

**Report to the  
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students**

**of**

**University of Puerto Rico at Aguadilla  
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Prepared following analysis of the institution's  
Periodic Review Report

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## **Introduction**

In March, 2001, the Middle States Committee on Higher Education reaffirmed accreditation of the University of Puerto Rico at Aguadilla and requested a follow report by March 1, 2003 documenting progress in the implementation of a comprehensive outcomes assessment plan including student learning outcomes. In June, 2003 the committee acknowledged receipt of the report and requested a monitoring report by October 1, 2004 documenting further development and implementation of a comprehensive plan for the assessment of student learning including the establishment of learning goals at the program and course levels. On March 3, 2005 the committee accepted the monitoring report and requested that this Periodic Review Report (June 1, 2006) document evidence that student learning assessment information is used as part of institutional assessment. The University has now produced a narrative Periodic Review Report describing the current state of the university, campus response to the recommendations contained in the site-visit team report, major challenges and opportunities, progress on assessment processes, and institutional planning. The Puerto Rico Council on Higher Education requires each campus to undertake a Self-Study Report every five years to maintain the License of Operations Renovation and as the basis of the next Strategic Plan. This PRR makes use of and refers to the latest Self-Study, completed March 3, 2006 by a 30 member steering committee representing administration, faculty, non-faculty and students.

## **PRR data, information, analysis**

The University of Puerto Rico is a public supported higher education system comprised of three major campuses, two at Rio Piedras, a land grant institution at Mayaguez, and eight four-year university colleges throughout the Island. One of these is the University of Puerto Rico at Aguadilla which received autonomous status in March, 1999. UPR-A is a liberal arts, undergraduate, traditional age, public institution offering associate and baccalaureate degrees and non-credit continuing education programs. It serves approximately 3722 head count students, 2661 full-time and 570 part-time. There were 53 Associate's and 371 Baccalaureate degrees awarded in the latest report. There are 113 full-time, tenured faculty, 17 full-time, tenure track faculty, 20 full-time, non-tenure track faculty, and 16 part-time faculty plus 203 non-faculty staff. The university receives approximately two thirds of its total unrestricted funds from the Government of Puerto Rico. Operating revenue is also derived from registration fees (tuition), service fees, sales from university enterprises and restricted funds from donations and service contracts from the Government of Puerto Rico, the Federal Government and private enterprises. For the past five years inflation has averaged 7% while university funding growth has averaged 6%.

## **Major Challenges and Opportunities**

The PRR identifies budgetary constraints and a need to improve the institutions physical facilities as its major challenges. State appropriations over the last five years have just kept pace with inflation and are not expected to grow significantly in the near future,



which will curtail enrollment growth. A new Information Technology Fee, which took effect in 2005-06, is expected to help but more funds will be needed from other external sources such as service contracts and continuing education. While funds for capital improvements continue to be scarce, the construction of a new Learning and Information Resources Center, which includes the Library, which was noted as a concern in the Report of the October 2000 accreditation visit, is expected to be completed by December 2007. The two major opportunities noted in the report include the Accreditation Initiative and the IT Initiative. The accreditation Initiative reflects the President's policy of supporting external professional accreditation and will target programs in business Administration, Education, Electronics Engineering Technology and Counseling. The IT Initiative builds on the improvements in IT infrastructure achieved through the Title V-funded Multimedia Educational Technology Center, which was established in 2001. The goals of this initiative are to develop a set of Distance Education courses, starting with hybrid courses, which will be extended to fully on-line courses and eventually a full program.

#### Response to recommendations from the previous team report and institutional self-study

Beyond the request for a follow-up report on a comprehensive outcomes assessment plan there were no formal recommendations in the 2001 report of the visitation team. There were however 52 suggestions tied to Concerns raised by the visitation team for the administration to consider. Although the 2005 Self-Study Report and this PRR do not systematically address these, it appears that some of the concerns which led to the suggestions are being addressed, but evidence is missing regarding several important topics. For example, it is not clear what changes have taken place to address the concerns relating to Student Services, especially retention, graduation rates and services to evening and Continuing Education students. Since the suggestions on redesign and use of the institutional web site appear as Objectives 7.2 and 7.3 of the 2006-20011 Strategic Plan one assumes they have not yet been accomplished. It appears that progress is being made on a new Information and Learning Resources Center and parking for students.

Concerns relating to student learning outcomes assessment were the subject of both the 2003 and 2004 monitoring reports as well as the Self-Study and PRR. Addressing actual full-time faculty course load (normal of 12 semester hours per year plus overload) was the first suggestion and the PRR reports a drop from an average of 17 semester hours in 2000 to 15.7 in Fall 2004. This metric is certainly linked to both the financial challenges faced by the university as well as the slow progress on establishment learning outcomes assessment in all departments evident in the two monitoring reports, the Self-Study and the PRR. Steady progress is apparent on many suggested changes involving space and IT equipment and services for students and faculty. The suggestion to implement a strategy to assist students who require additional assistance in mathematics and/or identified as high risk has not apparently led to actual changes as of the writing of the Self-Study Report. In Table 4.5 listing the 13 courses with D,F,W rates of 66% or higher, 6 are mathematics or statistics courses and the Academic Senate has asked the Department to conduct a comprehensive assessment to determine the root-causes of the high failure and



.withdrawal rates. Perhaps related, Table 4.6 of average class size by department in 2004-05 shows the highest (27) to be in mathematics.

#### Current enrollment and financial status and projections

PRR Table 4.4 shows that from 2001-02 through 2005-06 total head count enrollment was relatively stable, growing slightly from 3,276 (3,004 FTE) in Fall 2001 to 3,497 (3,161 FTE) in Fall 2003 and falling the last two years to 3,231 (2,931 FTE) in Fall 2005, a trend attributed to declines in retention. Because the university budget is so dependent upon the Puerto Rican economy which has been growing slowly the university has conservatively projected annual increases of 5% in the operating budget for the next several years. Their goal is to maintain FTE enrollment at or below 3,100 for the next three years while being alert to possible growth opportunities. The financial pressures on the university are exacerbated by personnel related costs consuming 86% of the operating budget, even with the high overload teaching rate of the faculty and the small fraction of full-time faculty with doctoral degrees. This will complicate strategic plan goals and objectives to reduce the reliance on overloads in order to allow more time for faculty scholarship and research and to increase the proportion of doctorally trained faculty.

#### Current status of institution's outcomes assessment processes

Five years after the 2001 visitation team's report, the 2003 follow-up report and the 2004 monitoring report, both focused on direct learning outcomes assessment, the 2005 Self-Study and this PRR both fail to document such assessment in place in all departments. Approximately 18 courses are described in detail and an additional 15 or so alluded to. Not every department is yet included. In contrast, Institutional Assessment under the leadership of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research appears to be well advanced among the administrative, Library, IT, academic support, and student support areas.

#### Linkage between institutional planning and budgeting processes

The PRR documents 11 Goals and 42 Objectives from the new 2006-2011 Strategic Plan. Many objectives are very specific with timelines and measurable outcomes and are clearly already being used in budget allocations. For example, Objective 5.5 is to increase the proportion of doctoral faculty from 14% to 30% by 2011. Both the PRR and Self-Study note that most approved faculty leaves are for the purpose of advanced degree studies, amounting in 2004-05 to \$273,462, a significant commitment by the administration to linking the budget to the strategic plan in a time of fiscal challenges. Reference is made to the UPR system-wide Capital Improvement Plan as the vehicle for addressing space needs for both current programs and future growth, although no formal plan is currently in place. Over the last five years 6,557 sq feet of additional space was added to existing buildings (3.8%), electrical and lighting systems were improved, parking spaces added, water storage increased and the Learning and Information Resources Center partially completed.



There are goals and objectives in the Strategic Plan for increasing external funding from both public and private sources. The amount of such funding over the past five years has varied quite a bit, recent years lower than earlier. While such funds provide needed support for specific projects (IT for example) and should be encouraged and increased, they cannot support on-going base budget needs.

The most ambitious objective in the Strategic Plan is probably 1.2. "Obtain external professional accreditation for the following bachelor's degree programs: Education (NCATE); Business Administration (AACSB); Electronics Engineering Technology (ABET.)" This is a System-wide policy. Addressing the concerns noted above – faculty overloads and limited scholarship/research, proportion of doctoral faculty, and incomplete learning outcomes assessment - are central to successful accreditation by all three agencies.

## **Conclusion**

The PRR describes an institution responding to many of the suggestions of the site visit team in 2001 during a five year period of constrained funding from the Puerto Rican government. Progress is evident and the university is making good use of limited resources. However, neither the PRR nor the 2005 Self-Study Report have addressed all the concerns and suggestions. In particular there is no documentation that Middle States Standard 14, Assessment of Student Learning, has been met for all disciplines nor is assessment of General Education, Standard 12, addressed. Focus on implementing learning outcomes assessment in all disciplines and demonstrating that the information is being used to inform curricular and other changes needs to be embraced by all faculty and staff alike.

## **Suggestions**

Growing enrollment pressure from the baby boom echo is pressuring all public universities to increase enrollments to match that demand possibly in advance of any additional state funding. Holding down enrollment growth to match funding at UPR-A as planned makes budgetary sense but will need careful explanation to the public and their elected officials.

## **Recommendation**

That the PRR be accepted.