



**UPR**

# Self-Study Report

## 2025

Submitted to Middle States Commission on Higher  
Education

**YO  
IUPI**





**2025 Self-Study Report**  
**University of Puerto Rico,**  
**Río Piedras Campus**

**Prepared for the Reaffirmation of Accreditation through**  
**Self-Study**

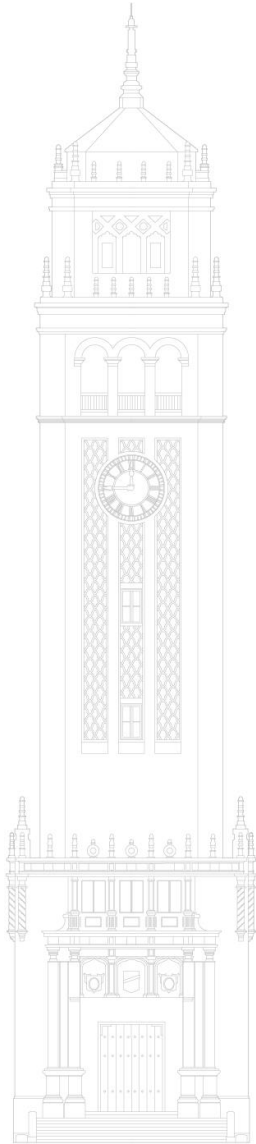
**Middle States Commission on Higher Education**  
**(MSCHE)**

**February 2025**

## LETTER FROM THE CHANCELLOR



**UPR RP**  
UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO  
Recinto de Río Piedras  
Rectoría



February 24, 2025

Dr. Heather Perfetti  
President  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education  
3624 Market Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104-2680

Dear Dr. Perfetti,

I am pleased to submit the Self-Study Report for the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus in preparation for our upcoming evaluation for reaccreditation. This comprehensive document reflects the institution's ongoing efforts to meet and uphold the rigorous standards of the Commission, which have served as a roadmap and assisted us in embracing the theme: **Commitment to Institutional Excellence and Empowerment for Continuous Improvement**.

Throughout the self-study process, a wide range of stakeholders, including faculty, non-teaching staff, students, and administrators, have contributed to the honest and thorough evaluation of our practices, resources, and overall institutional effectiveness. We believe this report demonstrates our commitment to continuous improvement, transparency, and alignment with the Commission's standards.

We look forward to engaging with the evaluation team and are confident that our efforts toward strengthening institutional quality will be evident throughout the review process.

Sincerely,

  
Angélica Varela Llavona, Ph.D.  
Chancellor

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MSCHE Self-Study 2025

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## ACRONYMS

### LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACOI	Authorization to Take Courses in Other Institutions	Autorización para Tomar Cursos en Otras Instituciones
ACUDEN	Integral Childhood Care and Development Administration	Administración para el Cuidado y Desarrollo Integral de la Niñez
APA	Academic Accomplishment Program	Programa para el logro Académico
APPU	Puerto Rican Association of University Professors	Asociación Puertorriqueña de Profesores Universitarios
SA	Academic Senate	Senado Académico
CAO	Compliance and Articulation Office	Oficina de Cumplimiento y Articulación
CAUCE	Center for Urban, Community, and Entrepreneurial Action	Centro de Acción Urbana, Comunitaria y Empresarial
CDLC	Center for the Development of Linguistic Competencies	Centro para el Desarrollo de Competencias Lingüísticas
CEA	Center for Academic Excellence	Centro para la Excelencia Académica
CEDESP	Center for Studies and Research on Puerto Rican Higher Education	Centro de Estudios y Documentación Sobre la Educación Superior Puertorriqueña
CEPR	Puerto Rico Council on Education	Consejo de Educación de Puerto Rico
CFO	Chief Financial Officer of the University of Puerto Rico	Director Financiero de la Universidad de Puerto Rico
CGS	College of General Studies	Facultad de Estudios Generales
CIPE	Institutional Committee for the Implementation of the UPR-RP Strategic Plan	Comité Institucional para la Implementación del Plan Estratégico
CIP	UPR-RP Institutional Budget Committee	Comité Institucional de Presupuesto
CIPSHI	Institutional Committee for the Protection of Human Beings in Research	Comité Institucional para la Protección de los Seres Humanos en la Investigación
CITI	Collaborative Institutional and Training Initiative	Iniciativa Institucional de Adiestramiento Colaborativo

CRIIAS	Undergraduate Center for Research and Learning	Centro de Recursos de Investigación y Aprendizaje Subgraduado
DAA	Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs	Decanato de Asuntos Académicos
CORE	College of Rehabilitation Counseling	Colegio de Consejería de Rehabilitación
DARI	Office of the Assistant Dean of International Relations	Decanato Auxiliar de Relaciones Internacionales
DIIA	Division of Institutional Research and Assessment	Division de Investigación Institucional y Avalúo
DCODE	Department of Counseling and Student Development	Departamento de Consejería para el Desarrollo Estudiantil
DECEP	Continuing Education and Professional Studies Divisions	Division de Educación Continua y Estudios Profesionales
DEGI	Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research	Decanato de Estudios Graduados e Investigación
DSA	Office of the Dean of Student Affairs	Decanato de Asuntos Estudiantiles
DTAA	Academic and Administrative Technologies Division	División de Tecnologías Académicas y Administrativas
EAP	Employee Assistance Program	Programa de Asistencia al Empleado
ELASH II	English Language Assessment	Sistema de Avalúo del Inglés para
SH II	System for Hispanics II	Hispanos II
ESLAT	English as a Second Language Assessment Test	Prueba de Avalúo del Inglés como Segundo Lenguaje
EXADEP	Postgraduate Studies Admission Test	Examen de Admisión a Estudios de Posgrado
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid	Solicitud Gratuita de Ayuda Federal para Estudiantes
FACI	Faculty of Communication and Information	Facultad de Comunicación e Información
FIPI	Institutional Fund for Research	Fondo Institucional para la Investigación
FOMB	Financial Oversight and Management Board	Junta de Control Fiscal
GE	General Education	Educación General
GMAT	Graduate Management Admission Test	Examen de Admisión para Graduados en Gestión Empresarial
GRE	Graduate Record Examination	Examen de Registro para Graduados
GSC	General Student Council	Consejo General de Estudiantes
GSP	Graduating Student Profile	Perfil del Egresado
GTAH	Ad-Hoc Working Group	Grupo de Trabajo at Hoc



HEPT	Humanities English Placement Test	Prueba de Ubicación en Inglés para las Humanidades
HRS	Human Resources System	Sistema de Recursos Humanos
IACS	International Association of Counseling Services	Asociación Internacional de Servicios de Consejería
IACUC	Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee	Comité Institucional para el Uso y Cuidado de Animales
IGS	General Admissions Index	Índice General de Solicitud
iINAS	Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Initiatives	Iniciativas de Investigación y Actividad Creativa Subgraduada
IPEDS	Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System	Sistema Integrado de Información Educativa Postsecundaria
IR	Institutional Research	Investigación Institucional
ISEP	International Student Exchange Program	Programa Internacional de Intercambio de Estudiantes
LIM	Children’s Lab	Laboratorio de Infantes y Maternales
LS	Library System	Sistema de Biblioteca
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration	Administración Nacional de la Aeronáutica y del Espacio
NIH	National Institute of Health	Instituto Nacional de la Salud
NSE	National Student Exchange	Intercambio Nacional de Estudiantes
NSF	National Science Foundation	Fundación Nacional de la Ciencia
NSLDS	National Student Loan Data System	
OCIU	Office for the Maintenance of University Installations	Oficina para la Conservación de las Instalaciones Universitarias
OEAE	Office for the Evaluation of Student Learning	Oficina de Evaluación del Aprendizaje Estudiantil
OLAS	Online Learning Assessment System	Sistema Digital para el Avalúo del Aprendizaje
OPASO	Office of Environmental Protection and Occupational Security	Oficina de Protección Ambiental y Seguridad Ocupacional
OPDF	Office of Planning and Physical Development	Oficina de Planificación y Desarrollo Físico
OSEI	Office of Students with Disabilities	Oficina de Servicio al Estudiantes Incapacitados
OTI	Office of Institutional Transformation	Oficina de Transformación Institucional
PAAED	Academic Support Program for Special Skills Students	Programa de Apoyo Académico a Estudiantes con Destrezas
PACTIC	Administrative Project for Certification in Communication and Information Technologies	Proyecto Administrativo para la Certificación en Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicación
PAE	Financial Aid Program	Programa de Asistencia Económica
PAEI	Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Plan	Plan de Assessment de Efectividad Institucional
PATRIA	Project for Developmental Health Service	Pograma de Servicio para el Desarrollo de la Salud
PEAF	Formative Academic Experiences	Programa de Experiencias Académicas

	Program	Formativas
PEAU	Evaluation Tests for University Admission	Pruebas de Evaluación y Admisión Universitaria
PECA	Continuing Education for Adults Program	Programa de Educación Continua para Adultos
PET	Program of Study and Work	Programa de Estudio y Trabajo
PICIC	Project to Integrate Information Skills into the Curriculum	Programa para la Integración de Competencias de Información
PIE	Educational Initiatives Program	Programa de Innovaciones Educativas
PRAAR	Recruitment Program for High Performing Athletes	Programa de Reclutamiento de Atletas de Alto Rendimiento
PREI	Interdisciplinary Studies Program	Programa de Estudios Interdisciplinarios
PRREE	Recruitment and Retention Program for Student Success	Programa de Reclutamiento, Retención y Éxito Estudiantil
PSAE	Academic and Educational Services Program	Programa de Servicios Académicos Educativos
PROMESA	Puerto Rico Oversight Management and Economic Stability Act	Ley para el Manejo y Estabilidad Económica de Puerto Rico
SIS	Student Information System	Sistema de Información Estudiantil
UPR	University of Puerto Rico System	Universidad de Puerto Rico
UPR-RP	University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras Campus	Universidad de Puerto Rico Recinto de Río Piedras

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The 2025 self-study report serves as a roadmap for the reaffirmation of accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education for the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus, embracing the theme: **Commitment to Institutional Excellence and Empowerment for Continuous Improvement. Organized using the** “standard-based approach,” the report’s sections discuss various examples of institutional improvement alongside the seven MSCHE standards and the 15 requirements of affiliation. Each section ends with a list of findings and next steps. Identifying challenges and articulating critiques is important to the self-study process, but it is not the sole focus of this work. The self-study process has shown that promoting awareness of our strengths and achievements is also an effective way of cultivating growth, insight, and progress. It has also opened up for a more comprehensive discussion of our mission as the institution engages new demographic trends, societal shifts, and technological change.

## INTRODUCTION

The University of Puerto Rico is a multi-campus state-supported institution of higher education licensed by the Postsecondary Institution Board. When it was founded in 1900 as an Industrial Normal School established in the town of Fajardo, its main goal was to prepare teachers to work in the rural areas. Twenty students and five professors made up the initial group. In 1901, the institution was relocated to Río Piedras and officially recognized as an academic institution by the legislature of Puerto Rico on March 12, 1903. The Normal School became the University of Puerto Rico and its first graduating class, which consisted of 13 students, graduated in June of 1907.

### **The Río Piedras Campus**

Over the last 120 years, growth has been exponential in terms of both size and achievements, which have contributed to our status as the most prestigious and respected institution of higher education in Puerto Rico. Today our campus is the island's premier institution of higher education and the oldest and largest of eleven campuses in the University of Puerto Rico System. It is a public land-grant campus that by law is obligated to pursue and uphold the general mission of the University as set out in the Law of the University of Puerto Rico of January 20, 1966. UPR-RP is the leading public university on the island and one of the key centers of research in Puerto Rico and the wider Caribbean region.

Our reputation extends beyond national and international borders, crossing languages and academic disciplines. It is bolstered by the solid formation and professional success of UPR-RP graduates as well as the accomplishments of first-rate faculty members who are committed to the goals of a tertiary education of excellence and public service. Accordingly, the UPR-RP has a diverse faculty with academic degrees awarded by world-class universities. Experienced non-teaching staff provide support and services that enrich course offerings, campus activities, and the intellectual and professional formation of students. In addition, our institution has a long tradition of welcoming visitors that include academic, scientific, and government leaders from the U.S., the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, and other parts of the world to join us in academic endeavors and the enrichment of the educational experiences of our students.

As a public research-oriented comprehensive doctoral institution, our campus is distinguished by diverse academic offerings that include 59 undergraduate programs, 47 master's degrees, 4 postgraduate certificates, one first professional level, 16 doctoral programs, and a wide variety of offerings that are available through the Division of Continuous Education and Professional Studies (DECEP). Ongoing improvement has been guided by a vision in which academic excellence and activity in research, artistic creation, and other professional activities reinforce one another. The institution nurtures the formation of professionals in the arts, business, and science, providing our community with a substantial portion of its most talented journalists, writers, teachers, scientists, architects, actors, musicians, historians, lawyers, medical professionals, and public relations specialists.

Our dedication to both Puerto Rican society and research across various disciplines has been recognized in numerous contexts. In February of 2025, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching designated our institution Research 2, *High Spending and Doctorate Production Institution*. During the 2023-2024 academic year, the university secured \$69 million in external funds, including over \$22 million for research through

competitive grants from agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Health, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

### **Our Most Important Constituents**

Each year the most talented and academically promising students among Puerto Rico's high school graduates choose the UPR-RP as the place to complete their higher education. Upon enrollment, they have access to the most comprehensive academic offerings anywhere in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, with a wide range of majors and opportunities for coursework on a par with large public research institutions in the mainland U.S. and Latin America. They are provided with the best educational resources available on the island and the support services that they need to succeed in their programs of study and to graduate prepared for the future.

Our campus serves approximately 13,000 students annually. Recent figures show approximately 8,738 undergraduates and 2,614 graduate studies. This population makes the UPR-RP the largest degree-granting institution in the Caribbean region. Undergraduate and graduate students alike receive rigorous academic preparation strengthened by service, hands-on learning, and creative activities. As a result, they stand out for their academic work and are awarded prizes in conferences and competitions at the international level.

### **Our Contributions to Society**

In the last decade, the UPR-RP's contributions to Puerto Rican society have strengthened its commitment to excellence and public service. The institution takes special measures to enrich faculty and students' involvement in its immediate local context. The Center for Urban, Community, and Entrepreneurial Action (CAUCE), for example, promotes the physical, social, and economic revitalization of the Río Piedras community with the help of local businesses, community organizations, and development and housing projects. Another important contribution to society is our School of Law's Legal Assistance Clinic, a requisite part of the curriculum for all law students. The clinic provides *pro bono* legal services in the areas of intellectual property, patents, community economic development, domestic violence, and sexual and gender discrimination. It fosters in our law students an understanding of Puerto Rican society that provides grounding for the practice of law.

The institution's growth and embrace of service are rooted in a vision of higher education and productivity in research and related professional activities complement and reinforce one another. The institution's commitment to Puerto Rican society and research in diverse disciplines is bolstered by significant external funding. In academic year 2023-2024 the UPR-RP received \$69M in external funds, with more than \$22M for research coming from competitive grants awarded by agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Health, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

### **Our Self-Study Review**

Our campus was first accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Public Schools in 1946. Today, in addition to institutional accreditation, over 62 academic programs and services are accredited by more than 25 local and international agencies, a sign of the strength of the academic curriculum at the core of students' educational

experiences. Accreditation has nurtured a culture of change and opportunities for reflection and transformation in the pursuit of excellence.

The Self-Study Steering Committee held frequent meetings to discuss reaccreditation and identify issues to be addressed in the distinct stages of the process. The committee submitted the document *Design for the Self-Study 2024* to MSCHE in May 2023. It described the self-study process and presented our preliminary project design and format preferences. Once the design and format were approved by MSCHE, work officially began. Throughout the process, the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs served as the administrative base for the project. The steering committee established seven workgroups, each consisting of between five and seven members. Approximately 60 faculty members, non-teaching staff, and students served as members of the working groups that created the initial reports upon which this report's sections are based.

Two drafts of this report, a preliminary draft and a revised draft, were made available for review and commentary to promote discussion and engagement across the campus community. Sharing these drafts kept our campus community aware of progress on the project and cultivated familiarity with the issues it addressed. The preliminary and revised drafts were distributed in August 2024 and December 2024, respectively. The revised draft included changes made after the careful consideration of comments, queries, corrections, and suggestions that were submitted by members of our campus community. This input assisted in adjusting the scope and focus of the report and helped to ensure that it addressed the concerns and opinions of the campus community.

The self-study process has shown that promoting awareness of our strengths and achievements is also an effective way of cultivating growth and progress. Thus, the completion of this self-study has facilitated a balanced perspective with respect to the assessment of the university's performance under the recently finalized strategic plan, Commitment 2023. It has also assisted in articulating the main initiatives that will guide the new strategic plan, Strategic Routes. This work has assisted us in the assessment of our performance as we engage in new planning processes that will improve our institution and nurture those areas in which we have excelled. This is particularly important at the present time as the institution prepares for yet another change in leadership. Looking ahead, it is clear that improvement should encompass strengthening existing structures and daily operations to safeguard academic excellence.



## **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.*

### **The UPR-RP Mission Statement**

This section discusses the UPR-RP mission and strategic goals, focusing on the period since our last self-study for MSCHE, 2016-2024, as well as improvements slated for the future that are related to the standard. During this period, several individuals have served as Chancellor, 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. The mission, which is central to campus culture, has contributed to continuity and effective decision-making by the administration during this period.

As stipulated by law, our campus must pursue and uphold the general mission of the University of Puerto Rico System. This 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 at the level of the campus. 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://www.uprrp.edu/english/mission-vision>). The campus mission guides strategic planning and contributes directly to the institution's sense of purpose. It also assists in integrating numerous initiatives, activities, and offerings, recognizing their importance as contributions to Puerto Rican society.

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 aforementioned Law of the University of Puerto Rico, articulates aspirations and core values in five main areas: (i) student learning; (ii) graduate education; (iii) undergraduate education; (iv) teaching, research, and community service; and (v) innovative and relevant programs.

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, 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, including 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 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.

These aspirations and values guide the institution's main operations, shaping the academic offerings, research projects, and investments in service 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 pillars of the institution's foundation as well as its accomplishments and its ability to respond to the needs of Puerto Rican society. For many, they are also a source of pride.

Some characteristics of the mission, including its emphasis on graduate education, research, community service, and commitment to ideals and values of 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 UPR-RP mission continues to be pertinent to the institution's vitality. Establishing the purpose of our campus within the context of Puerto Rican society and higher education, it assists in navigating challenges, contributes to decision-making by campus-level bodies such as the Administrative Board and the Academic Senate, serves as a resource for the development of policies, and when necessary, assists in improving and updating them. The mission has also facilitated smooth transitions in leadership.

The UPR-RP mission was approved and implemented in 1989-90 and has continued to prove effective. Establishing a consensus about the university's main functions, it cultivates a shared vision of the work that needs to be done. Our last two strategic plans have been organized around its main elements, in the case of Commitment 2023 through "priority areas" and in the case of our new plan, Routes 2024-2029, which is described below, through "strategic issues." Furthermore, shared commitment to its central precepts reinforces the general mission of the larger, eleven-campus UPR System. The latter is 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).

### **Fulfillment of Mission**

The mission and the strategic goals of Commitment 2023 have served the campus and its internal and external constituents in the face of challenges that have arisen in recent years. It has, for example, acted as a reliable anchor since the creation of the Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) that was established as a result of the federal law called PROMESA. Passed by the U.S. Congress in 2016, this legislation altered the relationship between the UPR System and the Commonwealth government. This is apparent in terms of state funding for public education, decision-making that impacts academic programs, and support for some of our educational and research projects. Moreover, high-level

administrators based in UPR Central Administration, which include the UPR President, now directly respond not only to the campuses and the Board of Governors, but also to the FOMB. Our campus has experienced dramatic cuts to state funding, which formerly guaranteed the UPR System 9.6% of all tax revenue. Changes have led to a series of operational budgets that have become smaller from one year to the next, resulting in the reduction of 40% of state allocations to the UPR System. As shown in the section of this report on Standard VI, the UPR-RP received about 30% less state funding in 2024 than in 2016, a net difference of \$69 million.

Challenges related to budget cuts were inflicted 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. Our campus responded to these events by working to secure conditions in which operations could remain focused on compliance with the mission, in particular those that center the student experience. The mission helped to keep the institution's leadership and governance bodies on track given that it underscores what is important to the life of the campus and the services that it offers the public. The belief that the mission represents the institution's purpose and charge is widespread among the different groups that constitute the university community, and this has assisted in navigating changes that are consequences of budget cuts and other challenges that contextualize them.

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, the mission gives visibility to important long-term initiatives and priorities and helped to minimize the negative impact of challenges and disruptions. These include an emphasis on research, the firm embrace of Puerto Rico's history and culture, and the institution's insertion in work that addresses the country's problems in its social and economic realms. Moreover, 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.

The Office of the Chancellor and the Academic Senate, with the support of the Office of Budgetary Planning, has aligned resources and planning to ensure they are sufficient for supporting and executing strategic goals that advance institutional improvement. Planning has included budgetary guidelines related to the creation of new academic programs, a process informed by alignment with the mission (EI 1.4: Policy for Program Creation GB Cert. 163, 2022-23). Considering decreased local government funding and the complex financial environment, in recent years several cost-saving initiatives have been enacted and external funding has been bolstered. Cost-saving initiatives have led to budgetary reductions in the following areas: non-teaching staff contracts, infrastructure maintenance, and electricity costs, which have been reduced by updating lighting and relocating some programs and units to shared spaces. As established below, planning goals encompass securing external funding through grants and the provision of services. In addition, planning has helped to ensure that academic programs have the support they need to sustain university experiences that students of today find enriching.

### **Commitment 2018-2023**

The UPR-RP strategic plan Commitment 2018-2023, which was 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-sectorial committee that reviewed the campus mission; considered UPR-RP's accomplishments as Puerto Rico's leader in knowledge formation, research, and creative activities; and evaluated recent changes in Puerto Rico. The latter include the Commonwealth government's declaration of bankruptcy, the institution of PROMESA, and dynamics related to the economic situation facing the Commonwealth and its public institutions.

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, which describes it 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).*

DAA and DEGI have worked to ensure that suggestions from the prior self-study for MSCHE have been acted upon. This has led to improvements such as:

- Strengthening of online education
- The creation of an exit profile for graduate students
- The use of data to better understand the experiences, backgrounds, and aspirations of undergraduates
- The compilation of data to document graduation rates by program and demographic information
- Expansion of activities associated with institutional assessment and its visibility within the offices of executive deans and the Academic Senate

### **Goals by Priority Area**

Commitment 2018-2023 established 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.

#### Priority Area 1

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.

#### Priority Area 2

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.

#### Priority Area 3

*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.

#### Priority Area 4

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 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 & Strategic Planning**

The mission has guided strategic planning at both the campus level and at the level of its main units: the Offices of Executive Deans and the Offices of Deans of Colleges and Schools. Each of these units has its own strategic work plan (EI: 1.6 CBA Example of College Strategic Plan), which is aligned with that of the campus. Thus, the mission contributes to a cohesive institutional culture and approached to operations. It based on a shared vision of purpose as well as accountability in the attainment of objectives that support the achievement of goals in the areas of research, academics, service, and fiscal resources.

Strategic 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, among other areas. 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.

Given that the UPR-RP could benefit from the development of a mission statement that is more concise and shorter, both the working group that focused on Standard I and the committee developing our most recent strategic plan examined the mission to consider how it might better serve the institution. They discussed its main elements as well as its strengths and weaknesses and they proposed a larger review process that in the context of approving a new strategic plan. Of course, a revised mission would have to be approved by internal governance bodies and the process leading to the approval of a new statement would include ample opportunity for discussion and input from all campus constituents, leadership, and the public at large.

### **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 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 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.

### **Support for Research & 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. Creative work has also benefited from support aligned with 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.

UPR-RP is among the top contributors to research publications in the UPR System, matching UPR Mayagüez, the campus with substantial STEM and engineering offerings, at 24%. While UPR Medical Sciences Campus produces 53% of total research, UPR-RP outperforms smaller campuses by a wide margin, contributing a large portion of the total



research output in comparison. High research productivity also contributed to the ranking of our campus as number one in the Caribbean QS World University Ranking in October 2024.

### Student Learning Outcomes

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 offering internship experiences for undergraduate majors enrolled in Humanities and Liberal Arts programs. Through it, students learn about a plethora of related and discipline-specific opportunities, summer experiences, and training programs.

Among other initiatives that impact student learning and research experiences is the CrieAS 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 and other initiatives. In addition, the Caribe Digital initiative, following the model established by CrieAS, developed a comprehensive and sustainable plan to promote Digital Humanities in Puerto Rico. It has done so in various ways, including the creation of a capacity-building program for professors, researchers, and librarians to conceptualize and develop digital projects. This initiative benefits over 120 professors and librarians, 65 undergraduate students, and 15 community organizations.

Moreover, most graduate students complete original research, internships, or professional practicums in conjunction with their coursework and capstone projects. Success in this area has been recognized repeatedly, and a substantial number of our graduate students complete their degree with significant publications, exhibitions, or final projects as part of their academic record and professional formation.

### **Program & Curriculum Development**

The pandemic raised awareness about the importance of distance and on-line education and resulted in circumstances in which technologies in this area were out into use. At that time 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. While our campus continues to focus on face to face teaching and the seated classroom, a large percentage of its academic offerings were reviewed during the pandemic in an effort to ensure that course syllabi were adapted for all three teaching modalities: face-to-face, hybrid, and online.

A limited number of academic proposals for online programs and degrees were encouraged, and as a result their overall number has increased, mainly at the graduate level. Other new academic programs are now in the pipeline for approval, as addressed in Section on 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. Individual academic units are instructed to 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, as well as aligned with the campus mission, student needs, and 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 the expectation of excellence established in our mission as well as with developments and innovations in higher education, the job market, and industry.

Another result of program review is that some programs have been consolidated and others phased out then removed from offerings. This occurred with the BA in Business Administration with a concentration in Office Management, the PhD in Business Administration with specialization in Finance, and post-BA certificates in library science (online and in-person) and applied linguistics in Spanish, and the post-MA certificate in translation. The normative processes behind these actions as well as program creation are detailed in section on Standard III.

### 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 in 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 by 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 resituated 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 activities 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 Societal 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 initiatives 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 projects 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 in Río Piedras. The institution seeks the support of government agencies and non-profit bodies 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.

### **Our New Strategic Plan**

As mentioned above, a new strategic plan that covers 2024 to 2029 was approved by the Academic Senate in December of 2024 (EI: 1.9 AS Cert. 48, 2024-25: Strategic Plan “Rutas”). This plan has five goals, which are distributed across the following five areas: (i) research and academic activity, (ii) the transformation of education, operations, and infrastructure, (iii) sustainability, (iv) community service, and (v) justice via diversity, equity, and inclusion. The major units on campus (i.e. colleges, schools, and offices of executive deans) are now tasked with creating their development plans and annual plans that will cover the new fiscal year, which begins on July 1, 2025. This process is coordinated by the DIAA. These plans will include objectives related to recruitment, retention, persistence, and graduation rates.

### **Findings**

- The UPR-RP mission has allowed the institution to adapt to volatile circumstances and served to reinforce a consensus about the purpose and importance of programs of high quality, and our ongoing commitment to research, creative work, and community service.
- The UPR-RP mission continues to serve the campus well and allows for continuous improvement, which is partially due to its aspirational characteristics.

### **Next Steps**

- The Academic Senate will continue its discussion about the mission in alignment with the operationalization of the new strategic plan.
- Development of the unit-level plans by our colleges, schools, and other units to support the recently approved strategic plan will include objectives related to recruitment, retention, persistence, and graduation rates, to assist the campus in better serving its students and Puerto Rican society at large.

## **STANDARD II ETHICS & 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.*

### **Faithfulness to Mission**

Our campus values and takes measures to protect both academic and intellectual freedom, which can be considered cornerstones of its mission. Moreover, an array of policies and practices which ensure that ethics and integrity are central components of how the UPR-RP functions as a public institution inform ongoing improvement. Transcending mere compliance with guidelines, commitment to ethics and integrity enhances the institution's position within a trajectory of credibility, trust, and service.

### **Academic and Intellectual Freedom, Freedom of Expression, & Intellectual Property**

Guided by the institution's General Bylaws, faculty teach, discuss, and engage resources, knowledge, and opinions in their area(s) of expertise, doing so objectively and honestly and in the pursuit of truth (EI 2.1 UPR General Regulations). Academic freedom is paired with faculty members' responsibility to contribute to and remain abreast of the latest discussions, developments, and debates in their fields. It extends into both the classroom and spaces beyond given that it pertains to not only teaching but also to expression, decision-making related to research, and respect for intellectual property rights and research ethics.

Intellectual freedom and freedom of expression have long been aspects of our institutional culture. For example, faculty and students alike debate controversial topics such as politics, war, colonialism, foreign policy, and divergent perspectives on truth. This happens in classrooms and in other realms, such as public forums, conferences, and other discussions in a collegial manner and without interference from administrators, members of governance boards, or other entities. While these exchanges are sometimes impassioned, they are orderly and do not interfere with the operations of our campus. Appreciation for academic and intellectual freedom also shape research, creative work, and scholarly collaboration, in Puerto Rico as well as internationally. This means that faculty and other researchers can make decisions about topics researched, place of publication, and other aspects of disseminating scholarly work without interference. Moreover, our campus is no stranger to debate as it has historically been a site for protests, strikes, and campaigns that raise awareness about important social, economic, and political issues, including access to higher education. UPR-RP's role as a setting where these things take place reflects the tendency to see the campus a place where knowledge formation and critical thinking respond to both contemporary problems and efforts to address them.

Commitment to ethics and integrity is also evident in concrete actions that include the responsible use of technology, compliance with copyright policies, and ethical considerations that are woven into the structure of courses, research design, and academic programs. Institutional norms safeguard these practices as a keystone of academic innovation (EI 2.2: Institutional Copyright Policy, EI 2.3: UPR Policy for Patents, Inventions, and their Commercialization). The UPR System's Office of Intellectual Property, which is located in Central Administration, is the unit that ensures protection of intellectual property. The unit has multiple functions, among which are: protecting,

managing, and marketing intellectual property, as well as supporting multisectoral collaborations. Furthermore, this unit establishes ownership processes for inventions, academic and creative works, and trademarks, in addition to licensing and protection of inventions.

### **Academic Integrity & Honesty**

The recent adoption of the Academic Integrity Policy (EI 2.4 AS Cert. 66 AY 2022-23 Academic Integrity) which dates to 2023, is another example of its commitment to ethics and integrity. This document nuances and adds to policy found in the *General Regulations* and the *General Student Regulations*, reinforces the institution's obligation to foster 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 also 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 honesty is supported by the UPR-RP Library System's extensive workshop offerings (EI 2.5: Library Workshop Inventory), which have recently addressed topics such as strategies for using Library System databases, writing according to style manuals, academic dishonesty, and plagiarism. A total of 767 workshops were delivered between 2016 and 2023 to a total of 12,233 students. These are proactive academic activities that make ethics and research integrity part of student learning. They are one example of how the campus fosters responsibility through co-curricular experiences that contribute to a shared culture in which ethics and integrity are prominent.

### **Course Syllabi**

Faculty are required to include an academic integrity clause on all their syllabi and to make sure that students are aware of its assertions. These relate to 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 evidence of adherence to this and additional syllabi content requirements set forth in AS Certification 39 2018-19 to department directors (EI 2.6: Required Clauses for Syllabi). This policy requires the inclusion of established clauses or statements regarding:

- Reasonable Accommodation
- Academic Integrity
- Discrimination / Sexual Harassment
- Contingency Plan in Case of Emergency

Once information showing that courses comply with these requirements is received by the DAA, a summary report is compiled by and sent to the Academic Senate for review, discussion, and, if necessary, further action.

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 in 2024. Subsequently, the DAA, in conjunction with its assessment of ethics and integrity, developed guidelines to help ensure that these technologies do not

negatively impact student learning, and these were distributed by the beginning of 2025. Subsequently, in January 2025, the DAA shared guidelines concerning ethics and the use of AI by students. These include a clause that faculty have the option of presenting on their syllabi as well as a description of how this technology can be used (EI 2.7: DAA Circular 8 2024-25 Use of AI).

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 modalities and the practices that characterize them are required adhere to the standards for ethical and academic integrity set by the Academic Senate as well as policies and laws pertaining to higher education. Recognizing the importance of ethics and honesty in all learning environments, UPR-RP mandates that professors offering online courses complete training that addresses the law, institutional policy, and ethics.

### **Research, Protection for Human Subjects, & CITI**

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 ensures adherence to ethical principles and human subjects protections. The program used, the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), is a web-based resource 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 (EI 2.8: Chancellor's Office Circular 18, 2018-19 Human Subjects). Since 2019, over 8,200 professors, students, and personnel have taken courses offering preparation in this area. Participation has been substantial: 4,274 individuals have completed the module for Social and Behavioral Human Research; 1,860 the Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research module; 1,182 the Research with Human Subjects module, and 934 the module on Conflict of Interest. Adherence to the practices and protocols learned in these modules is monitored and reinforced by officials in Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research who work with faculty and student researchers alike.

CITI's impact fosters a culture of ethical research, empowering individuals to make informed decisions throughout the research process. This culture translates to tangible benefits that include: reduced risk of misconduct, enhanced reputation through demonstrably ethical practices, streamlined compliance, and improved research quality due to reliable data and trustworthy outcomes. What our faculty, students, and others learn from participation in CITI safeguards the rights of participants, contributing to trustworthy research that benefits the broader community. Also significant is that it prepares students for the future by setting the stage for the research and related professional activities that they will undertake after graduation.

### **A Climate of Respect**

The UPR-RP actively cultivates and values an atmosphere in which diversity, equity, and inclusion are recognized as significant and valued. 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 through the programs and services it offers. These contributions evidenced through compliance with 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. Historically, diversity has been conceptualized in ways that draw attention to the need to diminish disparity in socioeconomic status, physical (dis)ability as well as differences related to political opinion and access to higher education. However, as explained below, the concept has widened to address other concerns, including gender, sexuality, and racial identity.

Student rights and responsibilities are clearly established in the University of Puerto Rico Law, which emphasizes the central importance of respectful dialogue and academic integrity. *The General Student Regulations* also provide resources that help to cultivate and maintain a climate of respect by identifying measures that promote harmonious coexistence among the student body and the other groups that form part of the broader university community; these are also available in the undergraduate catalogue (EI 2.9: Student Rights and Duties, Extract from 2023-24 Undergraduate Catalogue). These play important roles in student government and in day-to-day operations and discussions about ongoing improvement.

Also, the Institutional Policy of Coexistence of 2016 is an important resource. It guarantees all campus constituents the right to voice their opinions and exercise rights in an environment that rejects violence while prioritizing respect, tolerance, open dialogue, and peaceful exchange. This policy is one that provides common ground for parties should disagreement or division emerge. The environment that it values is the basis for the support that the institution offers its student, non-teaching 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).

### **Principles & Policies of Non-Discrimination**

Our institution has a zero-tolerance stance against discrimination and provides extensive resources for reporting and addressing such incidents if they are to occur. The UPR System's Policy Against Discrimination (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).

Structures at the campus level also uphold principles of non-discrimination. These are relevant for all university community members, including students, faculty, and non-teaching staff, regardless of background, beliefs, rank, or position. The principle of non-discrimination is further bolstered by the Policy and Procedures for Responding to Situations of Sex and Gender Discrimination at UPR, which ensures comprehensive protection for anyone who experiences discrimination in these areas and identifies effective practices related to problem solving. The anti-discrimination policy that focuses on sex and gender offers protection both in classrooms and in 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.

While sex, gender, and sexuality have long been discussed within conversations about policies about ethics and integrity at our institution, they have recently given more attention to transgender and non-binary people. For example, a chosen name protocol that was implemented in 2023-2024 allows transgender, non-binary and other students to register a preferred name in various contexts, including course lists, student IDs, and email (EI 2.10:

Chosen Name Protocol). Nine gender-neutral bathrooms have been designated across campus, thereby fostering a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all. 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, violence and dating, and stalking at work and in the educational context.

If a person experiences an incident of sex discrimination at the university that violates Title IX, they can (and should) report it to the appropriate office. Employees who 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 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 contact the Office of the Title IX Coordinator or the Office of the Student Ombudsman. Anyone who is not part of the university community should report the situation through the Office of the Title IX Coordinator. Complaints or grievances can be made orally or in writing, depending on the complainant's preference. They 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 that they occurred. The university keeps the proceedings strictly confidential, as established in relevant policy.

**Services for Students with Disabilities**

The Office of Students with Disabilities (OSEI) oversees reasonable accommodations and academic support services for students. In addition to proactively 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 specific concerns or grievances addressed. The latter is useful for students who feel requests for accommodation 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, which presents data related to requests for services and the corresponding numbers of complaints.

**Table 2.1: OSEI: Reasonable Accommodation for Students**

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
Requests for reasonable accommodation	2,178	2,250	1,954	1,087	1,198	1,263
Complaints	15 (.7 %)	23 (1 %)	29 (1.4%)	33 (3%)	21 (1.9%)	6 (.5)

Source: Report to UPR-RP Academic Senate

As the table shows, requests for service were high during the pandemic and have since lessened. Complaints also increased during the pandemic but have since declined by more than half, as shown by data from AY 2023-24.

**Ethic Hours**

UPR-RP's commitment to ethics is also aligned with the law (EI 2.11: PR Government Ethics Act of 2011). An Ethics Committee spearheads ongoing education efforts, ensuring

that all personnel complete at least 20 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. Between 2020-22 and 2022-24 compliance increased from 43% to 69% of employees. The committee involved in this work might make the contents of this trainings more relevant to the work that UPR-RP do and might expand the list of alternatives for compliance to include a wider array of ethics-related activities that employees already attend.

### **Institutional Grievance Policies**

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

Newly hired faculty and non-teaching staff also receive comprehensive information about relevant policies and regulations. When a grievance arises, it is handled by one of various offices, according to the nature of the grievance. The units involved 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 employees.

### **Review of Grades**

Numerous efforts are made to foster dialogue and limit grievances and problems related to grades and other matters. 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 is meant to foment awareness about resources and support services from the outset. In addition, many graduate programs have student representatives that facilitate communication between students and relevant administrators (e.g., Graduate Program Coordinators, Department Directors). Students also solve problems in traditional ways, including by meeting with professors in office hours and making appointments with their advisors or Associate Deans of Student Affairs in their colleges or schools.

AS Certification 118, 2022-23 outlines a standard process for students to request that a grade be reviewed. If a student disagrees with a grade on an assignment, exam, or their final course grade, they can follow 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 process are: (i) students have deadlines to initiate reviews, (ii) no decision can lead to the grade being lowered; (ii) the Appeals Committee serves as the final step for both mid-term and final grade disputes; (iii) specific schools/programs with their own procedures may be exempt, provided they guarantee the right to challenge a grade following their own general process (The Law School has a detailed procedure for revising exam results and course

grades; and (iv) confidentiality and the avoidance of punitive measures in response to the request for review are emphasized.

**Office of the Student Ombudsman**

Another essential resource to address grievances is the Office of the Student Ombudsman, which was mentioned above. Its staff members are trained to help students navigate challenges and provide guidance and support for various concerns. As shown in Table 2.2, this office becomes more active at times when the challenges that students face increase in intensity or number. 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 the series of earthquakes that caused substantial damage in Puerto Rico.

**Table 2.2 Office of the Student Ombudsman: Cases**

AY	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Cases	365	365	105	1,431	219	319	369	297

Source: Office of the Student Ombudsman

**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 aforementioned Puerto Rico Government Ethics Act outlines a set of ethical principles and responsibilities that all public service employees must follow. These principles and responsibilities aim to foster 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 (EI 2.12: BT Cert. 45 2006-07 Policy and Procedures on Research Misconduct). Norms concern the use of external funds and include the identification of practices that characterize responsible research (EI 2.13: DEGI Website Overview of Integrity in Research). Some of these focus on policies meant to ensure the avoidance of financial conflicts of interest (EI 2.14: BT Cert. 8 2012-13 UPR System Policies to Avoid Financial Conflicts of Interest). In addition, 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.

### **Fair and Impartial Practices for Hiring & Appeals**

In addition to the *UPR General Regulations*, our campus has a general guide and rules for recruitment, hiring, promotion, and evaluation (EI 2.15: Chapter V, Article 35). It establishes fair and impartial practices related to these processes, as well as disciplinary and separation measures and procedures for all university members that are 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. *The Faculty Manual* brings together the policies and regulations related to the duties, responsibilities, and functions of faculty members that are included in the UPR General Regulations.

In the case of non-teaching staff, norms and collective bargaining union agreements guarantee fair and impartial practices for hiring, leaves, promotion, and evaluation (EI 2.16: BT Cert. 142, 1994-9, Appeal Process for Non-Teaching Staff and EI 2.17: GB Cert. 35, 2018-19). The UPR-RP 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 HR Office
- A petition to the Board of Appeals if unsatisfied with HR's decision
- An appeal to the Board within ten days if still unsatisfied. If the Board's decision is unfavorable, they can appeal to court.

### **Honesty & Truthfulness in Internal Communications & Announcements**

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, as well as other types of communication and institutional outreach.

The Office of Communications, which is under the direction of Chancellor's Office, spearheads strategic communication initiatives, 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.

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, including the Deaf and visually impaired.

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 directed at high school students 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. Deans and program directors monitor the descriptions of programs and related resources on cyclical basis to ensure accuracy and the integration of updated information.

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 many of the most highly qualified students.

### **Affordability, Accessibility, & 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. While the cost of tuition has risen in recent years, the administration 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.

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 can assist in planning and in understanding processes that are new to potential applications. 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. In addition, a user-friendly online tool allows students to estimate the net costs of study based on their specific circumstances (EI 2.18:

Net Price Calculator). Since 2019, a survey has been administered to new students for the purpose of identifying their goals, expectations and needs. The results are used to improve orientation and provide support that is relevant to the cohort.

Financial literacy is approached as a critical component of informed decision-making and the effective management of student debt. The Financial Aid Office, 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 (e.g., food, housing, and transportation). It offers a comprehensive range of programs, including scholarships, work-study opportunities, and support for applying for the Pell Grant and federal 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 (EI 2.19: FAFSA Days Announcements).

Ethical and transparent practices are adhered to in the administration of financial aid. 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.

### **Compliance with Reporting Policies, Regulations, & Requirements**

UPR-RP demonstrates a steadfast commitment to transparency and accountability by adhering to applicable federal (Title IX, Cleary 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 updated and disseminated 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 Institutional Research and Assessment. Adherence to regional accreditation standards works to assure stakeholders that the campus consistently maintains the highest quality of education and that it is dedicated to continuous improvement. Program-level accreditation has a similar function, as the institution responsibly houses 49 accredited programs in the colleges: 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 admissions, 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 unit 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.

### **Periodic Assessment of Ethics & 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 MSCHE. Moreover, in the last year, a comprehensive academic integrity policy was, the first in the UPR System, was approved (EI 2.20: AS Cert. 66 2023-24 Intro.). This was an outcome of actions taken by the self-study working group that developed this section. Its work also led to the establishment of a committee on integrity that was appointed for the implementation and assessment of policy in the area of ethics and integrity that will consider its effectiveness as well as issues related to AI and the role of technology, among other issues.

### **Findings**

- Institutional culture demonstrates a conscientious that embraces respect for diversity among students, non-teaching staff, faculty, and the administration.
- The campus has renovated policy in the area of ethics and integrity by creating and updating regulations through the Academic Senate in areas that include academic integrity; discrimination on the basis of gender or sex; training for faculty who teach online; and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### **Next Steps**

- DAA will require the inclusion of designated levels acceptable us of AI on all syllabi as of August 2025 in accordance with its circular letter of January of this year.



### **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.*

#### **Coherent and Appropriate Learning Experiences & Degree Programs**

As a public research-oriented comprehensive doctoral institution, our offerings include 59 undergraduate programs, 47 master's degrees, 4 postgraduate certificates, 16 doctoral programs, 1, Juris Doctor, and professional development experiences offered through the Division of Continuing Education and Professional Studies (DECEP in Spanish). To ensure that the student learning experience is coherent and conducive to rich, pertinent, and transformative learning opportunities, our 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 enables it to operate as a postsecondary institution of higher education and award degrees (EI 3.1: DS Cert. 2023-116). 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 time to degree established by the institution (EI 3.2: 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 3.3: Extract from GB Cert. 163 2022-23, Requirements for Proposing Academic Programs). These establish requirements that are either aligned with or similar to those of the agencies that license and accredit individual academic programs. They address innovation as well, helping to ensure that both proposals for creating new programs and changes to programs to maximize opportunities for student learning.

#### **Academic Offerings**

As described in the UPR-RP catalogues, our campus offers a substantial number of academic programs at multiple levels: baccalaureate degrees (BA, BS, BBA), master's degrees (MS, MA, MEd, MBA, LLM), doctoral degrees (PhD, Ed.D.), a Juris Doctor degree and certificates, both post-baccalaureate and post-master.

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 of Business Administration
- Master of Science in Information Sciences
- Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics with Supervised Experiential Learning
- Master of Laws (LL.M.) in Orality in the Criminal System

- Master in Project Management

Enrollment targets in these new programs have been met, and efforts are in place to sustain if not increase them. Looking ahead, it is clear that other programs will be added to our online offerings. Four programs are in the licensing process, with launches slated for August 2025: the post-baccalaureate certificate in Applied Linguistics in Spanish, a professional certificate in Interpretation, the MA in Translation, and an MEd in Sports.

The campus is proud of these online initiatives because they demonstrate the achievement of prior objectives, but online offerings will by no means replace or serve as a substitute for the bulk of our traditional on-site, seated classes. Instead, these two modalities are positioned to complement one another, with the virtual modality operative only in specific areas. The working group responsible for this standard observed some confusion about this issue in the wider community, where some think the number of online programs to be larger than it actually is. Moreover, as of August 2024, the majority of our sections were face-to-face, with just under 7% virtual (EI 3.4: Course Modality Distribution AY 2023-24, 1 sem.).

### **Regulatory Compliance**

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 innovations and insights in higher education and provided students with more options in their area(s) of study. This revision established that 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 3.5: 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 3.6: 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 closely examined then updated and enriched. This is the equivalent of 67% at the undergraduate level and 48% graduate levels, respectively. The DAA and DEGI are involved in the process. Curriculum review, a central element of this work, ensures that academic offerings are coherent, rigorous, and current. The current cycle of program review culminates in 2026 (EI 3.7: 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle for Programs Completing Review AY 2022-26). It ensures that programs are prepared for reaccreditation and that those not subject to accreditation are reviewed and improved. A particularly important result is curriculum change (EI 3.8: Examples of Self-Study Curriculum Changes).

### Program-Level Accreditation

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 has helped to consistently foster learning experiences that are relevant and bolstered by the review of peers and at the same time contributed to an institutional culture in which curricula are current, in terms of both the knowledge imparted and the practical preparation that students receive through experiences such as internships, supervised practice, as well as thesis and capstone projects. In terms of recent achievements, 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. Finally, in November 2024 our master's degree in planning was reaccredited for seven years. The visiting committee recognized its plan for the assessment of student learning as excellent and circulated it as a “noteworthy practice” (EI 3.9 PAB Noteworthy Practices).

### Internal Self-Study (Graduate Level)

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 (3.10: GB Cert. 55 2023-24 Regulations for Evaluation of Academic Programs). 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 was once again operative. It involves review by program faculty as well as the use of metrics, the analysis of research or creative activity, and assessment tools. Examples of recent improvements made through the self-study 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 to make improvements, in the CE Educational Leadership and the MEd in Teaching English as a Second Language have decided to transition to a trimester calendar, a change to be implemented in AY 2025-26, that was recommended by external reviewers and supported within the program by faculty and students alike.

### Substantial Changes

The approach to program review, which takes place at the campus level, 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 in this area, it should be noted that processing petitions for requests for change by programs can be slow. Efforts should be made to ensure that curricular changes identified through program review can be instituted in a 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 or school) examine and request modifications to proposals before they leave a college or school to be considered by governing bodies responsible for review at higher levels.

The process of program review also allows for some programs to be put on moratorium, which means that admissions are paused until proposed changes are approved and implemented. This can be done, for example, in the case of program consolidation, dramatic changes in program level accreditation requirements, or the evolution of fields and industry. In January of 2025 Central Administration opened a discussion related to program review and new admissions. An initial communication established that 64 undergraduate programs in the UPR System (15 at UPR-RP) would not admit new students in August 2025. However, the decision was reconsidered, programs were encouraged to continue with their plans for improvement, admissions took place, and administrators agreed to bolster program enrollment.

**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. This data shows that retention was stable at a rate of about 84% for 2017, 2018, and 2019 and then decreased about 5% in the pandemic (EI 3.11: Undergrad Cohort Retention 2013-22, 3.12, Undergrad Graduation Rates 2012-2017, and 3.13 Graduate Level Retention Rates 2013-22). Our graduation rates reflect a coherent learning experience appropriate to degree objectives. Information about the student population indicates that these rates have also 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 early course registration for students approaching graduation, and improvements to student support services.

**Table 3.1: UPR-RP Graduate Licensing & Certification**

<b>Professional Certification or License</b>	<b>College or School</b>	<b>Pass or Approval Outcome</b>
Architecture (ARE)	School of Architecture	2023: 41% of test-takers
Certified Public Accounting (CPA)	School of Business Admin.	2019: 43% of test-takers
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	2023: 94%
Federal Bar Examination	School of Law	2020: 75%, 2021: 79%, 2022: 78%

### Licensing & Student Learning

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 to meet this requirement. As shown in Table 3.1, passage rates are high in multiple programs, signaling that graduates are well-prepared for careers in their areas of study. Regarding the licensing exam in Architecture, which is actually a series of exams that takes an average of 7.5 years to complete, it is important to note that the rate is not a straightforward score representing a percentage of 100% like other results included in the Table 3.1. In fact, exam results of UPR-RP graduates increased from 26% in 2019 to 41% in 2023, which is higher than other architecture programs in Puerto Rico. Also noteworthy is that the results of the UPR-RP graduates taking the CPA exam are the highest in Puerto Rico; in fact, more than 70% of those that pass the exam in the Commonwealth are graduates of our College of Business. For 2010-2019, our campus led with an average of 108 CPAs annually, followed by UPR-M with an average of 30 CPAs, which shows both that the UPR-RP approval rate is 3.6 times more than UPR-M and that the rigor and coherence of the program translates into the success of its graduates.

### **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 hold part- and full time adjunct positions (EI 3.14: UPR-RP Employee Statistics). Faculty are highly qualified and sufficient in number, as demonstrated by the 71% with a doctoral degree and 25% of the remainder with at least a master's degree and their expertise in the wide variety of areas required to responsibly operate our colleges and schools. In terms of the process for ensuring that these needs are met, these units make projections concerning the number of sections needed each academic year based on student enrollment, degree requirements, and time to degree. Subsequently, the DAA, in dialogue with Associate Deans of Academic Affairs of our colleges and schools, ensure that the number of faculty is sufficient to meet demand.

Also relevant to qualifications, it should be noted that the percentage of faculty with a doctorate has risen over the last two decades as the result of hiring practices and other initiatives that aimed to increase the number of professors with this qualification. This was prioritized given its importance to the design, delivery, and assessment of the student learning experience. Most of the faculty members who have not earned a doctorate teach at the undergraduate level.

### Recruitment and Appointment

Regarding faculty recruitment, the UPR System's fiscal plan for tenure-track faculty recruitment establishes the number of new hires. It states that 3% of the total number of tenure-track and tenured faculty can be hired annually. 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. 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 faculty job candidates go through a rigorous process whereby committees at the department and college or school levels evaluate applicants' teaching experience and credentials. The DAA 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.

UPR-RP takes the credentials and professional development of graduate-teaching faculty seriously. The DAA is required to individually assess the academic background, research, and overall preparedness of professors identified to teach graduate courses. While this can be tedious, it is necessary to ensure that the institution is hiring well-prepared professors. Since AY 2019-20, policy related to graduate level teaching has required that professors hold a doctoral degree (or an equivalent terminal degree) and relevant academic activity within the past five years.

Policies related to professional performance as well as growth and innovation are presented in the *Faculty Manual* 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 academics and administration processes (EI 3.15: *Faculty Handbook* Section 10).

#### Professional Development, Support, & Training

The institution provides support for faculty development. For example, new professors attend a minimum of six hours of training in this area, and those seeking tenure or promotion are required to participate in orientations, workshops, or guided discussions in preparation for review. Many of these are offered by the Center for Academic Excellence (CEA).

The CEA, operating under the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs, is a key 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 programming. In AY 2023-24, several workshops related to artificial intelligence 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 AY 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 3.16: CEA Training Webinars AY 2022-23, 3.17: 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., Autonomous University of Santo Domingo, U of Florida, U of Michigan at Ann Arbor, NYU, U Completeness in Madrid, and the University of Córdoba, among others). These help faculty remain abreast of activity in their areas of research and professional activity, and assist with networking.

### Faculty Scholarship & 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, and this contributes to the prestige of the campus. This demonstrates that faculty take seriously both their work and the institution's mandate to position research as well as cultural and artistic production as resources for Puerto Rican society. UPR-RP, as a public institution, 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 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 3.18: Overall Statistics and Works Published by Professors).

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

### Retirements

Retirement is one of the issues that has impacted strategic planning and faculty recruitment. Recently, our campus has had a larger number of tenured faculty retiring each year than annual hires. Data about forthcoming retirements is gathered to assist with planning hires, with the most recent report showing that 84 faculty are anticipated to retire by May 2027 (EI 3.19: Anticipated Tenured Faculty Retirements 2024-2027). In requesting tenure-track lines, academic programs consider enrollment trends, areas of specialization that need to be covered, as well as retirements. Budget directive described above in the section on recruitment and appointment are also factored in. As shown in Table 3.2, the percentage of tenure-track faculty retirements varies considerably across campus. Data show that the largest number of hires have taken place in Natural Sciences, the college with the most

students. In Architecture and Law, faculty have been hired to guarantee student-to-faculty ratios and requirements associated with program accreditation. Between August 2020 and December 2023, 103 tenure-track hires took place. This represents 72% of the hires in the same period. Adjunct faculty have helped to cover areas of need. It should also be noted that the student body is increasingly smaller, thus the institution does not aim to replace all retiring faculty.

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

College / School / Unit	Number of Retirements	TT Hires AY 2021-22 to AY 2023-24
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
<b>TOTAL for campus</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>103</b>

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

**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 resources for tracking 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.”

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. Program-level committees examine these materials to ensure their accuracy; in addition, DAA and DEGI are required to certify the integrity of the information describing all of the UPR-RP’s program offerings. Mi IUPI, our student services portal, is an important electronic tool for students. Used in conjunction with another tool, Next, which allows students to verify course registration, track progress towards graduation, and apply for graduation, among other functions.



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 with faculty advisors and non-teaching staff offering support services. They are also publicized through UPR-RP's official Facebook, X, and Instagram accounts that are monitored to ensure integrity and accuracy.

### **Course Evaluations**

Teaching effectiveness is 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 number of students who evaluate courses has dropped in recent years and the DAA is currently developing guidelines aimed at increasing the number.

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. In addition, faculty use this feedback to become more aware of student perceptions and to improve their teaching. Course evaluation ensures that feedback is relevant and useful for advancing improvement, regardless of modality. Effort to make general patterns across course evaluations available to the public in an online dashboard is currently underway in the DAA.

### **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 & Mentorship**

The Program for Student Support Services (PSAE) uses formalized individual and group counseling with cultural and academic activities to help undergraduates 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 & 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. Annual reports

show that text revision appointments increased from 290 in AY 2021-22 to 591 in AY 2022-23 (EI 3.20: Extract from CDCL Annual Report 2023-24).

Active in mathematics and natural sciences, a second resource, the Tutoring Center, which is based in the College of Natural Sciences, is available for students who can benefit from additional guidance or assistance related to a specific set of courses (e.g., 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 areas such as critical thinking and effective communication. The program was created as a transformative action following the assessment cycle for AY 2018-19. Additional tutoring programs exist in the College of 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 3.21: Support Services Related to Information Competency). This is done through on-site workshops and guided tutorials provided by experienced personnel, and by providing access to materials and electronic databases. The latter 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 institutes. In the College of Natural Sciences, for example, the Information and Technology Center, situated in its library, provides both support services and research resources. In addition, small collections, seminar rooms, and archival collections in various colleges and schools make learning resources available, serve as important sites for research. The library provides numerous resources, including research databases, subject guides, access to an online reference librarian, and videos related to citation (3.22: Online Library System Resources). In addition, new online resources for these students (a list of tools and a directory of services) has been made available (EI 3.23: DAA Online Student Service Resources).

### **General Education (GE)**

Our GE offerings are designed to expand intellectual experiences, promote essential skills, and include the study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives. They are housed both in the College of General Studies and other units, in particular specific programs the College of Humanities, the College of Natural Sciences, and the School of Architecture. Combining elements of a free standing approach with one integrated into the disciplines, this curriculum is guided by specific pedagogical principles, ongoing assessment, and various support mechanisms.

### **Requirements**

GE 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 are detailed in our

undergraduate exit profile (EI: 3.24 Undergraduate Exit Profile), which establishes the competencies that all students should acquire by graduation.

The DAA examines and certifies syllabi for GE courses to ensure that they include the relevant GE competencies; using a rubric which shows the alignment between essential GE skills and the competencies that are included in learning objectives and our student exit profiles.

GE requirements can be grouped into two categories: those in the CGS and those in other units. Of the 42 minimum credits, the CGS offers courses in Spanish, English, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities. These nurture core competencies and provide a foundation for specialization associated with the major(s). Both CGS courses and those offered outside it make students better learners by engaging them in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to problem-solving and knowledge formation. The two-tiered structure allows students to complete a common core and to select additional courses based on their individual needs, goals, and interests.

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 General Studies, Colleges of Business Administration, 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. Regardless of where they are housed, GE courses are clearly identified as such in course description.

### **GE Curriculum & Essential Competencies**

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

- 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 that is practical and assists in addressing complex problems.
- 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 requires the use of academic databases, familiarity with research protocols, and the integration of findings from prior research. Students identify, evaluate, and acknowledge sources of information as well as apply the pertinent knowledge.

### **Assessment of Student Learning**

The General Education Skills Assessment Project, a permanent project based in the CGS, examines learning outcomes. Contributing to success in student competencies, it has done work leading to revamped syllabi, updated rubrics, and strategies for bolstering outcomes in technological competence and information literacy, among other areas. This project develops

a three-year plan for all CGS departments and oversees its implementation; in addition, it offers assessment coordinators and faculty members workshops and trainings concerning assessment and resources for improving teaching and learning (EI 3.25: Examples of GESAP Rubrics). It also works to ensure that insights and findings included in reports are implemented by faculty (EI 3.26: CGS Annual ASL Report AY 2022-23).

In programs outside the CGS, general education courses are assessed in a cycle established by DIAA, and results are uploaded and displayed in OLAS. As detailed in Section on Standard V, the assessment of student learning is faculty-led, data driven, and course embedded. It is an ongoing and systemized effort to improve both teaching and student learning by facilitating faculty access to meaningful information that can be translated into transformative actions. Targeting results that are useful and used, assessment is guided by program-level plans that complement the Institutional Student Learning Assessment Plan.

Student learning in specific GE competencies is monitored and assessed on an ongoing basis. According to a recent annual report by the Student Learning Assessment Project from the CGS, 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 assessment data, with the exception of one semester in AY 2019-20, which was during 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 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 initiatives provide resources 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.

### **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 not only as they relate to courses but also 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.

### **Research, Scholarship, & Co-Curricular Support**

An emphasis on providing students opportunities for research and related types of engagement with scholarship contributes to the rigor and coherence of programs at all levels. Our campus is characterized by academic exchange of various types, including talks, community involvement, field trips, lectures, poetry readings, book launches, film screenings, concerts, the discussion of works in progress, as well as research in libraries, galleries, scientific laboratories, green spaces, and archival collections. These and other examples of co-curricular activity positively contribute to the learning experiences of students.

### **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 is one of the initiatives that promotes student research and creative projects under the supervision of faculty, specifically STEM projects via Title V funds described in Section on Standard IV. It provides students with integrated research opportunities for publication and advanced training. An example of how external funds have been used to develop projects that have a long-term impact on institutional structures, CRIIAS builds on the accomplishments of a prior project, 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.

Moving forward, 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.

DEGI coordinates an important program called Academic Experiences Training Program (PEAF). Participating students work 9 to 18 hours weekly, serving as research or teaching assistants to professors. They receive a tuition waiver and a stipend. From AYs 2020-21 to 2024-25, an average of 595 graduate students participated in the program annually. The

stipends for PEAFF participants have not increased in several years nor has additional funding for this program been allocated. Moreover, as of August 2024 the number of positions declined by 16%, with 427 positions at the time of this writing (EI 3.27: PEAFF Statistics 2020-2025). This has led 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.

An 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 the 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 international students have been unable to enroll due to challenges associated with confirming that they will indeed participate in the PEAFF. Improving the program would strengthen the UPR-RP's response to both the challenges that graduate students face and its status as an R2 institution.

### **Conferences, Hands-on Experience, & Other Activities**

A plethora of conference series and co-curricular innovations enrich the experiences of our students. The annual Graduate Student Conference on Research and Creative Projects, sponsored by DEGI, allows graduate students to gain hands-on experience and to share their research findings and creative work. 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 Conference and the Eastern Caribbean Islands Conference. 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.

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

### **Study Abroad, Internships, & Career Services**

#### Internationalization

Through collaborative agreements with other institutions, the Office of the Assistant Dean of International Relations (DARI) promotes undergraduate students with diverse internship and scholarship opportunities abroad. 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 them the opportunity to learn

from educators in contexts with different social and academic traditions. 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 term 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 expanding student opportunities to learn from internationally renowned researchers and professors.

### Internships

Experiential learning through internships and related activities are an important part of learning in numerous programs. According to the DAA, between 2020 and 2024, a total of 2,587 students in areas such as counseling, education, planning, and business administration completed coursework that placed them in positions of real work environments. In the College of Business Administration, an average of 1,085 students, approximately 217 per year, participated in an internship experience. This represents about 45% of the students who are eligible for this experience. Some did so through a course while others did so outside a course, during summer break, for example. This unit's *Enlace* Program provides students the opportunity to participate in practical experiences that contribute to learning about business management in local and global contexts. The program allows students to explore various internship, employment, scholarship or competition opportunities.

In the College of Humanities, the Program in Interdisciplinary Studies has two internship opportunities in which about 20 students participate annually; one involves museums and the other public and private institutions, including non-profits. opportunities in which about 20 students participate annually; one involves museums and the other public and private institutions, including non-profits. Some experiences in Humanities are supported by external funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Mellon Foundation.

Students in the School of Law also complete internships at multiple levels, with a total of 33 participating in AY 2023-24 and 31 in AY 2024-25.

### Career Services

The Employment Office, attached to the Auxiliary Dean of Programs and Initiatives of the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs, supports students in searching for jobs, the completion of professional preparation and training, and with practical exercises such as preparing for interviews and building CVs and resumes. It also serves as a link with professional leaders, locally and internationally, to increase the placement possibilities of graduates and recent graduates. One of its most important initiatives is an annual career fair, which has attracted approximately 500 students in recent years.

### **Ongoing Institutional Improvement**

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 of art and literature, as well as

managers, entrepreneurs, and professionals in other areas. This requires that the institution continue to prioritize a holistic learning experience characterized by rigor and coherence that focuses on student success, one enriched by 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.
- The program-level accreditation process consistently bolsters program quality and excellence; it fosters important dialogues, foments actions that address challenges proactively, and cultivates improvement.
- Most faculty have taken advantage of training opportunities that have improved online teaching.
- Experiential learning, internships, and research outside the classroom (e.g., volunteer, summer, paid) strengthens retention and persistence rates among undergraduate and graduate students.

### **Next Steps**

- The PEAFF program should be strengthened as a resource for the recruitment and retention of graduate students as it provides them key experience and income and assists in maintaining the institution's R2 status.
- DIIA will provide assessment coordinators specific guidelines for the assessment of student learning in general education courses offered outside the College of General Studies.
- Examples of outstanding achievements and improvements in reports for program-level accreditors will be identified as best practices and shared across campus in announcements about reaccreditation.
- The DAA and DEGI will ensure that academic programs include information about career and employment opportunities aligned with their major(s) as well as profiles that describe the professional trajectories and achievements of graduates on their websites.



## **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.*

### **Student Recruitment**

Student recruitment processes for our campus are structured around the admissions policies and procedures established by the UPR System. Our ongoing commitment to admitting a diverse population is evident in various regulations 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 undergraduate admissions and are currently developing a revised recruitment plan. It will include a list of indicators and lists of activities such as the annual Open House, visits to high schools, and several island-wide recruitment events, among other initiatives. A variety of individuals support and participate in these events—assistant deans, department directors, professors, non-teaching staff, and current students. They provide a wealth of information about the admissions process, academic programs, financial aid, and co-curricular opportunities.

### The Undergraduate Level

Data from the period 2018-2023 demonstrates a steady increase in school visits and other recruitment activities from between AY 2019-20 and AY 2022-23, showing that they increased from 139 to 203. Recruitment activities are assessed regularly to bolster institutional improvement. The aim is to answer the questions of potential students and to provide them with the information that they need concerning the structure of academic programs, the admissions process, and how to enroll. Applicants can be advised concerning how to identify the program of study that is most aligned with their area(s) of interest and professional goals. Subsequent to admission, efforts focus on retention and enriching the academic experience. The Office of the Dean of Student Affairs assists students in securing opportunities to work or complete internships and oversees numerous co-curricular initiatives. It also assists undergrads who are completing their degree with their integration into the labor market and the identification of graduate or training programs in which they can peruse further study.

Regarding new projects, in November 2023, the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs inaugurated “*Soy futuro gallito*”/“*Soy futura jerezana*” (“I’m a future rooster / I’m a future hen”) initiative. Consisting of school visits and 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. This initiative presents studying on our campus as positive experience that offers both personal growth and professional opportunities. It aims to counteract the reduction in the size of our student population, a trend that has been impacted by higher emigration rates, lower birthrates, and socioeconomic change.

Corollary strategies for recruitment that have proven successful include discipline-specific summer camps for older students, including middle and high school students. These are ongoing and include: Explore the Humanities, the School of Architecture’s Summer Workshop, the Law School’s Summer Legal Workshop, the Computer Science Department’s Cyber Camp, Film Scriptwriting, Career Planning Camp, and Podcast Production, among others. The College of Social Sciences is developing a similar initiative focused on research and the use of technology that is slated to begin in June of 2025.

### The Graduate Level

To promote awareness about opportunities in graduate studies, representatives of the DEGI and different graduate programs visit various UPR campuses. They also participate in annual graduate study fairs, as well as offer orientations on different graduate programs. In addition, DEGI representatives recruit new applicants in the UPR-RP Open House as well as in educational fairs in private agencies and universities.

Some colleges and graduate programs conduct their own Open Houses, prospective student orientations, and related events. For example, in October 2024, the College of Social Sciences organized a Research and Graduate Studies Fair. At this event specific programs shared information about study and research opportunities. In various units, department directors and graduate coordinators are working to improve online resources about their programs, disciplines, and related career opportunities. Such measures assist potential students in making informed decisions while also supporting those currently enrolled.

### **The Application Process**

Most high school students access information about our campus either through their guidance counselors or independently. The admission application is active online at the UPR System website from October through the third week of January. Recruitment initiatives include student orientations on how to complete admissions applications. Relevant admissions policies are explained in several documents, including the new undergraduate admissions policy implemented in AY 2023-24 (EI 4.1: GB Cert. 162 2023-24, Undergraduate Student Admission). This policy, which replaced longstanding admissions regulations and practices, was put into place following a pilot project completed in AY 2022-23. One of the new issues to consider going forward is that a significant percentage of first students who are admitted and indicate they will study on our campus, approximately 10%, do not register before established deadlines. For the first semester of AY 2024-25, this amounted to 13% of first-year students. A significant number of these students appear to have maintained UPR-RP as a “Plan B” while awaiting information about housing and financial aid packages from universities in the U.S. then opted to study there rather than Puerto Rico.

This did not occur in years prior, and measures are being taken to address it. For example, some programs have established more direct contact with those who are admitted prior to the date that they have to confirm attendance. In years past, direct contact with the programs was delayed given that many students complete their first year in the College of General Studies with limited contact with the program of their major.

As explained below, the application process has been changed to consist of two routes for admission rather than only one: traditional and non-traditional. These categories are presented on the UPR System’s admissions webpage, where they are easy to access and clearly described so that the applicant can identify the one that best suits them. Some of

these resources appear to be either directed at parents or are designed to be read by the applicant with a parent or school counselor. While this can be effective in some cases, additional resources (in particular videos and visuals) directed specifically at potential students should be added. These should include recruitment materials that assume little to no knowledge about university life and address how to cover costs, registration, scheduling, what year one is like, and the immediate and long-term benefits of higher education. Separate pages could be developed for distinct users, for example, one for the future student who is in the process of finishing high school, another for adult applicants, and another specifically for school counselors and educators who assist students with their applications.

A few user-friendly videos as well as other relevant resources are already available on admissions websites for undergraduates, graduates, as well as international candidates. One of the resources that stands out on our campus website is an 8-minute video directed at beginning undergraduates that was published on our admissions webpage and the UPR-RP YouTube Channel in 2023. More dynamic, user-friendly resources should be developed.

Admissions applications have been completed online using the platform Next since 2017. This has improved the processing of applications and enabled the institution to respond to applications more quickly than it did in prior years. It has also assisted those who are accepted in making early decisions about enrollment and preparations for study. Features continue to be added to Next. One of the present short-goals is for students to complete all course registration and enrollment actions via the platform.

### **Admissions Policies & Processes**

Admissions policies process has become more nuanced in response to various policy guidelines that have been implemented between AY 2015-16 and AY 2022-23. These measures have sought to ensure greater access for applicants from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and to diversify enrollment in other ways that are detailed below. Consistent with our institutional mission's goal to ensure social equity, these actions have resulted in the enrollment of 2,849 undergraduates in AY 2021-22, 2,492 in AY 2022-23, and 2,482 in AY 2023-24, (EI 4.2: Undergrad Enrollment AY 2021-22 - AY 2023-24). While these numbers demonstrate a decline of about 13% over three years, efforts to improve admissions policies have helped to attract students and prevent the decline from being more substantial.

Recently, admission processes have also been strategically modified to respond to shifts in higher education and Puerto Rican society. For example, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, applicants with the necessary IGS were admitted even though they did not take the SAT II given that it was not available to many. Similarly, in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and María requirements for the electronic application were waived and paper applications reinstated, as numerous segments of the country were without power for several months. Applicants with academic profiles who would have found it difficult to be admitted a few years ago now apply, demonstrate preparedness, and they are accepted. Of equal importance, they succeed once enrolled. They are able to do so due to practices and processes that prioritize inclusion and ensure the availability of student support services.

### **Traditional & Non-traditional Admission**

Building on the insights of a pilot project, the Governing Board revamped admissions policy roughly two years ago to include both traditional and non-traditional admission criteria for undergraduate students and these were adopted by our Academic Senate (EI 4.3: AS Cert.

86, 2022-23 Guide to Implementation of New Admissions Regulations). Traditional admissions continue to account for most of those who are admitted and made up 98% of our most recent first-year cohort. Non-traditional admissions accounted for approximately 2%.

### Traditional Admission

While the traditional admission process considers the IGS, the formula for calculating it has changed. As of the beginning of AY 2024-25, the IGS is based on 60% GPA and 40% entrance exam scores. Each year, academic programs establish a minimum IGS, based on a quota, capacity, and demand. To facilitate placement of applicants, program-specific information about the IGS is published on the Central Administration and UPR-RP webpages so applicants can understand the process and determine their likelihood of admission to programs of interest.

Traditional undergraduate applications can be submitted simultaneously to three programs at any of the campuses within the UPR System. Regarding specific 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. This admissions route includes non-resident (foreign) applicants. They are required to have completed an education equivalent to secondary education in Puerto Rico with a 2.0 minimum GPA and to take an entrance exam.

### Non-traditional Admission

Applicants who seek non-traditional admission must have a GPA of at least 2.0. While the entrance exam is not required, the applicant should fit into one of the following categories: (i) students with special talents or abilities (e.g., artistic, athletic, and/or academic), (ii) participants in the “University Articulation” program; (iii) participant in the “Dual Enrollment” program, (iv) students from specialized schools, (v) individuals from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background, (vi) international students, (vii) members of the adult population (students over 23), or (viii) applicants to the UPR Utuado campus. Useful explanatory materials that describe these regulations are available on the UPR System website.

As mentioned above, the non-traditional admission process was established considering the results of a pilot project. Its results were assessed and used to improve procedures and mechanisms before the non-traditional policy was institutionalized. As these currently stand, applications are evaluated on the basis of criteria established by a committee in each college or school. These include: essays, portfolios, interviews, and letters of recommendation. Regarding the evaluation of applications, each college or school makes a recommendation concerning admission to its academic programs, then the Admissions Committee Coordinator certifies these and oversees the referral of applications. Non-traditional applications are identified in February, and referrals are made at that time. Applicants are informed about final decisions via e-mail in April.

While students admitted via the non-traditional route rely on the same support services as other students, a second pilot project was developed to monitor their academic progress. It focused on understanding best practices that might be especially useful for promoting retention and helping these students meet their academic goals. One of its findings was that students who were admitted through the non-traditional route have been retained at a rate similar to those who were admitted through the traditional route. This finding comes from a

close analysis of data from AY 2023-24 which shows no significant difference between the academic performance of these two groups and identifies improvements that can be implemented to enrich the student experience in the future (EI 4.4: PLARESNO Recommendations).

Looking ahead, the non-traditional route should be publicized more widely, most notably outside the UPR Admissions website, in order to attract more applicants. A variety of distinct recruitment projects should be implemented, with each focusing on one or more of the specific groups listed above.

### **Undergraduate Student Enrollment**

On average, 2,086 incoming students enrolled in the first semester from 2017 to 2023. Students admitted since 2018 have reported IGS differently than in the past with more weight given to the high school gpa. Under the new policy applicants are ranked according to a formula which gives 60% overall gpa and 40% College Board scores in verbal reasoning and mathematics. Most students have obtained an IGS of 320 to 201. In recent years, the number of students who come from private high schools has increased.

Natural Sciences and Business Administration are the colleges with the highest number of students and some of the most competitive admissions requirements. 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 where enrollment has declined. For example, there is a 48% reduction in the number of students enrolled in the College of Education. In addition, fewer students are opting to major in Humanities programs. These are launching initiatives to attract more applicants, including an internship program, experiential learning opportunities, and the revamping of online resources and profiles.

Undergraduate 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, the higher cost of housing and tuition, 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. 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%.

As requested by MSCHE, our campus submitted a supplementary information report in December 2023. This report was required because annual enrollment—FTE for 2021-22 and 2022-23—reflected a fluctuation of enrollment of more than 15%. The report showed that the decrease occurred across a period of two years rather than one and that there has been a steady decline in enrollment over the years. It also detailed actions taken to address the problem, among which were: the expansion of recruitment strategies and admissions processes, more options for student enrollment, the assessment of retention efforts, curricular and program changes, the expansion of offerings in non-traditional modalities, and internationalization.

### **Graduate Admissions Policy, Procedures, & Enrollment**

Graduate studies are regulated by institutional policies framed in 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 are 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. In terms of the process, applicants are required to complete an online application and submit required documentation. The application is validated for compliance with all requirements and referred to the graduate committee of each program, which evaluates it and makes a 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. Fewer graduate programs open admission in the second semester. Graduate admissions for AY 2016-17 through AY 2023-24 show that over 950 students enroll each academic year and the size of the graduate student population is stable, with most students beginning in their program in the first semester of each academic year (EI: 4.5 Graduate Admissions & New Enrollment).

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, with part-timers having more time to graduate.

DEGI provides an online orientation course for new admitted graduate students. Additionally, each year DEGI prepares webinars and workshop orientations about graduate policy for students and program coordinators. These are available for all students. Academic programs with online programs provide virtual orientations for their students.

### **Financial Aid Services**

The Financial Aid Office works to maintain ongoing communication with students before and upon admission and FAFSA submission. Prior to admission, prospective students are invited to visit the campus 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, eligibility is evaluated for all federal and institutional aid.

For current students, academic progress is reviewed to determine good standing and eligibility for federal financial aid at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (EI 4.6: GB Cert. 55, AY 2016-17, Eligibility for Financial Aid). Communication with students about their applications for aid takes place through email, telephone calls, social media, and an official online interface accessed through [portal.upr.edu](http://portal.upr.edu), where they can find announcements, news, and related information concerning student aid. Information is updated every 24 hours. This central portal accesses the web application NEXT, which students use to upload all documents that are needed for the completion and verification of the 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, then this is done during a short visit to the office. Improving on prior practice in which the processing of forms was not centralized and digital technology less agile or under utilized, original paper documents are scanned and returned, to maintain a completely digital file. While improvements in the process are ongoing, recent assessment exercises signal that satisfaction has increased among students receiving service. One reason for improvement is that support has shifted from a focus on immediate financial assistance focused on a given semester or year, to a more holistic approach that looks to the long term and aims to cultivate financial literacy among students.

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. Of current recipients, 62% qualify for the maximum allowed under FAFSA guidelines. In terms of diachronic trends, the number of Pell Grant recipients is on the rise, with a 12% increase observed since approximately ten years ago.

Other programs complement the Pell Grant program, such as the Work Study Program that employs approximately 300 students each year. It provides students with job experience and income that helps them pay for their studies. Another option is direct loans, which are received by approximately 6% of our undergraduates. 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. About 800 graduate students borrow an average of \$6,600 annually. As of August 2024, the institution's official cohort default rates for cohorts 2017, 2018, and 2019 are 6 %, 5.1 %, and 1.8 %, respectively (EI 4.7: UPR-RP Default Rate).

### **Hours of Service**

The limited availability of various student support services, most of which are provided during the traditional hours in which campus offices operate, presents challenges for some students. An expansion of the scheduling, to include evenings or Saturdays, for example, might be useful for those who work or cannot access services because they are in class. Moreover, improvement in this area would probably help to bolster student satisfaction and it would make non-traditional programs (e.g., evening offerings and online programs) more attractive to potential applicants.

### **Student Housing**

The availability of on-campus student housing has become very limited since both Resi-Campus and Torre Norte were severely damaged by Hurricanes Irma and María then closed shortly afterward. Providing housing will assist with student recruitment given that some applicants opt to study at other campuses due to concerns about funding and finding an affordable place to live in the metropolitan area. These residence facilities help to attract a more diverse student body that includes applicants from areas distant outside the metropolitan area as well as those for whom affordable housing is a requisite for study. At the time of this writing, construction on Resi-Campus is underway at a cost of about \$34 million. The completion of construction is slated for the second half of 2025. No date has

been set for the opening of Torre Norte or a structure that replaces it; however, it is clear that this work will be significantly more costly than that of Resi-Campus and that it is likely to require demolition of the current building.

Campus leadership has advanced in its efforts to identify additional student housing options in Río Piedras and plans for the development of a small housing unit there have been approved. Once complete, these three initiatives will make living on or near campus possible for a total of 450-500 students. Housing in a fourth facility, the Plaza Universitaria Residence, which is run by a private corporation, is currently operative and serves local as well as international students.

### **Support Services & Undergraduate Retention**

A variety of support services are offered to bolster student success and enhance retention. Aligned with new undergraduate admissions policy to promote inclusion and greater access to a more diverse pool of applicants, including members of non-traditional populations, these services undergo 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, among others.

Course placement at the proper level is one area that has recently received special attention. Test scores and an interview inform decision-making in areas such as English, Spanish, and Math. These methods are used to place students accepted through both traditional and non-traditional admission processes in their initial general education courses. This process, which requires programs, departments, and assistant deans to work together, involves identifying students who appear to not be adequately prepared for study at the level in which they have been placed, facilitation of swift course movement at the beginning of the semester, and measures which ensure they are relocated to the appropriate course.

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 courses, 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 has been 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. The results of the pilot project will be used to consider the development of new practices associated with the placement of these students.

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 those who might need additional academic 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 start of the academic year, preparing students for a successful first year that will include significant learning and culminate in them continuing on to a successful second year.

**Retention Patterns**

Regarding retention from AY 2017-18 to AY 2020-21, 82% or more of first-year undergraduate students continued to their second year (EI 4.8: Full-time Undergrad Retention Data). 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 is striving to increase this rate, we also note that 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, retention for the AY 2021-22 cohort was 78%. This decrease appears to be due to the effects of the pandemic and economic pressures leading some students to work rather than continue their studies. As shown in Table 4.1, in AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24, the rate rose to about 81% and 82%, respectively.

**Table 4.1: Undergraduate Retention Rates**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Students in Cohort</b>	<b>Retention Rate</b>
2017	2,113	84.2%
2018	2,129	84.3%
2019	2,175	84.7%
2020	2,234	82.1%
2021	2,103	77.9%
2022	1,722	80.9%
2023	1,787	81.5%

As established by GB Certification 50, 2014-15, establishing goals for increasing retention and persistence is a means of advancing institutional improvement. Looking ahead, closer attention should be paid to persistence in the third-year of the undergraduate experience. This rate has declined regularly since 2017. For instance, for AY 2021-22, it decreased 4% to 69%. In terms of documenting student performance, 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 still enrolled and eligible for graduation. Moreover, retention rates and studies of the challenges and obstacles that negatively impact them 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. They should also be considered by the faculty and non-teaching staff who work in student support services. These discussions, which will cultivate greater

awareness about the challenges students face and strategies for student success, should address the classroom experience, red-flag mechanisms that are activated when student grades drop below established metrics, 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, a topic mentioned above, has made it more difficult for those 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 first-year undergraduates as they became familiar with the institution and established a foundation for their university experience.

### **Intra-System Transfer Policies & Student Success**

The UPR Governing Board has implemented institutional policies designed to enhance student success in conjunction with achieving educational and professional goals, degree completion, transfer to other institutions, and post-completion placement. This body has worked to facilitate 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. Policy goals are meant to ensure that transfer students do not lose relevant credits or end up with credits that cannot be counted at the receiving campus or experience; time-to-degree 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 study in a particular campus or program and then switch to another campus without a transfer mechanism per se. It assists with such transitions so that students can pursue their academic and professional interests.

### **Improving Persistence through Student Services**

Numerous student services contribute to student persistence, among which are counseling services, support for students with disabilities or functional diversity, and a support program that is known locally as PSAE. These services undergo institutional improvement on an ongoing basis. For example, 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 2023 using Microsoft 365 infrastructure.

#### DCODE

The Department of Counseling for Student Development (DCODE), 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 have been

augmented in recent years given that since 2017 a greater number of students have sought its services and guidance (EI 4.9 DCODE Assessment of Services and Personnel Recruitment).

Personnel in this unit provide individual and group counseling sessions through personal and direct relationships with students. The methods and strategies it uses are supported by scientific knowledge that prioritizes the holistic development and well-being of students. Its menu of services includes career counseling, outreach activities, one-on-one consultation, and crisis intervention. DCODE counselors sometimes refer students to academic advisors and the Assistant Deans of Student Affairs for academic orientation and advising. In addition, faculty and administrators sometimes consult DCODE regarding issues that arise in the classroom. During the pandemic, DCODE services were offered remotely and it proved effective. For this reason its services are now offered both face-to-face and remotely, in accordance with the student's preference.

#### The Office of Services to Students with Disabilities (OSEI)

OSEI 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 conducts a summer orientation for first-year students with a disability or functional diversity 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. The office also assists students in planning their semester and adapting for campus life, developing a retention plan for each of the individuals that uses its services (EI: 4.10 Individualized Transition and Retention Plan Form). OSEI ensures that these students 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. It coordinates conferences and workshops on topics related to functional diversity for the broader campus community. The office recently implemented an innovative support service called OSEI Bot, a virtual assistant currently in the testing phase that was designed to answer users' questions about resources and services.

Personnel at OSEI, like those at DCODE, have found that despite the use of 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. Current budgetary constraints make it difficult to implement major changes in this area; however, efforts are underway to ensure that students have access to the student support services they need, regardless of their scheduling preferences or the modality of their course or program.

#### PSAE

The Student Support Program (PSAE), 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. When possible, the coordinators offer support and share information to facilitate their return to study. The Registrar's Office assists in identifying inactive students, transfer applicants, and those who skip a semester. First-year students are contacted in order to assess the reason that they have not continued with their program of study and encourage them to continue their studies. Going forward, these efforts should become more systematic at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

### **Practices & Support Services to Enhance Graduate Level Persistence**

At the graduate level, persistence rates have remained relatively stable in the last few years (EI 4.11: Graduate Student 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. Some curriculum changes have contributed to persistence by making programs more attractive through aligning them with changes in higher education, such as the streamlining of course requirements, more hands-on learning experiences, and the substitution of the traditional thesis with the research monograph. Department directors, graduate coordinators, and advisors play important roles in the experiences of graduate students and contribute to efforts to enhance persistence.

### **Career Guidance, Preparation, & Planning**

One of the components 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 involving local business leaders and mentors. The project also 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 groups of 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 (*Red Graduada*, in Spanish) and the 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 participate 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.

### **Transfer Data**

Admission processes establish the traditional admission processes as well as the rules for readmission and transfer. They also consider student exchange programs. Students coming from other local institutions, the U.S. 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, current policy, allows 1/3 of the total number of courses to be validated 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.

### **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 (HIPAA). 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 HIPAA 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.

### **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 ("las Justas"), musical concerts, and workshops and fairs, among many others. Likewise, it coordinates 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 students.

It should be noted that all student support services are provided directly by the campus and that no third-party providers are used. 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. It should also reinforce how institutional assessment can contribute to immediate and long-term gains.

### **Findings**

- Additional efforts and resources (in particular videos, visuals, and campus-specific informational materials) should be made available to bolster interest in our campus and its programs at the time students apply for admission and in the period leading up to the beginning of the first semester.
- While data about retention and graduation rates has long been documented and shared among administrators, it is now more readily available to the campus at large and has contributed to a general awareness about how to increase these rates.
- Providing affordable student housing should be recognized as an urgent priority that is necessary to attract new students and bolster support services. Planning in this area should include the publication of a timeline that shows the reopening of Resi Campus and possibly the construction of other units.

### **Next Steps**

- The DAA will work with the deans of colleges and schools so that contact is established with applicants who have been accepted into our programs and they are assisted and encouraged to enroll.
- The DAE will work with the units under its supervision to foment awareness about support services and increase their visibility among all students.
- Regardless of current budget constraints, the institution will explore the strategic extension of student support services outside the traditional hours in which our campus operates, to include, for example, some evenings or Saturdays.

## **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.*

### **Clearly Stated Educational Goals**

Assessment of educational effectiveness at UPR-RP is grounded in the learning outcomes included in our 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.”

Academic programs in colleges and schools are responsible for the assessment of student learning and for identifying transformative actions that are aligned with the competencies listed in undergraduate and graduate exit profiles. In short, assessment aims to bolster student learning through better and more effective teaching as well as to document student achievement. Department directors, graduate coordinators, and faculty receive guidance from assessment coordinators and units on campus that organize the assessment of student learning. The most prominent of these is the Division of Institutional Research and Assessment (DIIA), which as described below is supervised by the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs. Also important is the General Education Skills Assessment Project that is described in the section on Standard III. It is a permanent project that examines learning outcomes in the College of General Education.

### Undergraduate Level

Undergraduate learning outcomes are also described in the list of competencies included in the Undergraduate Profile (EI 5.1: AS Cert. 46, 2005-06, Undergrad Exit Profile). These include competencies associated with general education and those of the major. There are seven general education competencies: information competencies, effective communication, research and creation, critical thinking, logical and mathematical reasoning, social responsibility, and technology. These provide a basis for assessing undergraduate learning across majors and programs of study. Competencies associated with the major differ according to program and these are aligned with the profiles and learning objectives of courses for majors in specific programs of study. In some instances, the same language is used to describe a general education competency and a competency associated with a major; however, these are not assessed in the same way given that learning in the major takes place at a more advanced level.

### Graduate Level

Like the undergraduate level, student learning outcomes at the graduate level are included in twelve areas of the Graduate Profile (EI 5.2: AS Cert. 104, 2016-17, Grad Student Exit Profile): research and creation, critical thinking, independence of judgment and initiative, content and protocol of the discipline of specialization, information competencies, integration of technology, effective communication skills, continuous learning, social responsibility, ethical sensitivity, multidisciplinary teamwork, and leadership. These outcomes, which of course involve learning at a more advanced level than do undergraduate



degrees, identify common areas of learning across graduate programs. Each program has its own exit profile specifying the competencies associated with the area of specialization which students should acquire by the time they graduate.

### **Organized & Systematic Assessment of Student Learning**

Student learning at all levels and in all 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 results were not published systematically due to the public health crisis. Since then, assessment of student learning has been completed in accordance with institutional policy using a variety of tools, as explained further below.

The learning objectives of general education courses are key tools for assessing learning at the undergraduate level, given that they identify levels of competency that generally should be achieved prior to students beginning coursework in their 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, the College of Natural Sciences, and the College of Business Administration. Student learning in the area of general education is assessed in all of these units.

Clearly stated learning outcomes provide the foundation for the assessment of student learning. For each three-year assessment cycle, assessment activities document levels of student achievement for each competency, as established by the assessment plan. Each college and school has a plan that addresses the assessment of student learning aligned with its academic programs and with the DIIA assessment of learning cycle. Typically, programs focus on the assessment of one competency each semester. Student achievement as well as transformative actions are documented for undergraduate and graduate students alike and organized by program as well as college or school. In addition, the data that is collected during the cycle can be disaggregated by major, General Education courses, and major courses in the Online Learning Assessment System (OLAS, described in more detail below).

Assessment exercises provide an opportunity to examine teaching methodology, student performance, and course design, among other elements of the university experience, serving as a basis for identifying actions that will lead to more effective teaching and result in better student performance (EI: 5.3 Examples of Transformative Actions). Assessment results have also been used as a point of reference in college and school development plans and the development of institutional policies. An example of the latter is the set of actions that emerged during the pandemic when a special committee was appointed by the Academic Senate.

An example of our efforts to ensure the effectiveness of assessment on an ongoing basis, the committee in question sought to bolster student learning in the context of courses that relied on alternative online modalities. It reviewed documents and institutional policy and administered questionnaires to learn about student and faculty experiences. Its assessment findings and recommendations were presented in the Academic Senate to improve pedagogy, curriculum, and online student support services (EI 5.4: AS Cert. 43, AY 2020-21). These findings were also included in official letters to improve regulations concerning the creation and offering of distance education courses. In addition, a subcommittee of the Committee of Academic Affairs in the Senate is currently reviewing regulations related to distance education policy on our campus and throughout the UPR System. Eventually this

will result in the revision of policy, building on the assessment of learning experiences during the pandemic.

This approach to assessment has served as a basis for identifying insights that will be used to make the assessment process more effective in the future. The assessment of traditional classroom learning has served as the model for the assessment of learning in online contexts; moreover, our assessment cycle produces results that can be disaggregated to show patterns that arise in the context of online learning and be used to distinguish it from that which takes place in the traditional classroom. Moving forward, the assessment cycle should contemplate separating assessment processes by modality and develop rubrics for each. In addition, assessment should also be further developed to include metrics that make a direct connection between learning competencies and the skills and other aspects of academic preparation that are valued or required by employers and industry, and, for those who will continue their studies, programs of higher education. Progress in this area has been made by several of our accredited programs. The School of Law consistently publishes an annual summary report that presents information about the employment rates of its graduates (EI 5.5: School of Law 2023 Annual Employment Summary Report). Looking ahead, assessment in programs that are not subject to accreditation should be expanded in a similar manner.

At the curricular level, each academic program has a curricular committee in charge of ensuring the optimal functioning and continuous updating of the curriculum requirements for their degrees. This committee is charged with strengthening the student graduation profile, thus guaranteeing that study plans are aligned with current standards and expectations, both national and international. The curriculum committee has the responsibility of designing and reviewing plans of study, evaluating their alignment with the graduate exit profile, and making adjustments and improvements. Likewise, it develops tools such as rubrics and evaluation matrixes and implementing actions that promote the achievement of the learning outcomes defined in the exit profile of graduating students.

### **Informing Constituents about Programs & the Institution**

In general, the 123 academic programs disseminate their missions, visions, and goals to the university community and the public through their webpages, catalogs, curricular sequences, curricular offerings, and brochures. Many programs and departments also have printed information regarding curricular design and a description of student learning that is aligned with its graduate exit profiles. In addition, details about assessment of student learning are available to the public at large on the websites of General Education Skills Assessment Project and DIAA.

Currently, accredited programs present both their entry and exit profiles on their websites as a resource that assists users—whether potential applicants, current students, or future employers, among others—in answering questions about the program, the preparation that it offers, and their accreditation process (EI 5.6: Example of Public Information from GSP, 5.7 Graduate School of Rehabilitation Counseling Public Information, 5.8 Public Information about EA Accreditation Process). This practice should be expanded campus-wide to include non-accredited programs. In addition, the practice of posting online the self-studies overseen by DEGI and transformative actions undertaken by the program should be implemented.

Other ways that our academic programs report on student assessment include the publication of self-studies. For 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, in which assessment recommendations were included. The Graduate School of Planning developed a strategic plan for the years 2018-2023, and it proposed improvements to assessment. The College of Business Administration published its assessment data on its website. The Department of Social Work in the College of Social Sciences, also did so. Meanwhile, the master's degree in Information Sciences of the College of Communication and Information has published 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 promotes success within the field of education and uses direct and indirect assessment data to transform educational practices.

The Division of Institutional Research and Assessment (DIIA) webpage also presents data on compliance with learning assessment goals, cohort profiles, retention, and graduation rates. Specifically, the Institutional Effectiveness Report contains comparative data for the years 2016-2020. Program websites present specific information on assessment results and graduation rates. Some programs include transfer and placement information. However, as signaled above, this information tends to be for accredited programs.

### **Units Dedicated to the Assessment of Student Learning**

The unit that coordinates assessment cycles is the DIIA, and it analyzes, safeguards, and disseminates data gathered from three fundamental sources: assessment of student learning, institutional research, and the student information systems. Its website archives and disseminates assessment data and information about transformative actions.

DIIA builds on the work of the Office of Assessment of Student Learning (OEAE), which was in place from 2008 to 2019. The OEAE was responsible for collecting and analyzing data for assessment and for contributing to the development of an integrated student learning assessment process. One of its main achievements was expanding assessment to take place in a systematic way that involved all academic programs. DIIA compiles information on a semester basis and presents findings from institutional research, the assessment of student learning, and the assessment of institutional effectiveness on its website, in addition to validating and calibrating rubrics and reference material for the university community.

DEGI, for its part, provides a guide for developing plans for the assessment of student learning assessment on its webpage, as well as a collection of models for rubrics presentations and reports, and templates for satisfaction questionnaires. These resources are geared towards coordinators and others involved in designing or improving their plans.

### **Dynamic OLAS**

The work that was done by the OEAE, including the development of online tools to be used by faculty and assessment coordinators, was taken up by the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs (DAA) in May 2019. The OLAS online platform (the Online Learning Assessment System) supported the assessment process by serving as a repository for data on student performance. It organizes data to show the percentage of students that achieve the level of learning expected for each learning outcome listed in the relevant exit profiles. It is also used to produce reports of outcomes at the cohort, course, program, and college/school levels. Access to OLAS is provided to all faculty, who are responsible for entering assessment data

for their courses. The DIIA has created and shared online video tutorials to support engagement with OLAS.

The tool was upgraded in AY 2022-23 to Dynamic OLAS, which distinct from its predecessor, can be used to identify patterns of student learning at the levels of the entire undergraduate and graduate populations. This campus-wide perspective provides information about compliance with learning outcomes. The analysis of this data can be useful in elaborating development plans, curricular review, and proposing new programs, as well as in academic management. Dynamic OLAS enabled our campus to fulfill the goals of Academic Senate Certification 68, 2005-06, which stated that a system for gathering evidence would be established and then used to demonstrate whether academic programs are achieving what they set out to achieve in relation to student learning objectives that are aligned with the institutional mission, goals, and curricular competencies.

### Course Evaluations

Student course evaluations are another resource for improving course design, pedagogy, and curriculum. The process was reorganized in compliance with AS Certification 34, 2022-2023; AS Certification 115, 2022-2023; and the letter to the DAA by Chancellor Varela dated August 11, 2023. The process now takes place within Next, allowing students to evaluate their professors electronically at the end of each semester. The instrument collects data on student perceptions and learning experiences. Results of the evaluations are available to department directors, deans, the faculty member whose course is under evaluation, and other administrative positions (EI: 5.9 AS Cert. 32 2022-23, Student Perceptions).

### **Use of Assessment Results for the Improvement of Educational Effectiveness**

Results documented in the process of assessing learning provide the programs and the institution at large with a portrait of students in terms of the strengths and challenges that they face. Consistent strengths include the acquisitions of disciplinary competencies (these are associated with the major), information literacy, ethical and social responsibility, critical thinking, communication, and research skills.

During the period of 2016 to 2021, 66 of 68 undergraduate programs evaluated complied with all assessment cycles, as well as all the graduate programs. The assessment data obtained through this process facilitates planning and academic and administrative transformations that promote institutional effectiveness and accountability through periodic semi-annual and annual reports. The latter can be accessed through the webpages of DIIA, the DAA, and those of some colleges and schools. How these materials are used varies across programs, but they have been considered in processes of academic management, curricular revisions, budgetary decisions, and program creation.

### Program Changes

Transformative actions are informed changes to existing structures, tools, processes, and approaches to teaching and learning. The most frequently implemented transformative actions are directly related to modifications in the academic realm. Curricular revisions were the most frequently implemented transformative action by the academic programs, 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 after examining

data from multiple courses. In addition, it implemented a 21-month accelerated online master's program in Business Administration (iMBA). In classes that were already part of its academic program, additional transformative actions related to the following: the use of bibliographic resources, and the enrichment of learning resources for students. It developed new rubrics in ethics and communications courses to reflect new competencies in diversity, equity, and to emphasize entrepreneurship in introduction to management, marketing and strategy, among other courses. It also created a mega rubric for its doctoral programs. In other cases, transformative actions addressed deficiencies related to oral and written communication skills, including in the School of Law, which implemented the elaboration of a written research paper as a requirement for the completion of its program.

During the preparation of this self-study, multiple proposals resulting from the assessment of student learning were submitted, as well as periodic program evaluations, accreditations, and reaccreditations. These were evaluated at different institutional levels and the majority were approved. They resulted in new minor concentrations, program creation, the fusion of programs, and the approval of double majors. The latter have become shorter in terms of time-to-degree, a change that has contributed to higher rates of retention. Online professional certifications, were also approved.

More specifically, during 2021, 70 undergraduate and graduate proposals were submitted for the consideration and approval of institutional authorities at different levels. While most have already been completed, some are still under evaluation. All the accredited programs that were expected to submit their self-studies either did so in a timely manner. 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), the 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 had its proposal for the establishment of an accelerated online program for the master's degree in Business Administration approved. The School of Architecture submitted a proposal for the creation of Professional Certificates in Architecture and Landscape, Architecture in Tropical Climates, and in Conservation of Architectural and Urban Heritage.

#### Faculty and Assessment Coordinator Workshops

To help students improve their learning, DIIA and the Center for Academic Excellence have developed workshops to train faculty and teaching assistants in the use and development of assessment activities, rubrics to improve student learning, and tools for faculty to strengthen and improve their teaching strategies and curriculum design. A series of workshops is required for new faculty, and the rest of the faculty have access to it as ongoing professional development 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, and the Andragogy Teaching and Learning Cycle to Address the Adult Population, among others.

The institution also assesses the student support services provided by the Offices of Deans of Students, colleges, and schools that have an impact on the academic success of students, paying special attention to the factors that promote retention and improve

achievement. Of the programs that have been particularly successful, the Graduate College of Rehabilitation Counseling, stands out for its development of a Guide for the Student Learning Assessment Plan (2020). This is a Personal and Professional Development Plan for students who score below the expected level. This program, which assigns professors to act as advisors for individual students, is already operative and serving those who need it.

#### Peer Mentoring and Tutoring

The College of Communication and Information (FaCI) created an Academic Accompaniment Program that relies on peer mentoring. The accompaniment method allows graduate students and advanced undergraduates to offer individualized tutoring to students with identified needs areas such as: effective communication skills, critical thinking, and content of the discipline. The program is the result of a transformative action that was proposed in the AY 2018-19 student learning assessment cycle and is coordinated within the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs in FaCI. The program also publishes reports on direct mentoring evaluations and evaluations of the experience. These have led to transformations in mentoring strategies.

The impact of the FaCI Academic Accompaniment Program on the retention rate of the baccalaureate programs is notable. Between 2013 and 2018, the program maintained an average of 73% of its student populations. This percentage has gradually increased due to the implementation of a project that led to a graduation rate of 89% in 2019 and 92% in 2021.

Other programs that have successfully developed initiatives or used mentoring, tutoring, or academic advising models include the College of Business Administration, College of Education, the School of Architecture, the Graduate College of Planning and the Graduate Programs in Public Administration and Social Work, both of which are based in the College of Social Sciences. Most of the academic programs from these units are accredited. Experiences in these units serve as references in developing a model that meets the need of all the programs, in accordance with the guidelines established in the institutional mission. This project is currently under development following GB Certification 134, 2023-2024, which identifies our campus as the unit in charge of a pilot project that focuses on improving student services. Other processes and procedures designed to improve academic experience and 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, and implementation of new teaching-learning strategies and syllabi revisions, among others.

#### Students' Professional Development

Assessment results are also used to plan, conduct, and support professional development activities for students, 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 their 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 and provides a monthly stipend.

Another example of these initiatives can be found in the College of Education, where the emphasis is on strengthening knowledge and skills that have been identified as needing improvement through the Teacher Induction Program (PIM). The college shares information about activities and the benefits for participating students annually on its webpage. In January 2025, a new program called *Vive las Humanidades* was implemented with the support of a \$1.5 million dollar Mellon Foundation grant to provide internship experiences for undergraduate students on the verge of completing their degrees, with the goal of preparing them to prepare them for work environments in their respective fields of study.

### **Future Projects**

The Office of Institutional Transformation (OTI) of the UPR and the Vice President for Student Affairs in Central Administration recommended our campus to the Board of Governors as 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 transformative actions important across UPR campuses: 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. In addition, a \$3,000,000 five-year federal Title V grant has been reconfigured to incorporate artificial intelligence models to improve the academic performance of the undergraduate STEM population. These projects build on past accomplishments and the work previously done to consider relevant contexts and the lessons that have been learned.

### **Findings**

- Dynamic OLAS played a key role in fulfilling the goals of AS Certification 68, 2005-06, which called for a system that gathers information to help determine whether academic programs are achieving what they set out to achieve in relation to student learning objectives.
- The use of assessment data for institutional research on longitudinal trends has increased since the last self-study for MSCHE, and the institution continues to maintain a steady focus on rendering results that are useful for improving teaching and student learning in the short-term.
- The collection and dissemination of disaggregated data on the DIIA webpage has contributed to more robust processes of data analysis related to the assessment of student learning and to a better understanding of its significance.

### **Next Steps**

- The DAA will ensure that the transition to Dynamic OLAS is complete and continue faculty orientation and training in coordination with DIIA and CEA.

- The DAA will instruct each college and school to review main accomplishments in assessment and exemplary examples of transformative actions in faculty meetings that take place at the beginning of the semester.
- DEGI will require the graduate programs that complete the self-studies it oversees to post online transformative actions resulting from assessment.



## **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.*

### **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: the UPR System Strategic Plan); (ii) the UPR-RP Strategic Plan, Commitment 2018-2023 (6.2: UPR-RP Strategic Commitment), which was extended to December 2024; and (iii) the various development plans and annual reports that academic and administrative units on our campus 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 strategic plan that received the most attention in this report, Commitment 2018-2023, focused on allocating resources to address the challenges following large-scale 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 to 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. Moreover, 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 in multiple realms (e.g., staffing and infrastructure), they have also been met with reductions of expenses in numerous areas 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.

### **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 strategic plan as well as its links to their college or school. Regarding the process leading to Commitment 2018-2023, 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 experience, 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 Think Tank’s 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**

In the period leading up to the plan’s 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. In addition, two committees were established in 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 within 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 were used to advance related processes for institutional improvement. In addition, all major academic and administrative units (i.e., 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 DIIA and the respective campus 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 competitive 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 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

Given the focus on research at our institution, significant efforts have been made to consistently support the work of students and professors in this area, with initiatives aimed at increasing the production of innovative knowledge through both research and creative activity, and the recruitment of professors of excellence (Goal 1). All units evidenced successful projects and increased external funds through 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 has strived to make significant achievements while strengthening its recognized longstanding excellence in undergraduate, graduate, and professional education.

This includes meeting specific strategic goals (Goals 4, 5, & 6), as well as launching several projects and initiatives. In addition, the campus has continued to make great strides in its public service and community work related to outreach (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 linked to academic programs. This has taken place through practicum and internship courses, volunteer work in urban and community contexts, and entrepreneurial projects, quality of life projects, and student organization activities. Through the development of congresses, forums, expositions and cultural initiatives (which were virtual during the emergency periods), the campus led discussions about public affairs and the formulation of public policy proposals, facilitating engagement as well as humanistic and creative reflection.

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 completed during the prior plan, 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 an 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 has lead multiple collaborative and innovative projects to promote the participation of student organizations and employees in an array of community services as well as social and cultural management activities. These include beach cleanups, blood donations, and visits to homes for the elderly, animal shelters, the Julia de Burgos Protected Home, and hospitals, among others.

To support an environment that is conducive to research, creation, teaching, and service with greater fiscal sustainability (Goal 9), our administrative and academic units have developed and submitted proposals for funding other than the aforementioned external funds. They include: intramural practices, trusts and donations, the provision of continuing and professional education services, as well as collaborative alliances with governmental and private (local and international) organizations. In addition, the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs institutionalized a payment collection mechanism that can be used 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). 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 improving services (Goal 11). The Office of Human Resources, which is under the Office of the Dean of Administration, completed the evaluation and administrative reorganization of units' requests implementing reclassifications. It also

updated classification questionnaires and the process for granting of differentials to reduce temporary and/or substitute appointments, achieving an estimate payroll reduction of \$3.7 million. Efficiency was also improved through sustained monitoring to ensure that services are provided by suppliers quickly and that 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, DEGI 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 and higher levels of recruitment and student success.

Undoubtedly, the UPR-RP confronted challenges during the six-year period of the strategic plan, but it also reallocated 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 funds for infrastructure repairs, and graduate student assistantships, fewer bibliographic resources).
- A new approach to faculty recruitment by the UPR System, which reduced the number of hires as of AY 2019-20.

### **The Financial Planning & Budgeting Process**

The financial planning and budgeting process facilitates the fulfillment of the campus mission while making possible ongoing institutional improvement. Financial planning includes annual cost reductions and revenue measures that the institution needs to implement and comply with, respectively. The UPR Central Administration establishes the funding distribution for each campus based on: (i) the amount of state funds 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 in the strategic development plans of our major units.

## **Fiscal & Human Resources**

Despite fiscal challenges, our campus has the 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 its 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 response to this situation, UPR Central Administration is developing a new classification and compensation plan for non-teaching personnel. In fact, our 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 amounts to 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 the section of this report on Standard III. 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.

## **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. 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, had little debt. Thereafter, the UPR Governing Board initiated the drafting and approval of the first UPR Fiscal Plan under PROMESA.

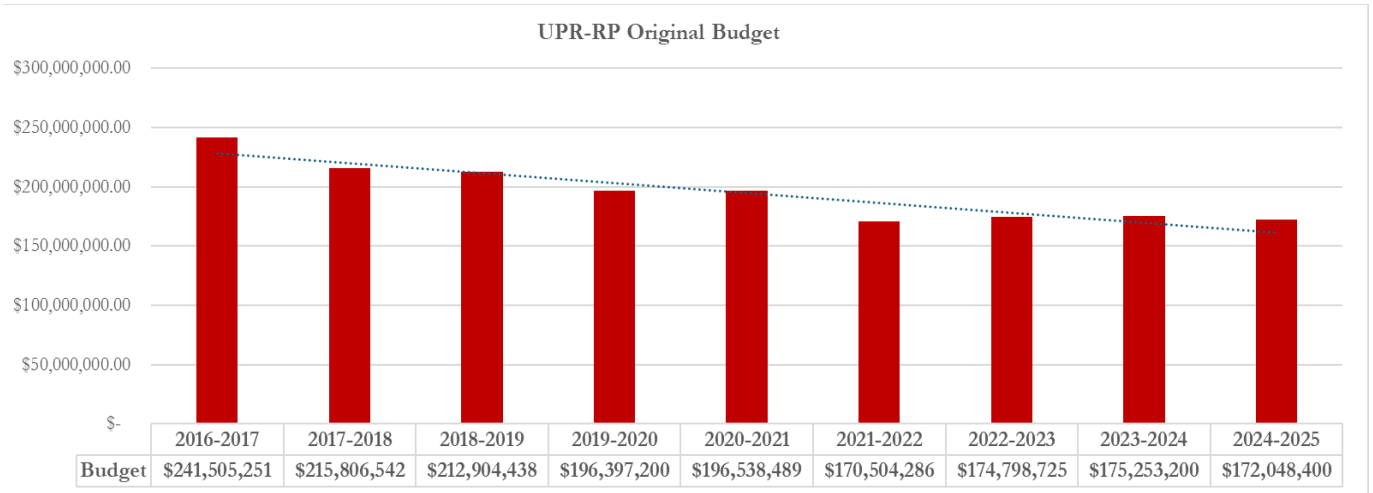
FY 2016-17 was the last year our campus received a general fund budget allocation of \$241.5 million. This funding allowed the institution to continue regular operations by

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 the maintenance of 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.

**Source: Board of Governors Cert. 17, 2024-25**



**Figure 6.1: UPR-RP General Fund Annual Budgets FY 2016-17 to FY 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 staff positions, the fiscal plan established that all that were vacant due to retirement would be eliminated as part of the annual adjustments to make operations more efficient. Campus administrators moved forward by 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 most power lines and millions of trees. An initial recovery phase extended until December 2017 with emergency funds approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Structural damage on our campus 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 negatively 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 under the pandemic grants. Other internal fiscal resources were used to completely cover 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 in the forthcoming budgets without changes that would address these concerns. 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 to this situation, 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 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, initiatives 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 the 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 cost 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.

In terms of the operational budget for this year, the main expenses are salaries, with faculty salaries and non-teaching staff accounting for about 35% and 18%, respectively, in FY 2024. Payroll, which includes health insurance, retirement contributions, and other benefits, and state and federal taxes, accounts for about 79% of the operational budget for the same year (EI 6.9: Operational Budget FY 2022-24).

**FY 2024-25**

The FY 2024-2025 began with new challenges: (i) the UPR Office of the President submitted to the FOMB a new law (Law 92 of 2024) approved by the Governor of Puerto Rico that would have increased Commonwealth government appropriations to the UPR to by \$59 million, but the proposed law was rejected by the FOMB and the institution lost the opportunity to receive the funds; (ii) in August 2024, the UPR Central Administration and UPR Governing Board integrated \$55 million to all UPR campus budgets from the \$102 million in non-recurrent funding that the FOMB will allocate to the UPR based on the milestones compliance, with our campus receiving \$21.6 million; (iii) the UPR-RP original operational budget was reduced by \$3.2 million in payroll allocation (salaries and fringe benefits), limiting our capacity to hire non-teaching staff in areas like physical plant maintenance and administrative positions in service areas; and (iv) the employee medical plan cost increased, and UPR Central Administration established that each campus would assume the responsibility of covering this expense out of its existing budget, leading to an impact of \$2 million. Decisions related to these four actions increased the campus budget deficit for the year and forced it to postpone responses to other areas of need, thereby putting more pressure on the budget of the year to follow.

Our campus has operated at the minimum operation level due to these budget restrictions. We did identify a complementary non-recurrent fund to support the operational budget, which received balances from the gains and surplus of activities like government contracts, summer academia initiatives, allowances from faculty internal revolving accounts, and the recovery of indirect costs from federal grants. Recently, new budget challenges have emerged as the result of additional adjustments that require administrators to identify additional complementary funds that allow the campus to cover its operational expenses.

**Overview of Funding Sources & Revenues**

Table 6.1 identifies the various funding sources and revenues that 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.

External Funds

Funds received from the CARES Act and ARPA, both associated with pandemic recovery, are 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 DEGI 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 6.10: DEGI External Funds Overview).

Recently, proposals have also been submitted to federal and local agencies for additional funds to further improve the energy infrastructure and execute other projects. Other activities slated 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.

### **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 request for an estimated \$99 million in 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 with an estimated cost of over \$450 million) are awaiting evaluation in the design and permit processes. In addition, funds the UPR Central Administration and the PR Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction, and Resilience (COR3) must identify funds for them. 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 administrative matters, a topic also addressed in the section on Standard VII, the UPR and the Puerto Rico Treasury Department have an agreement to replace the UPR's 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. Financing will be provided by the PR Treasury Department.

Table 6.1: UPR-RP Budget Appropriations &amp; 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)	%
<b>GENERAL FUND BUDGET</b>	\$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%	
<b>DECEP PROJECTS GAINS</b>	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2.05	\$4.69	\$2.80	\$9.54	0.57%
<b>FEDERAL FUNDS - GRANTS AND CONTRACTS</b>	\$12.65	\$10.49	\$14.31	\$15.50	\$13.77	\$16.51	\$18.79	\$21.00	\$110.37	6.60%
<b>CARES ACT AND ARPA FUNDS</b>	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$27.07	\$21.75	\$8.30	\$0.00	\$57.12	3.42%
<b>LOSS OF REVENUE FUND FROM CARES ACT</b>	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$11.82	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$11.82	0.71%
<b>LEGISLATURE AND UPR SCHOLARSHIP FUND</b>	\$3.38	\$3.38	\$6.86	\$2.77	\$2.09	\$2.61	\$2.49	\$2.50	\$22.70	1.36%
<b>STATE GOVERNMENT GRANTS AND CONTRACTS</b>	\$2.96	\$1.03	\$1.44	\$0.98	\$1.95	\$2.33	\$0.38	\$3.50	\$11.61	0.69%
<b>CORPORATIONS AND PRIVATE GIFTS</b>	\$1.55	\$1.26	\$3.22	\$1.29	\$3.17	\$3.96	\$1.42	\$1.50	\$15.82	0.95%
<b>FACULTY PROFESSIONAL SERVICES</b>	\$0.57	\$0.08	\$0.17	\$0.19	\$0.12	\$0.15	\$0.40	\$0.60	\$1.72	0.10%
<b>ENDOWMENT INCOME</b>	\$0.30	\$0.07	\$0.13	\$0.50	\$0.37	\$2.49	\$3.56	\$2.60	\$9.71	0.58%
<b>REVOLVING FUND INCOME</b>	\$1.39	\$2.38	\$2.98	\$3.56	\$2.73	\$4.58	\$4.45	\$4.70	\$25.38	1.52%
<b>OTHER SPECIAL PROJECTS</b>	\$2.08	\$0.79	\$10.63	\$6.47	\$1.06	\$2.71	\$1.52	\$3.80	\$26.98	1.61%
<b>CAPITAL PROJECTS</b>	\$3.40	\$5.19	\$5.31	\$1.87	\$4.46	\$2.22	\$4.34	\$4.00	\$27.39	1.64%
<b>RESTRICTED FUNDS</b>	\$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%	
<b>CONSOLIDATED BUDGET</b>	\$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.

**Preparing for New Metrics**

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 Office of the President, the University Board, and the UPR Governing Board. However, there has not been any response, nor has any commitment been made to address these concerns. The aforementioned documentation included a proposal for an additional \$52.7 million to cover costs associated with campus operations, specifying operational needs for FY 2024 totaling \$52,715,607 (EI 6.11: UPR-RP Budget Requests for FY 24).

In January 2024, UPR Central Administration initiated a study to review the budget model that has been used to determine how state funds are distributed among campuses. A new model was proposed and discussed and it included indicators such as tuition revenues, number of students (FTE students), retention and graduation rates, the efficiency of academic offerings, and the efficiency of the administration. The purpose of the study was to obtain information to use for modifying the model and implementing a new one, which at the time of this writing is still not officially in place.

The Budget Office completed an analysis of the proposed model and found that an additional indicator is needed to assist the campus in meeting costs associated with community service (in particular, the operation of CAUCE, University Radio, and the Laboratory School attached to the College of Education). In addition, 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. Moreover, the proposed model does not recognize the budget insufficiency of the operational fund, which is estimated to be \$12 million. Given this scenario, campus leadership is preparing for new budgetary and operational challenges in the coming fiscal years.

**Annual Independent Audit**

The UPR financial statements have been issued on time for the past six years (EI 6.12: 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 could cause delay and thereby 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 Finances 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

### **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 reviewed in the DAA and the AS. 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 AB. 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.

### **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 be modified to support the more effective allocation of budgetary resources decisions. Efforts must be focused on realistic long-term goals with tangible objectives in each 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**

- 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.
- The process for assessing the achievement of goals and objectives in strategic plans has improved.
- The centralization of the budget decision-making process mandated by FOMB has limited input mechanisms that previously allowed for a more adequate consideration of campus needs.
- Federal funds (grants and contracts) have increased significantly in the period 2018-2024, totaling \$110.37 million dollars and averaging \$15.76 million annually.

### **Next Steps**

- The campus should implement recommendations for fiscal transformation that have resulted from the work of its external consultant.

- Improvements to the campus electric grid and water plant, projects for which some funding has been made available, should be prioritized.
- The institution should provide necessary resources that would allow university enterprises to strengthen their operations and increase their intake of revenue as well as 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.*

### **General Governance Structure**

Institutional governance at UPR-RP involves various bodies, including the Academic Senate, the Administrative Board, the University Board, 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 responsibilities, as well as 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 and the fulfillment of our mission.

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 UPR's Central Administration, governance responsibilities are distributed among three complementary bodies that serve UPR-RP and the other 10 campuses: the Governing Board, the Office of the President, and the University Board. Central Administration is responsible for executing system-wide policies regarding: 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. It oversees the Administrative Board, which is 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 Student Affairs, 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 convene and facilitate the participation of students, non-teaching staff, and faculty in governance. The exchanges that take place in these meetings provide a space for dialogue and input while simultaneously assisting campus leadership in making informed decisions 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 "*El 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 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. Certifications

create, replace, or amend policies and are periodically compiled as an updated version of *El Reglamento*.

The review completed for this analysis indicates that Governing Board regulations and certifications are clearly articulated and transparent, and that if additional comment or information about a policy or change to policy is requested, it responds with updates to published policy or explanation to the body or unit responsible for implementation. Equally important, it is clear that the publication of certifications allows the relevant governance bodies to execute new policies and thereby respond to plans and proactively address challenges. The latter is apparent 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.

The regulations and procedures that have been recently approved and others currently in place can be easily accessed 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, certifications presenting policies related to academic and administrative issues and amendments to them 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 those issued by governance bodies on campus and those at Central Administration.

### **The UPR Governing Board (GB)**

The GB is the highest-ranking governing body of the UPR System (EI 7.3: GB Cert. 100 2013-14). 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 also a member. This person represents the Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) which has since 2017 controlled the finances of various public institutions in Puerto Rico, as authorized by the federal law PROMESA (passed by Congress in 2016).

Most GB members 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 who is named by the FOMB. 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.

### Responsibilities

Relevant to governance on our campus, the GB is also responsible for approving the appointment of Chancellors, executive deans, and the deans of colleges. It 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 GB represents 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 GB 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 its mission and achieve goals and objectives. As such, the GB 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 Section on Standard VI, in recent years, the GB has submitted a consolidated budget for the entire UPR System to the FOMB. Once it is approved by the FOMB, the GB certifies the annual operational budget.

Official regulations establish that the GB is obligated to ensure the financial security and fiscal solvency of the UPR System. Board members and the President are charged 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. This is noteworthy considering widespread concerns about ongoing reductions in the institution's state funding and resulting budgetary shortfalls.

The necessity of avoiding conflicts of interest on the GB 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 section suggests that current members are well aware of these rules and consider them central to effective and responsible governance.

### Committees, Meetings, & Access to Information

The GB establishes standing and special committees to organize its work. Standing committees include:

- Appeals, Law, and Regulations
- Academic Affairs in the Areas of Academics, Research and Innovation, and Students
- 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 GB's internal regulations, it holds ordinary meetings monthly, and it can also hold extraordinary meetings. In accordance with institutional policy amended by Law 25 of 2014, the GB broadcasts online 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 YouTube 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.

In accordance with its regulations, all GB 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: Certif. 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 current. Anyone with a question regarding a certification may contact the Board's Minutes and Records Office.

#### Reports and Audits

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 since then this information has been submitted to its representatives.

Additionally, the GB 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 GB, and external auditors (EI 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 GB 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.

Dr. Luis A. Ferrao Delgado, was appointed UPR President 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.

President Ferrao resigned February 3, 2025, effective the 15<sup>th</sup> of the same month. His resignation was accepted by the GB, which assured members of the university community and the public at large that an interim president would be named by the 15<sup>th</sup>. Dr.'s Ferrao's letter of resignation stated that he is convinced that the UPR possesses "the capacity and historic strength to overcome the challenges that confront it and continue as a pillar of social, economic, and cultural development in Puerto Rico."

On February 13, 2025, the Governing Board voted to determine the institution's new interim president, selecting Dr. Miguel Muñoz, a faculty member from the UPR Mayagüez Campus. Dr. Muñoz served as president of the institution between 2011 and 2015.

### **The University Board (UB)**

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 UB has a set of internal regulations that governs its functions and duties (EI 7.8: UB Internal Regulations).

The UB 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 UB holds ordinary and extraordinary meetings. Ordinary meetings are held monthly in person between the months of September to June (excluding January). In case of emergency situations, such as natural disasters, meetings are held virtually. Extraordinary meetings are called by the president or at the request of an established percentage of its members.

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 draft of the integrated budget for the UPR System, as formulated by the president, to be submitted to the GB. 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 GB).

The UPR-RP Chancellor, who is appointed by the GB after being nominated by the President, is the chief executive officer at the campus level, where they exercise both administrative and academic authority. The General Regulations and Article 7 of the UPR Law detail specific responsibilities for the Chancellor:

- Guidance and supervision of university staff and teaching, technical, research, and administrative functions;
- Formulation of the budget proposal;
- Representation of 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
- Resolution of 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 GB in February 2023. Dr. Varela Llavona, who completed postdoctoral work at Harvard, holds a doctorate from Ohio State University, a master's degree in Public Administration and Social Work, and a bachelor's degree in Psychology from the College of Social Sciences at UPR. She has served as a member of various working committees, such as the Accreditation Committee for MSCHE, 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 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 GB (EI 7.9: Office of Chancellor Annual Report). The Chancellor's performance is evaluated in intervals of four to six years.

The Academic Senate follows the provisions in the General Regulations of the UPR, completing the campus-level tasks associated with selecting the Chancellor. 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 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 all candidates' 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 a role in the process of evaluating the candidates for Chancellor, as they form a consultation committee of three elected employees to rank



candidates. Both consultation committees present a report on the advantages and disadvantages of the candidates to the GB and the President for their analysis and final decision. On the whole, the process promotes participation among the university community (students, faculty, and non-teaching staff, among others) through a variety of mechanisms: forums, public hearings with candidates, surveys, and circular letters disseminated by email.

### **The Administrative Board (AB)**

The AB 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 AB began a discussion about the impact of recent changes, in particular those related to how the campus operational budget is approved, on its responsibilities and actions. Concerning the budgetary role of this body, it is charged with approving promotions and tenure, salary compensation, leaves of absence, special appointments, the creation of new academic programs, and funding for priority projects.

### **The Academic Senate (AS)**

The AS 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), as described below. 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, the internal regulations of the AS serve as a guide for the institutional work that it carries out (EI 7.10: AS Internal Regulations).

The AS consists of 66 members which include 13 student senators elected by their peers; the Deans of Academic Affairs, Administration, and Student Affairs; the deans of colleges and schools; 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 AS 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 AS (EI 7.11: AS Certification 103, 2022-23). The work schedule it establishes and the mechanisms of participation 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 shared by email.

In terms of organization, the Chancellor presides over the AS. The body has six permanent committees: Agenda, Academic Affairs, Claustal Affairs, Student Affairs, University Law and Regulations, and the Committee to Recommend Academic and Honorary Distinctions. In recent years, the AS has 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 GB. 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 (GSC)**

The GSC 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 and serve in all of our governing bodies, thereby ensuring that the administration is aware of student experiences, including the challenges that 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 GSC promotes widespread student participation in campus activities and helps to shape institutional culture and disseminate information about matters of interest, as its members engage the institution with both voice and vote.

### **Administrative Units**

The Office of Legal Counsel is one of the campus-level administrative units that advises the appointing authority on our campus, the Chancellor. One of the offices under its supervision 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. Another important unit is the Title IX Office, which is part of the Office of Compliance and Audits; its functions include carrying out audits and ensuring that personnel and students are treated with equity and fairness.

Other units, including academic departments and programs and administrative units, have the authority to define internal policies, norms, and procedures that allow them to fulfill their responsibilities in accordance with the campus mission and goals and, when applicable, external regulations. They are led by experienced personnel who are qualified to perform the roles and responsibilities that they have been assigned. Administrative staff also have the required credentials in their areas of expertise, in compliance with UPR regulations. Changes are taking place in these units and updates to processes are being implemented. Due to the large number of retirements and limited number of hires in recent years, campus leadership has turned to mechanisms such as reclassification, and the payment of differentials, extra compensation, and overtime as strategies to secure the provision of 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 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 (EI 7.12: HR Calendar). 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 7.13: OHR Report for Assessment of Strategic Plan).

Another example of improvement has taken place in the Office of Planning and the Development of Infrastructure, which recently carried out a process of needs assessment concerning the use of physical space. It relied on an assessment 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 that was expressed by the Academic Senate, which relate to the current state of infrastructure, the tool was used in conjunction with work by 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. This plan is significant given concerns about infrastructure among members of the university community and a downward shift in funding for this area.

### **University Autonomy**

Article 4.A of the UPR Law recognizes the authority of the eleven campus 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 any request that entails authorization from the GB to the president, including budget allocations, petitions for teaching and non-teaching positions, amendments to regulations, and proposals for infrastructure projects related to permanent improvements. In recent years, ensuring the integrity and autonomy of the university system, as it is stipulated by Commonwealth law, has been a challenge for the GB. This is due to the fiscal crisis and decisions made by the Fiscal Oversight and Management Board (FOMB), which reviews and determines the budget and departs from prior precedent but does not necessarily always provide the UPR System with the funding that will allow it to complete the projects and transformations that the institution's administrative leaders suggest should be prioritized.

The FOMB has insisted on becoming involved with decision-making that was traditionally under the purview of the UPR leadership. It has also 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 that the FOMB has announced. Moreover, the President underscored that the UPR System has complied with its mandates. These 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.

Within this same context, the UPR-RP 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 as a recent accomplishment.

### **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 7.14: University Reform Project) 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.

The contents of the University Reform Project 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 more effective participation as it relates to decision-making in 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 the functions of its campuses, facilitating the streamlining of decision-making regarding academic structures and programs of study.
- Fortify institutional renewal and depoliticization through the establishment of fixed terms for the highest positions of governance, allowing these to be long enough to ensure the completion of their plans for institutional improvement and continuity across administrations.
- Require more effective exercises in planning, streamlining processes, and decision-making by reviewing and aligning improvement with 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 on the part of its academic and administrative units.

### **Audits**

In March of 2024, the Office of the President announced that it had complied with the timely submission of the Single Audit Report, for FY 2023 (EI 7.15: Compliance with SAR). Important for financial integrity and management, internal audits allow for compliance with university laws and regulations as well as their assessment. They require monitoring of administrative processes related to finances and compliance with the external audit conducted by the Office of the Comptroller of Puerto Rico (EI: 7.16: Compliance with

External Audit). Both sets of processes reinforce transparency, the efficient use of resources, and effective controls.

### **Non-Teaching Staff Classification & Training**

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 on our campus, impacting 155 administrative employees from different 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.

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 these employees' job descriptions with the current needs, skills, experiences of their respective units and appropriate compensation.

### **Evaluation of Administrators**

Periodic evaluations consider the effectiveness of governance structures, leadership, and administration. The President and chancellors are evaluated by the Governing Board (EI 7.17: GB Cert. 95 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 (EI: 7.18: AS Cert. 100, 2021-22; AS Cert 137, 2021-2022, Instrument for Evaluation of Chancellor).

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 leaders 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. DIAA 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**

- Openness and transparency have contributed to effective governance 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 university autonomy, as well as operations, since the budget cuts in most cases are neither formulated within its governing structures nor harmonized with needs at the academic and administrative levels.
- The achievement of goals associated with institutional improvement and greater effectiveness is not always documented in reports given that they tend to focus on outcomes.

### **Next Steps**

- The Academic Senate should conduct an annual self-assessment exercise that assists it in identifying the protocols and practices that make the body most effective.
- Campus level reports should be developed to better assist in documenting institutional assessment and transformative actions.
- A plan that operationalizes the assessment of leadership and governance on an annual basis should be put into place at all levels.