

Self-Study Evaluation Team Report

Effective Date: February 1, 2021

University of Puerto Rico - Carolina
Self-Study Evaluation Team Visit: April 24 to April 27, 2022

Section A: Institutional Representatives

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/Rector

Dr. Jose I. Meza Pereira

Dean Academic Affairs

Dr. José Ayala Pérez

Dean Administrative Affairs

Mrs. Elizabeth Negrón Pagán

Chair of the Board of Directors

Mr. Ricardo Dalmau

Section B: Institutional Context

The University of Puerto Rico at Carolina (UPRCA) was founded in 1974 as part of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) System. Currently made up of 11 units, this is the only public system of Higher Education in Puerto Rico. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education first accredited the Institution, known at that time as Carolina Regional College, in 1978. Twenty-one years later, Carolina became an autonomous campus within the UPR System. Bachelor and associate degree levels are included within the institutional accreditation scope. Carnegie classification categories describe UPRCA as a diverse field four-year primarily non-residential public baccalaureate institution. Carolina is located east of the capital city and is one of the largest and most developed cities on the Island. The UPRCA campus consists of multiple buildings built on a 57-acre field with teaching, sports, dining, and arts facilities. Adequate parking spaces and recreational areas are also available.

The UPRCA serves a population of approximately 2,373 students that come from the city of Carolina as well as other adjacent ones like Río Grande, Canóvanas, Trujillo Alto, Bayamón, and Caguas. Nearly half of the students are low-income who earn below \$23,000 per year. A high percentage receives financial aid, mostly Pell grants.

Exceptional events occurred in Puerto Rico during the last five years.

- US Congress approval of the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA, June 2016).
- Hurricanes María and Irma (September 2017).
- Earthquakes (December 28, 2019-present).
- Covid 19 pandemic (present).

All these events had an impact on institutional finances, enrollment, infrastructure (physical and technological), and human resources. The situation required an examination of the institutional mission that would render necessary changes to guarantee financial sustainability and provide assistance to students and staff in need. The priorities addressed direct topics of particular interest to the institution:

1. External Resources and Research
2. Academic Innovation
3. Advance Student Academic and Professional Goals
4. Data-driven Decision-Making

These priorities were included in strategic and financial planning, aligned with the mission, and approved by campus authorities.

Section C: Requirements of Affiliation

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet all of the requirements of affiliation.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

UPRCA meets the Requirements of Affiliation (ROA) 1-6 in that the institution is authorized to operate and award postsecondary degrees; the institution has students enrolled and it graduates a cohort each academic term; the institution submitted its Self-Study Report and other materials in English; the institution complies with all State and Federal laws as well as with Commission and inter-institutional policies. Further, the UPRCA presented evidence of its:

- Mission and goals (ROA 7)
- Program evaluation (ROA 8)
- Rigor, coherence and assessment (ROA 9)
- Integrated institutional planning (ROA 10)
- Financial resources (ROA 11)
- Governance structure (ROA 12)
- Governance and conflict of interest (ROA 13)
- Faculty (ROA 15)

Section D: Standards for Accreditation

Standard I: Mission and Goals

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

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- The University of Puerto Rico at Carolina (UPRCA) mission is aligned with the achievement of its goals. Community participation becomes vital to achieve goals and values.
- The UPRCA mission clearly defines the purpose of the university.
- The UPRCA strives to positively impact a diverse, dynamic, changing, and a globalized society; is recognized for its academic excellence and services; and is committed to supporting the research and scholarly efforts of its faculty and students both national and internationally.
- The UPRCA Values are: Excellence; Integrity, Ethics and Academic Honesty; Diversity and Social Awareness; and Culture of Service.
- The UPRCA provides opportunities for academic, professional, and cultural development for students in and out of Puerto Rico, specially through its unique academic offerings.
- The mission is periodically revised under a process that considered the alignment of institutional priorities and goals with strategic and financial planning. The mission and goals established by the UPRCA were developed through an ample and collaborative participation process that includes all university constituents. The planning process, the allocation of resources, the development of programs and study plans, and the definition of the institutional and educational outcomes are aligned with the mission, vision, and goals.

Collegial Advice: None

Team Recommendation:

- The team recommends that the university establish a formal institutional policy that will strengthen the process of assessing the mission and goals.

Requirement(s): None

Standard II: Ethics and Integrity

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

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- The UPRCA is committed to academic freedom, intellectual freedom of expression, and respect for intellectual property rights as evidenced in the UPRCA's Faculty Manual. The UPRCA's Student General By-Laws provides guidance on academic dishonesty. The UPRCA's Academic Integrity Policy provides additional information about academic integrity.
- The UPRCA's academic policies, processes and procedures are fair and equitable. A climate of respect is valued as indicated in the UPRCA policy against discrimination. There is also a Title IX coordinator promoting a university environment which is free from discrimination based on gender.
- The UPRCA has grievance policies and a robust Conflict of Interest policy. The UPRCA also ensures the implementation of fair and impartial practices through the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action. Further, the institution shares information on accessibility and affordability via its website and other institutional literature.
- The UPRCA complies with Federal, States and MSCHE policies as evidenced in the material included in the Self-Study.
- The UPRCA implements an internal communication system (re: Cartero.Carolina) to strengthen the security and the truthfulness of all communications shared among the units (academic and administrative).
- The UPRCA periodically assesses its ethical and integrity policies, processes and practices and the way these are implemented. The assessment is based on surveys and/or discussions that take place at official meetings. Changes as a result of assessment are implemented by the unit that initiated the assessment.

Collegial Advice: None

Team Recommendation(s): None

Requirement(s): None

Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

- The UPRCA should be commended for Proyecto *Construyendo Equidad entre Géneros* (Building Equity among the Genders Project). Through this project, the institution creates awareness about gender equity and gender violence and how to prevent it at UPRCA.

Standard III: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience

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

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- The UPRCA offers 14 academic programs, including 10 bachelor's degrees and 4 associate degrees. Degree offerings span 8 schools and departments, representing Hotel and Restaurant Administration, Office Administration Technologies, Design, Criminal Justice, Natural Sciences, Business Administration, Education, and Technologies in Engineering. Professional certifications are granted through the Criminal Justice and Business Administration departments. The UPRCA seeks to significantly expand its portfolio with 6 new academic offerings.
- The UPRCA programs adhere to a trimester calendar, with course length ranging from 10-11 weeks. All courses are flexibly designed for delivery in residential, hybrid, and fully online modalities via the Moodle learning management system (LMS). Academic program details and curricular pathways are published on the UPRCA website and the institutional catalogue. Hybrid and online offerings are managed through the centralized Office of Distance Education and apply a module template to achieve a coherent learning experience.

- The UPRCA has reduced its faculty profile to 82 full-time and 69 part-time members, the majority of whom hold a master's or doctoral degree in their discipline, with an increasing number of doctoral-level faculty. While 1.6% of faculty are dedicated researchers, UPRCA supports professional growth and scholarship through internal workshops, funding, and the Faculty Research Network. In addition, faculty are prepared for their online and hybrid teaching responsibilities via Moodle certification and participate in a systematic, three-pronged evaluation process integrating peer, student, and department director feedback. Processes for rank promotion are clearly outlined and disseminated in the Guide to Faculty Rank and Promotion checklist.
- The UPRCA provides a robust support system to bolster students' academic achievement. Available resources include the Learning Resource Center, Information Literacy and Technology program, Tutoring Office, and UPRCA Writing Center. An asynchronous Moodle orientation module is required upon matriculation as preparation for online and hybrid coursework. Just-in-time technical support is provided via email, Microsoft Teams, and phone calls.
- The UPRCA General Education Program curriculum is founded on 15 learning outcomes aligned to 8 programmatic goals that advance the Institution's mission, ethos, and culture of inclusion. Student outcomes are periodically assessed via quarterly exams.

Collegial Advice:

- Given the significant updates made to the physical classrooms and overall technological infrastructure in the past year, the team suggest that UPRCA might consider assessing the impact of these changes on the student learning experience via direct or indirect measures in the near future.
- As the UPRCA scales its Distance Education and financial resources become available, the team encourages the institution to provide engagement opportunities to all students and alumni. In the same vein, the team encourages the institution to expand the Distance Education supporting staff.

Team Recommendation(s): None**Requirement(s):** None**Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices**

- The UPRCA has shown a commitment to ensuring the accessibility of their courses for students with disabilities; faculty are prepared through digital accessibility training modules.

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.

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- The UPRCA provide students who wish to participate in extracurricular activities, student life and athletics with the opportunities to do so, pursuant to *Certification No. 4 2019-2020, UPR Governing Board*
- The UPRCA has policies and procedures in place to encourage student participation on the Governing Board of the institution.
- The UPRCA has clear guidance on how student athletes and musicians are to be supported by the university during their activities and the students' responsibility to comply with specific requirements.
- The UPRCA has policies and procedures in place to ensure confidential information is protected, pursuant to the Acceptable Use Policy. There is evidence of policies that support transfer students. There are policies and procedures in place to recruit, retain and support students.
- The Dean of Students Affairs Office provides a wide array of services to support students. Of note, there is a Student Services and Support Center named CASE (for its Spanish acronym) that provides support for second-year and beyond students. Such a focus on second-year students is commensurate with current research indicating that a focus on second year students leads to improved persistence and graduation rates.
- There is apparent collaboration between academic affairs, student affairs and student services that benefits the students and helps them meet with success during their studies. Faculty and staff work together both inside and outside of the classroom to support students.

Collegial Advice: None

Team Recommendation(s): None

Requirement(s): None

Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

- The team has observed that the culture of the campus is designed to support students from admissions to graduation. “Culture of service” is the term which was used to describe UPRCA’s commitment to student success. Faculty and staff work together and across divisions to meet the needs of students

Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment

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

In the team’s judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- The UPRCA has clearly stated educational goals. Every academic program is required to have clearly defined educational goals in line with the institutional mission and is periodically reviewed. Academic departments and support services plan and achieve educational goals in multiple modalities that complement each other, assuring a well-rounded academic development. The courses in each major are aligned to the program learning outcomes using a curricular map.
- The UPRCA General Education Program provides clear expectations for student performance and offer specific courses that address its learning outcomes.
- The UPRCA has implemented an Institutional Assessment System (IAS) based on Astin's model of Inputs, Environments, and Outcomes to guide administrative and academic units in the collection and use of relevant data that contribute to the achievement of the mission, vision, and goals of the Institution as a whole. The IAS system considers the characteristics of prospective students (Inputs), the interactions that take place as part of their academic experience (Processes and Context), and the short- and long-term results (Outcomes).

- The UPRCA has made a commitment to data-driven decision-making to assess the Impact of student learning assessment. Accredited programs use the data in their reports to accreditation agencies.
- The UPRCA has adopted the *Weave Online* platform, and hired an institutional researcher to support faculty in use of the platform. The platform *Weave Online* also aids in disseminating the results for decision-making at the course, program, and institutional levels.
- The UPRCA uses a Course Satisfaction Questionnaire to measure student engagement, perceived learning, satisfaction, etc., and the results are used to identify areas for improvement, and used in department-level 5-year program evaluation reports. Curricular and extracurricular activities on student development are continuously measured through the Exit Survey.
- The UPRCA uses data to inform decision-making at all levels. They have developed a campus-wide system to analyze and disseminate assessment information to support planning and decision-making processes.
- The UPRCA administer the Interests and Need Assessment Questionnaire to all first-year students and uses it to 1) refer students to the supported services they requested, and 2) provide information to the institution about the student profile so that support services can be developed or improved.
- The UPRCA has implemented an enrollment monitoring system to monitor the enrollment process, applying early interventions, and providing assistance and referrals.
- The UPRCA Title V project provides access to data that is updated daily and informs the academic planning process to determine the number of sections to be created per academic term instead of using historical data, resulting in optimized course enrollment and significant economies. This focus on data analyses aid in understanding student success.

Collegial Advice:

- The team encourages the university to create institutionally-supported processes to validate systematic and consistent assessment practices and maximize outcomes.
- The team encourages the university to diversify the measures of assessment across all academic programs to increase reliability.

Team Recommendation(s): None

Requirement(s): None

Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

- The Institutional Research and Assessment Office should be commended for supporting a culture of assessment, continuous improvements, and data-driven decisions
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Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement

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

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- The UPRCA has ongoing practices for institutional and strategic planning. Examples of how the planning process is used for decision-making prove that structures are in place to fulfill UPRCA's mission and goals.
- The UPRCA's state funding has been steadily reduced due to precautionary measures imposed by the Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico. Amid these disruptions, examples were shared that demonstrate how institutional leaders adopted administrative and academic processes to sustain student learning.
- The UPRCA's 2013-2017 strategic plan informed the revisions to the strategic plan. The revised plan is built around four strategic goals with thirteen objectives. The revised plan strengthens the links between and among resources and research, academic innovation, and advancing student academic and professional goals. The strategies included in the revised strategic plan were developed with a high degree of community involvement. Experts were assigned to each strategic goal to serve as leaders. An action orientation was used to identify opportunities and resources to help UPRCA achieve its desired goals. The participatory process was designed to produce an impactful plan and make the resource allocation effort easier. In spite of the institution's limited resources, significant investments were made in classrooms, and technology to enhance the student learning experience.
- The UPRCA campus leaders shared how they engage in short and long-term financial planning. Despite ongoing efforts to maintain fiscal stability and encourage growth, the budgetary constraints approved by the UPR System Fiscal Plan have put pressure on the institution through continual budget reductions. It was noted that seeking funding from external sources will be necessary for the institution to continue to fulfill its mission and goals.

- A review of the University of Puerto Rico's Central Administration budget process highlighted how resources flow to UPRCA. The UPR Central Administration sends a pre-approved budget with fund distribution and restrictions. UPRCA must request approval for any deviations from the UPR budget. Tools were developed to assign resources to the strategic planning goals and related objectives. Metrics are used to measure progress. UPRCA also uses variance analysis to identify, communicate and take corrective actions. This process is designed to ensure that units stay within their allocated budgets.
- The UPRCA's Division of Continuing Education (DECEP) programs are generating new and growing revenues. DECEP has increased its revenues from \$1.47 million in fiscal year 2017 to \$4.21 million in 2021. In the last five years, the success of these training programs represents a new revenue source. Hiring and retaining staff is a significant challenge for UPRCA, as are technology refresh efforts. A faster wireless network is underway, allowing for transforming lecture-style classrooms into ones that can support hybrid learning.

Collegial Advice: None

Team Recommendation(s): None

Requirement(s): None

Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

- The UPRCA should be commended for making significant progress executing its planning process aligning resources with goals, priorities, and their mission.
- The UPRCA should be commended for its effective use of zero-based budgeting to allocate and repurpose resources throughout its fiscal year.

Standard VII: Governance, Leadership, and 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 constituents 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.

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with campus constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- The UPRCA is a dynamic and vibrant student-centered community that is responsive to both internal and external stakeholders.
- The UPRCA's administration and governance operates in a manner that is ethical and transparent in support of the institution's mission to strengthen their graduates "professional development and contribute to the socioeconomic progress of the country."
- The UPRCA's governance structure is demonstrated in their organizational chart which is publicly available on the institution's website. The Views, Values, and Goals are in support of the institutional mission.
- The UPR Governance Board is legally constituted and is comprised of members who meet the stated qualifications. The Governing Board has a clearly stated policy addressing conflicts of interest. The Governing Board routinely evaluates both the system president and campus chancellor. The Governing Board notifies internal and external stakeholders in a timely matter of scheduled meetings consistent with their policies and procedures.
- The UPRCA has publicly viewable description of roles and responsibilities of both their administrative leadership and governance system. The university comports itself and acts in a manner consistent with stated expectations. There are clearly stated qualifications for the Rector, who has sufficient autonomy in managing the university operations.
- The UPRCA administration maintains an active and reciprocal dialogue with all internal stakeholders while affirming academic freedom and refraining from inappropriate involvement in program level and curricular decisions. Quantitative and qualitative data is widely available and communicated in a reciprocal fashion that fosters consensus and informed decision making at all levels

Collegial Advice:

- The team suggests that the UPRCA make its strategic plan publicly accessible.
- The team suggests that the UPRCA support leadership development of new administrators.
- The team suggests that the UPRCA include adjunct and contractual faculty representation on the Faculty Senate.

Team recommendations: None

Requirements: None

Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices.

- The team commends the UPRCA for its innovative use of social media outlets instrumental in maintaining engagement and communication with all stakeholders during natural disasters and the pandemic.

Section F: Review of Student Achievement and Verification of Institutional Data

Section F does not need to be read during the Oral Exit Report.

I. Student Achievement Goals

In the team's judgment, the institution's approach to realizing its student achievement goals appears to be effective, consonant with higher education expectations, and consistent with the institution's mission.

This judgment is based on a review of the institution's student achievement information provided in the self-study report, evidence, interviews with institutional constituencies, and the student achievement URL available on its website.

In addition, in the team's judgment, the institution's student achievement information data that it discloses to the public appear to be reasonably valid and accurate in light of other data and information reviewed by the team.

The university uses a myriad of measures to realize student achievement goals, including course grades, course and program reviews/evaluations and by providing robust student academic support services, such as tutoring and additional services for students with disabilities. Moreover, the mental health of students is supported by counseling services. Furthermore, there are online, hybrid, and in-person classes with adequate curricular rigor and support for students. To reduce the time to degree completion, UPRCA operates on a trimester basis. This allows students to complete course work in a shorter period of time. All of the aforementioned taken into consideration, the 4, 5 and 6 year graduation rates are commensurate to similar institutions. Thus, it appears that UPRCA is realizing its student achievement goals.

II. Verification of Institutional Data

In the team's opinion, the institution's processes and procedures that it uses to verify institutional data and the data provided in the self-study report appear to be reasonably valid and effective.

The office of institutional research and assessment uses continuous and ongoing evaluation measures to assess the achievement of annual objectives and performance indicators and establish feedback that facilitate possible modifications in the targeted areas.

The office of institutional research and assessment is primarily responsible for data analysis and works collaborative with stakeholders to: 1) Select data analysis procedures according to the type of data collected, the outcomes specified, and their validity and utility; 2) Establish baseline data; 3) Design data collection procedures that vary to ensure a multifaceted analysis or use multiple measures to assess project effectiveness; 4) Develop qualitative instruments to assess student and

faculty satisfaction; 5) Establish quantitative measures that are analyzed with appropriate statistical tests to document project impact; and 6) Implement formative and summative evaluation procedures as appropriate and may include internal and external audits to validate results

Section G: Review of Third-Party Comments

Section G does not need to be read during the Oral Exit Report.

A student e-mail was received on the second day of the visit. The e-mail was read by the team and the team decided to do nothing.

Section H: List of Additional Evidence

Section H does not need to be read during the Oral Exit Report.

None

Section I: Self-Study Report and Process Comments

Section I to be read during the Oral Exit Report if completed.

The team wants to commend the institution for an excellent self-study and a clear and well-organized report. The team wants also to commend the institution for the culture of commitment to “Student Success.” And above all, and despite significant setbacks, including lack of resources, natural disasters, and the global COVID-19 pandemic, the UPR Carolina has demonstrated resiliency and prioritized the student learning experience by investing in facilities and technology infrastructure.