Report to Faculty, Administrators, Trustees, and Students
of

University of Puerto Rico- Aguadilla

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Prepared following analysis of the institution's
Periodic Review Report

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Evaluation of the Periodic Review Report of the University of Puerto Rico- Aguadilla

I. Introduction

The University of Puerto Rico-Aguadilla (UPRAg; "the University") is part of the University of Puerto Rico system. It offers Associate and Baccalaureate degrees. It was first accredited in 1976 and was reaffirmed in 2011.

The Periodic Review Report (PRR) provides the reader with an extensively-documented, comprehensive overview of institutional progress since its 2011 site visit, and also refers to monitoring reports prepared in 2012 and 2013, and a supplemental information report filed with the MSCHE in 2013.

In the 2012 monitoring report, the University demonstrated progress and compliance in strengthening institutional resources and developing alternative forms of income, including the provision of institutional pro-forma budgets that demonstrated the University's ability to generate a balanced budget for fiscal years 2012 through 2014 (Standard 3). It also detailed the additional steps that were taken by UPRAg to improve communication and shared governance, and provided evidence of the implementation of the UPR System Action Plan, as well as its plan to use assessment results for institutional improvement. Finally, this monitoring report provided evidence that measures were enacted to assure continuity and stability of institutional leadership. This monitoring report was accepted by the MSCHE in June 2012.

The second monitoring report, submitted to the MSCHE by UPRAg in April 2013, documented the implementation of an assessment process for documenting student achievement of quantitative reasoning skills, including evidence that assessment results are used to strengthen these skills and improve teaching and learning (Standard 12). The report also demonstrated the University's continued development and implementation of learning goals and appropriate outcomes assessments in all programs (Standard 14); the monitoring report was accepted by the MSCHE in June 2013.

In addition, a supplemental information report was submitted to the MSCHE by the University in August 2013. This report successfully demonstrated actions taken by the University to minimize the impact of governmental changes on institutional leadership, thereby showing compliance with Standards 4, 5, and 6. The supplemental report was accepted by the MSCHE in November 2013.

Given the completeness of the interim reports submitted by the University, it is no surprise that the current PRR is well-written and coherent. It clearly demonstrates marked improvements as well as the University's successful response to challenging financial

issues recently faced by UPRAg due to economic conditions in Puerto Rico. The PRR is clearly the product of community involvement and careful planning.

The reviewers commend the University for both the quality and comprehensiveness of the PRR.

II. Responses to Recommendations from the Previous Decennial Evaluation and Monitoring Reports

The PRR summarizes the University's responses to all Recommendations made in both its own self-study and in the site team report in 2011. The PRR also summarizes key elements of monitoring reports prepared by the University in 2012 and 2013 (outlined above). In the PRR, UPRAg responded to ten self-study recommendations as well as eight team recommendations by grouping them according to the Standards each addressed. Key areas include: mission, planning, resource allocation, institutional renewal and resources, institutional assessment, student admissions and support services, educational offerings, general education, and assessment of student learning.

Planning, Resource Allocation, Institutional Renewal, and Institutional Resources (Standards 2 and 3)

The PRR outlines the University's response to one site team and two self-study recommendations in the area of planning, resource allocation, institutional renewal and resources. The PRR described the University's efforts to increase external funding as well as its aggressive plans to double the number of non-traditional students taking evening and online classes. It also details the creation of a new administrative position dedicated to seeking external funding, and the University's restructuring of an existing position to focus on the acquisition of external funding and to create a compliance culture through the pre-award process.

Institutional Assessment (Standard 7)

The PRR reports the completion of the University's 2012-2017 strategic plan. This plan is comprised of four major institutional priorities, eleven strategic goals, and more than forty outcomes and assessment-driven indicators to track progress toward each goal. The evidence presented, which includes the creation of two new outcomes measures, clearly demonstrates how the University has tied the accreditation process to assessment outcomes as well as planning and budget processes.

The reviewers commend the University for its effective linkage of assessment and planning to budget allocation.

Student Admissions and Support Services (Standards 8 and 9)

The PRR notes the University's responses to four team recommendations and two self-study recommendations related to Standards 8 and 9. Specifically the University reports significant increases in its retention efforts that have resulted in a 10% increase in student retention (77% to 87% from 2010-11 to 2015-16). University efforts have included the establishment of a retention committee and the creation of a retention plan, as well as the consolidation of more student services in one location and the construction of an on-line student portal. The PRR also notes the implementation of numerous assessment practices to evaluate student services. In addition, the University documents its efforts to improve transfer services through the increased use of articulation agreements and the establishment of an online course transfer equivalency process.

The University should be commended for its significant achievements in retention.

Educational Offerings, General Education, and Other Related Activities (Standard 12)

The University responded to similar site team and self-study recommendations that encouraged the University to develop both a process to identify students who are deficient in basic quantitative skills and the necessary interventions to assist them. The University submitted a monitoring report on this recommendation in 2013. The PRR reports that its newly-established intervention programs have been successful, as the pass rate in lower level math courses has risen from 47% to 60%.

The University is to be commended on the significant annual increase in its quantitative reasoning pass rate.

Suggestion: The University should continue to monitor intervention efforts regarding quantitative reasoning in order to continue their forward progress.

The PRR also demonstrates that the University addressed a second similar site team/ self-study recommendation, to develop a strategic plan to increase online offerings. The PRR shows an increase from 24 to 50 online classes between 2010 and 2016. The University also notes significant technological improvements that have allowed for more online and hybrid courses, as well as the establishment of a Center for Educational Technology and Multimedia. The PRR notes that the Dean of Academic Affairs is working to develop the previously-recommended strategic plan.

Recommendation: The University should finish the development of its distance education strategic plan by the end of the academic year 2016-2017 (Standard 12).

Assessment of Student Learning (Standard 14)

The PRR documents how the University has responded to similar self-study and site team recommendations regarding faculty involvement in assessment, specifically that the faculty from the Math Department serve on the University Assessment Committee, and that the Department should develop an assessment plan that also includes the assessment of appropriate general education skills. The University's response to this recommendation was part of the 2013 monitoring report, which provided adequate evidence of a more comprehensive assessment program being used in the Department of Math.

III. Major Challenges and/or Opportunities

The PRR notes that the University has identified three major challenges: achieving financial strength, improving its physical facilities, and strengthening its technology infrastructure. The University has been remarkably successful at managing a challenging financial environment (details below in Section IV). It has also made enhancements to its aging physical plant, including many ADA upgrades. The PRR also details numerous improvements to UPRAg's technology infrastructure including smartboards and the adoption of Moodle. The University also has established a clear plan for the use of tech fees to fund technological improvements.

The PRR also presents five opportunities for growth, including the University's Accreditation Initiative, IT Initiative (the aforementioned technological improvements and increased focus on distance education and hybrid courses), External Resources Initiative, educational offerings (including its new Associate degree in Aeronautics and Aerospace Technology), and its already successful Retention and Graduation Rates Initiative.

In particular, UPR Aguadilla is highly commended for the very impressive improvements in its one-year retention rate.

IV. Enrollment and Finance Trends and Projections

Enrollment Analysis

The PRR demonstrates an increase in enrollment from 2,932 in 2010-11 to 3,158 in 2015-16; the largest increase has been in Associates degree programs. There was an 8% increase in enrollment in 2015-16 over the previous year. The University expects to sustain its enrollment at 3,200 through 2018-19, assuming it doesn't increase even further. Evidence presented clearly demonstrates the University's quantitative and evidence-based approach to setting enrollment targets based on environmental scans and careful planning.

Financial Analysis

The PRR presents a detailed analysis of the complex and difficult financial situation faced by the University. As part of the University of Puerto Rico system, the UPRAg's budget has

seen significant reductions since its last review. The University has had to adopt new strategies to deal with decreased funding, and must annually defend its budget allocations by clearly articulating how resources are tied to its goals, mission, and objectives. It is likely that these reporting requirements have undergirded the University's planning and resource allocation processes, and as such, have enabled it to strategically reallocate resources in order to adapt to its new environment. The PRR notes that, "despite budget challenges, the UPRAg was able to maintain and expand their academic offerings, maintain the quality of student services, increase their applications, admissions, and student enrollment, better their retention rates, create new academic programs like the Associates Degree in Aeronautics and Aerospace Technology, provide the faculty and non-faculty with professional development opportunities, and facilitate infrastructure improvements, among others."

The University should be commended for its empirical and focused approach to dealing with budget challenges, and for making proverbial lemonade out of lemons.

The PRR contains certified financial statements (Ernest & Young) that demonstrate its compliance with financial regulations.

The PRR also contains detailed budget projections through 2018-19 that anticipate annual reductions of 5%. These budget projections note the University's plans to address its fiscal challenges at least in part through the increased use of non-tenure track faculty and by securing additional external funding.

Suggestion: Establish an oversight committee to monitor the impact of an increased use of temporary faculty on departmental service workloads and instructional effectiveness.

V. Assessment Processes and Plans

The PRR states that assessment at UPRAg has gone from "'an accreditation requirement' to being accepted as an indispensable activity to determine institutional advancement."

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (Standard 14)

The PRR outlines the University's adoption in 2010-11 of a new, self-designed assessment tool, the Academic Proficiency Test (APT). This 90 minute assessment compares first-year and third-year student performance in six general education learning goals: written communication, management and implementation of technology, application of mathematical skills, critical thinking, the assessment, management, and use of information, and teamwork skills. The University established a goal of a 30% increase in performance. In 2014-15, the first cohort (2011-12) to take the pre-test as first-year students took the post test. The PRR reports that Academic Affairs is still processing the results of the APT, and therefore no results are available to evaluate the effectiveness of the instrument nor to draw conclusions about the assessment of general education classes.

Recommendation: The University should complete its analysis of the Academic Proficiency Test (APT) in order to determine its effectiveness as a measure of student achievement of the identified general education goals. In the absence of results from the APT or other direct evidence of student achievement of general education outcomes, it is difficult to document the University's progress in this area (Standard 14).

The PRR also includes a chart that outlines the process for establishing and assessing departmental student learning outcomes.

Recommendation: The University should clarify at what point in the departmental assessment process are the results of assessment activities examined and acted upon; that is, it should more clearly document how departments "close the loop" on their assessment activities, and show the steps that are taken to address identified issues in student performance (Standard 14)

The PRR also outlines the assessment plan that has been established in the Math Department, as outlined in the 2013 Monitoring Report.

Institutional Assessment: Ongoing Assessment of the 2012-2017 Strategic Plan (Standard 7)

The PRR outlines selected accomplishments toward the goals of the strategic plan. Under Goal 1, Academic Programs, the PRR highlights the new program in Aeronautics, as well as the development of a BA program in Studies in Puerto Rico. The PRR also highlights University efforts to increase retention. The PRR also notes an increase in the number of faculty with doctorates (23% to 35%), but also an increase in the number of temporary faculty (17.9% to 25.1%) during the same time span (2010-2015).

VI. Linked Institutional Planning and Budgeting Processes

The PRR demonstrates clear planning processes. The UPR Aguadilla Strategic Plan (2012-2017) maps its eleven goals to the MSCHE Standards of Excellence as well as the ten goals of the Strategic Plan of the University of Puerto Rico System. The PRR also presents evidence that unit strategic plans are linked to the University strategic plan, as well as a visual representation of the link between strategic planning and institutional assessment.

The University presents a functional and well-conceived mapping of assessment, resources, and planning. The PRR includes a detailed timeline and process for goal review and revision at all levels, including assessment of goals and the presentation of clear links to budget allocation based on assessment results.

The University should be commended for its use of institutional assessment to allocate resources and engage in effective planning at all levels of the institution.

Recommendation: As the current strategic plan expires in 2017, the University should continue to capitalize on present assessment efforts in order to develop its next strategic plan, which will need to be in place before its next accreditation review (Standard 7).

VII. Conclusions

It is clear that UPR Aguadilla is successfully managing a challenging financial period in its history and in fact is using these challenges to exchange ineffective practices and outlooks for thoughtful and participatory planning and fiscal responsibility.

There is ample reason for the members of the UPR Aguadilla community to be proud of what they have accomplished since their 2011 self-study. Four reviewer recommendations, as stated earlier in this report and repeated here, are offered as a means to continue the University's forward progress.

Recommendation: The University should finish the development of its distance education strategic plan by the end of the academic year 2016-2017 (Standard 12).

Recommendation: The University should complete its analysis of the Academic Proficiency Test (APT) in order to determine its effectiveness as a measure of student achievement in these general education skills. In the absence of results from the APT or other direct evidence of student achievement of general education outcomes, it is difficult to document the University's progress in this area (Standard 14).

Recommendation: The University should clarify at what point in the departmental assessment process the results of assessment activities are examined and acted upon; that is, clearly document how departments "close the loop" on their assessment activities, and show the steps that are taken to address identified issues in student performance (Standard 14).

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