bodies of the University System, and fulfill the responsibilities conferred to it under the UPR General Regulations. Additionally, its internal regulations serve as a guide for the institutional work that it carries out (EI: 7.10: AS Internal Regulations).

The Academic Senate consists of 66 members which include 13 student senators elected by their peers; the Dean of Academic Affairs, Administration, and Student Affairs and college deans; the director of the Library System and the President of the General Student Council are ex-officio members. The Student Ombudsman participates as an invited permanent member. The Senate serves as the primary advisory body for academic matters, budget issues, policy development, and student issues. Its functions include providing general guidance for teaching and research programs, as well as coordinating initiatives for colleges and corresponding departments. It establishes the general standards for admission, tenure, promotion, and different types of leaves for faculty members, in correlation with those established in the UPR System regulations.

The Academic Senate establishes the criteria for appointing each of the administrative deans through certifications, following a process which ensures that the Chancellor's team consists of qualified administrators (UPR-RP CVs). These appointments are made through a direct consultation process led by an ad hoc committee composed of members of the Academic Senate (EI 7.11: AS Certification 103, 2022-23). The work schedule it establishes and the participation mechanisms in this process, such as the sharing of opinions about candidates via email or letters and in public hearings, are communicated to the campus community through a circular letter. Subsequently, the results of the process and the appointment of administrative deans are communicated to the community through certifications that are announced by email.

In terms of organization, the Chancellor presides over the Academic Senate. The body has six permanent committees: Agenda, Academic Affairs, Claustral Affairs, Student Affairs, University Law and Regulations, and the Committee to Recommend Academic and Honorary Distinctions.

In recent years, senators have analyzed and evaluated tuition increases, budget, requests for teaching and non-teaching positions, and infrastructure projects, among others. These issues are sent under certification to the President so that they can be raised before the Governing Board. In addition, the Senate has developed policies and practices that help the campus navigate situations such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and the global pandemic.

The General Student Council

The General Student Council consists of members from the student councils of each college and school on campus. Student representatives who are elected by their peers contribute to governance at all levels, and their participation functions as a means of ensuring that the administration is aware of student experiences, including challenges they face. Their participation in governance helps to ensure that the campus environment is one that is conducive to learning, dialogue, and academic achievement. The General Student Council promotes widespread student participation and helps to disseminate information about matters of institutional interest, as its members engage the institution with voice and with vote.

Administrative Units

The Office of Legal Counsel advises the appointing authority, the Chancellor. Under this office is the Contracts Unit which is responsible for reviewing and ensuring that contracts and contracting processes are carried out in accordance with the law, regulations, and current guidelines. The Title IX Office is part of the Office of Compliance and Audits; among its functions is the assurance that personnel and students are treated with equity and justice.

Other units, including academic departments and programs and administrative units, have the authority to define internal policies, norms, and procedures to fulfill their responsibilities in accordance with the campus mission and goals and, when applicable, external regulations. These units are led by experienced personnel who are qualified to perform the roles and responsibilities that they have been assigned. Administrative staff have the required credentials in their areas of expertise, in compliance with UPR regulations. In the context of a large number of retirements and limited number of hires in recent years, campus leadership has turned to mechanisms such as reclassification, differentials, extra compensation, and overtime as strategies to retain non-teaching staff and secure the provision of needed academic and administrative services.

Various administrative units on our campus have recently made changes resulting in more effective operations and the provision of services. These include the Office of Human Resources which published a new calendar that includes deadlines for appointments, contracts, and other processes and also identifies dates for trainings, capacity-building, and reports to submitted to governing bodies.

This change, which responds to a process of institutional assessment carried out by the Office of the Dean of Administration, improves on prior practices by making operations such as those of the Office of Human Resources more focused by organizing them in terms of an annual cycle (EI 7.12: OHR Report for Assessment of Strategic Plan).

In similar fashion, the Office of Planning and the Development of Infrastructure, recently carried out a process of needs assessment concerning the use of physical space. It relied on a tool that was distributed to colleges in order to program improvements and ensure effective planning over a period of five years. Responding to concerns about the availability of FEMA funds expressed by the Academic Senate and the state of infrastructure, the tool was used in conjunction with the Office of the Chancellor to develop a master plan for infrastructure improvements that includes a set of guidelines for tracking and measuring the progress that will lead to the plan's completion.

University Autonomy

Article 4.A of the UPR Law recognizes the authority of the institutional units that make up the UPR System, noting that they will operate with academic and administrative autonomy within the norms provided by the Law and University Regulations.

Autonomy allows campus leadership to address situations on campus, to comply with current regulations, and to avoid any adverse situations or obstacles that would negatively affect academic and administrative services. In addition, it allows campus leadership to submit to the President any request that entails authorization from the Governing Board, including budget allocation, petitions for teaching and non-teaching positions, amendments to regulations, and proposals for the permanent improvement infrastructure projects.

In recent years, ensuring the integrity and autonomy of the university system, as stipulated by law, has been a challenge for the Governing Board. This due to the fiscal crisis and decisions made by the Fiscal Oversight and Management Board (FOMB), which reviews and determines the budget, but does not necessarily always provide the institution with funding to complete the projects and transformations it suggests should be prioritized. The institution has demonstrated its commitment to its established practices of shared governance, strategic leadership, and effective administration by maintaining fiscal discipline, increasing external funds, executing numerous cost-saving measures, and adjusting expenses. This has allowed it to protect its academic offerings and to maintain its institutional accreditation and the accreditation of its academic programs, in addition to other functions. Among these achievements, the renewal of the license to operate as a Higher Education Institution in Puerto Rico granted by the Board of Postsecondary Institutions (JIP) stands out.

The FOMB has insisted on becoming involved with decision-making that was traditionally under the purview of the UPR leadership. It has issued statements suggesting that implementing changes that it endorses might lead to a more robust, or at least predictable, budget. In June 2024, the UPR President issued a statement requesting members of the FOMB to recognize that "The University

cannot endure any more budget cuts," pointing out that operations of individual campuses will be at risk if it executes the reductions the Board has announced. Moreover, the President underscored that the UPR System has complied with its mandates which include the reduction of payroll, the implementation of a plan of shared services between campuses, the establishment of a new billing system, and further development of the Information System known as Next.

University Reform

The Multi-sectorial Commission for University Reform seeks to improve the structure and functioning of the university, including some issues related to Standard VII. The Commission filed the University Reform Project (EI 7.13: P. del S. 172) before the legislative assembly of Puerto Rico in 2023. This project was presented with the consent of and participation of representatives of each of the university community's sectors (i.e., faculty, students, administrators and non-teaching staff); however, it was not supported by the leadership based in UPR Central Administration.

Its contents address issues related to institutional improvement in the realm of governance and urge the leadership to:

- maximize the fiscal, administrative, and academic autonomy of the university system and the institutional units that comprise it and guarantee its depoliticization.
- maximize the principles of merit and accountability, within the exercise of responsible autonomy, as components of a culture of transparency and continuous evaluation of its main administrators.
- achieve effective participation as it relates to the decision-making of the different university sectors, complying with the principle of representativeness, and provide guidance for the exercise of fiduciary management of the governing bodies.
- decentralize the UPR System, within a framework that clearly articulates its units, achieving the streamlining of decision-making regarding academic structures and programs of study on different campuses.
- enable institutional renewal and depoliticization through the establishment of fixed terms for the highest positions of governance, allowing these to be long enough to ensure continuity and the completion of their plans and projects of institutional improvement.
- require the effective exercise of planning and streamlining processes and decision-making by reviewing the functions and structures established by law.
- guarantee robust public financing that supports campuses in complying with their missions.
- strengthen and enrich the university's capacity to achieve local and international accreditations and recognitions that nurture ongoing institutional improvement and high quality performance by academic and administrative units.

Audits

In March of 2024, the Office of the President announced that it complied with the timely submission of the Single Audit Report, for FY 2023 (7.14: Compliance with SAR). Also related to financial integrity and management, internal audits allow for the evaluation and compliance with university laws and regulations. These require the monitoring of administrative processes related to finances and compliance with the external audit conducted by the Office of the Comptroller of Puerto

Rico (7.15: Compliance with External Audit). Both sets of processes reinforce transparency, the efficient use of resources, and effective controls.

Non-Teaching Staff Classification and Training

In 2023, UPR-RP began updating the Classification and Remuneration Plan for non-teaching and trusted personnel, which had not been reviewed since 1977. This review, which has been partially completed, involves aligning the job descriptions of these employees with the current needs, skills, experiences of their respective units and appropriate compensation.

Training for non-teaching staff takes place on an ongoing basis. For example, during the first semester of AY 2019-20, seven workshops were offered by the Office of the Dean of Administration, impacting 155 administrative employees from different campus units. Training focused on preparation for the most complex techniques related to financial systems. During the second semester of the same year, training included topics such as purchasing, accounts codes, pre-intervention, management of projects with external funds, direct payment, contracts, stipends, among others. The training sessions were recorded and are available online through the Office of the Dean of Administration's website.

Another important campus unit is the DTAA, which provides technical assistance and training for all staff in the use of technology tools and provides technical maintenance and assistance to faculty and staff. In addition, the UPR System has appropriate regulations for the management of current information systems. Modifications and implementations have been made to the NEXT Portal to better meet academic and administrative needs on an ongoing basis.

Chief Executive Officer

The University of Puerto Rico conducts periodic evaluations that demonstrate the efficiency of governance, leadership, and administration. The President and chancellors are evaluated by the Governing Board, as evidenced by its Certification 95 of AY 2015-16. Similarly, the UPR-RP Academic Senate conducts evaluations of the Chancellor's work through requests for information from her office and various academic and administrative units, which it evaluates and for which it makes recommendations. In addition, this body evaluates the performance of the Chancellor using an instrument designed for this purpose (see 7.16: AS Cert. 100, 2021-22 and AS Certification 137, 2021-2022).

The Compliance and Audits Office (OCAO in Spanish), which is under the supervision of the Office of the Chancellor, is responsible for providing support, coordination, and assistance in compliance efforts concerning federal and state laws, as well as institutional regulations. It aims to promote the highest standards of ethical conduct among employees. To achieve this, it identifies compliance requirements with binding regulations, presents reports to the Office of the Chancellor, and coordinates action plans with colleges, schools, and other administrative authorities on campus.

Institutional Research

The Division of Institutional Research and Assessment (DIAA) also plays a crucial role in the periodic assessment of governance, leadership, and administration. This office considers the effectiveness of various administrative and academic endeavors, leading to more informed decision-making and to fulfillment of institutional mandates and accrediting agency requirements, among others. The DIRA is responsible for generating, receiving, analyzing, disseminating, and safeguarding official institutional data collected from students, faculty, and non-teaching staff. In compliance with its mission, the DIAA publishes annual reports on the institutional effectiveness, in accordance with the campus strategic plan.

Findings

- Shared governance is strengthened through open and transparency and this has contribute to effectiveness in the context of concerns about the budget and divergent opinions on issues of institutional interest.
- The control of financial decisions by the FOMB has impacted the autonomy of the University, as well as operations, since the budget cuts in most cases are neither formulated within its governing structures nor harmonized with the needs at the academic and administrative levels.
- The processes that offices of executive deans have undertaken to achieve goals associated with institutional improvement and greater effectiveness have included institutional assessment, but these are not always documented in reports given that they tend to focus on outcomes.

Next Steps

- The UPR-RP Academic Senate should conduct an annual self-assessment exercise that assists it in identifying the protocols and practices that make the body most effective, as well as those that allow it to swiftly assist in implementing institutional improvements.
- Campus level reports should be developed so that they assist in documenting institutional assessment, carefully distinguishing assessment from evaluation.
- The Governing Board should carry out an annual self-assessment exercise that assists in centralizing the protocols and practices that make the body most effective.
- A plan that operationalizes the assessment of leadership and governance on an annual basis should be put into place at all levels.