

Report to  
Faculty, Administration, Trustees and Students  
Of  
Inter American University of Puerto Rico  
Ponce Campus  
Ponce, Puerto, Rico

Prepared following analysis of the institution's  
Periodic Review Report

First Reviewer:

Dr. Paul R. Douillard, Vice President and Dean for Academic Affairs  
Caldwell College, Caldwell, NJ

Second Reviewer:

Fr. Jose Adames, Provost and Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Union County College, Plainfield Campus, Plainfield, NJ

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# EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE INTER AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO, PONCE CAMPUS PERIODIC REVIEW REPORT

## I. INTRODUCTION

In June 2003, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education reaffirmed the accreditation of the Inter American University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus with a request for a monitoring report by March 1, 2005 documenting the development and implementation of a comprehensive written plan for the assessment of institutional effectiveness and student learning. In June 2005 the Commission accepted the monitoring report and requested that the 2008 Periodic Review Report document further development and implementation of the institution's full assessment plan, including (1) further development and implementation of a sustainable assessment process and plan to evaluate student learning at all levels and the total range of program sand services offered by the institution; (2) evidence that assessment results are being used to improve teaching and learning and institutional effectiveness, and (3) linkages among assessments, institutional planning, and resource allocation. The 2008 Periodic Review Report includes the Master Assessment Plan as an Appendix and sections IV and V of the report discuss in detail Assessment Processes and Plans and Institutional Planning and Budgeting.

Three requests for Substantive Changes to the university's accreditation status were also submitted since 2003: in February 2004 a request to include distance learning offerings; in October 2004 a request to include two graduate degrees and a Professional Certificate; and in August 2005 a request to include the Cybernetic Learning Center located in the Plaza del Caribe Mall as an additional location. Section II of the 2008 Periodic Review Report, Major Challenges and/or Opportunities, contains an extensive discussion of the changes made in the campus' Mission Statement to include distance learning and graduate programs.

The reviewers commend the university for the quality of this report and for the obvious attention paid by the entire community to the requirements of the Commission on Higher Education. The report indicates that a culture of evidence and improvement does indeed exist across the community although a significant amount of work remains to be done to make this fully operational.

## II. RESPONSES TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS DECENNIAL EVALUATION

Since the 2003 Evaluation Team did not make any recommendations, no responses are included in the PRR. Instead, the report focuses on the challenges and opportunities arising from the changes in the university's mission and the documentation of assessment processes and plans at the institutional and student learning level.

## III. MAJOR CHALLENGES AND/OR OPPORTUNITIES

In January 2003, a revised Mission Statement for the Inter American University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus was approved by the Board of Trustees. This revision

was made to reflect a change in direction for the university to include distance learning and graduate level education. Section II of the PRR discusses the opportunities and challenges created by these changes. The most significant opportunity created by the introduction of distance learning as a significant academic offering of the campus is in the area of enrollments. Beginning with two associate degree programs, seven additional undergraduate degree programs are now offered entirely at a distance and enrollments have grown steadily since the fall of 2002. In the fall of 2006, 93 courses were offered with enrollments of 2225 students, which accounted for 44% of the institution's overall enrollment of 5062 students for that semester. As is pointed out in the PRR, there is a marked tendency for IAUPR – PC students to enroll in on-line courses as an alternative mode of study. Faculty training in the areas of course development, use of the Blackboard Vista learning management platform, and the pedagogical aspects of teaching online courses has been ongoing with 254 faculty members attending workshops in 2005 and 224 attending in 2006. The institution has identified two challenges that it faces as it fully implements this new initiative. The first is financial – how to develop an accurate cost-effectiveness analysis that takes into account not only the costs associated with this program (software licenses, faculty development and technical personnel) and the income generated through enrollments but also the savings that may or may not be generated (saved classroom and parking space, for example) by this type of course offering. The institution is working closely with the IAUPR Central Office to develop a model that will allow the institution to effectively analyze the cost-effectiveness of distance learning. Given the ever-growing percentage of enrollments generated by this mode of delivery, such an analysis will be critical for the institution. In a similar vein, effective retention data collection and learning outcomes assessment strategies must be developed for this type of modality and student population. A second challenge was to develop adequate services for this new population of students along with the training of faculty to teach in this new delivery mode. A new Associate Dean's position for this area was created and personnel in the Enrollment Management Office and the Information Access Center have been assigned to provide services to these students. Electronic journals and databases are available through a remote login, librarians are available through a dedicated e-mail address and the Library maintains an on-line newsletter to inform students of services and resources. While tutoring services are available on-line and via the telephone, the institution acknowledges that innovative means will need to be developed to meet these needs as the numbers of students, especially off-campus and off-Island continues to grow. A similar challenge exists in providing these students with professional counseling services. There are also two Blackboard Certified trainers and faculty development funds available to help part-time and adjunct faculty in this area.

Similar challenges apply to the newly established Cybernetic Learning Centers (CLC). The first Center was located at the Plaza del Caribe Mall, approximately two miles from the university campus in order to provide a place for prospective students to inquire about university offerings, provide preliminary admissions and registration services and to provide distance learning students with easy access to up-to-date computers and internet access for their on-line courses. The Center's principal users are now students enrolled in on-line courses who do not have access to the internet from their homes. The Center has been recognized for the quality of services and technology provided to students and is now approved as an additional location where some graduate courses and undergraduate Business Administration courses are offered. As a result of the success of

this Center, three additional CLCs were established in local towns with the assistance of the municipal governments. The major challenge that these initiatives pose for the IAUPR – PC is determining the cost-effectiveness of the CLCs. Only the Plaza del Caribe Mall site includes rental costs but all of the sites require investments of equipment and personnel. The institution is working with the Central Office to develop formulas to assess the cost-effectiveness of these Centers as well. Since an ever-increasing percentage of the University's students are participating in distance learning courses or entire programs, it will be critical for the institution to determine with as much precision as possible, the real costs and benefits of this major endeavor. This becomes even more urgent with the opening of a new CLC in Orlando, Florida aimed at the large Hispanic population in that state.

The 2003 revision of the University's Mission Statement also made possible the introduction of graduate programs, beginning with a Master's in Education and Curriculum with six different specializations. Three additional programs have since been added – a Master's in Criminal Justice, a Master's in Education in Teaching at the Elementary level and an MBA in International Business Administration with four areas of specialization. Since 2004, graduate enrollments have exceeded budget projections in all but one trimester (Nov – Feb 2005-06). The two major resource needs of this initiative are doctorally-qualified faculty and library resources. In 2004-05, there were 80 graduate students and 21 full-time faculty members with doctoral degrees; in 2006-07 there were 228 graduate students with 28 full-time faculty members with doctoral degrees. The PRR indicates that 15 full-time faculty members are currently completing their doctoral studies and that some of these are potential candidates for teaching in the graduate program. The university has provided financial support for faculty who are pursuing doctoral degrees.

In order to provide adequate library resources for these new graduate programs, \$123,100 has been allocated in the library budget and 1067 additional resources have been recommended by the faculty for the graduate programs from 2004-2007. Additionally, in 2005 the Coordinator for Information Skills administered a Needs Study for Information Literacy to graduate students and action plans were developed to meet student reported needs, preferences and learning styles.

*Recommendation:* the Inter American University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus needs to provide the Middle States Commission on Higher Education with evidence that it has a sufficient number of “faculty with credentials appropriate to the graduate curricula” (Standard 11: *Educational Offerings, Additional Elements for Graduate and Professional Education*).

#### IV. ENROLLMENT AND FINANCE TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS

Enrollments since 2003 that have met or exceeded budget projections has meant that IAUPR – PC has been able to achieve financial stability and contribute to payment of systemic services offered by the Central Office and also invest in the development and maintenance of the physical plant and infrastructure without incrementing debt. After carefully monitoring enrollment patterns, the institution decided to eliminate the second summer session held in July and use this time to carry out major physical plant and

maintenance projects. This change was made possible by the success of the two-week intensive terms held in January and August and by the introduction of the new graduate programs. Enrollments in the graduate programs exceeded projections in all terms (in one case by 219%) except for the November to February term of 2005-06. These solid enrollments have allowed IAUPR – PC to invest \$8.4 million from the operational budget into plant improvements and to steadily decrease the campus debt. The PRR includes enrollment projections for the next five years that anticipate stable enrollments between 5300-5400 students and budget increases of 203% each year. Given the enrollment trends of the previous five years, these projections seem very reasonable.

## V. ASSESSMENT PROCESSES AND PLANS

This section of the PRR documents the progress made by the IAUPR – PC in meeting the outcomes assessment expectations found in Standards 7 and 14. Specifically, the report addresses the three elements required by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education when, on June 22, 2005, it acted to accept the monitoring report submitted by the IAUPR – PC on March 1, 2005. As an Appendix, the PRR includes the IAUPR – PC *Master Assessment Plan*, October 2007 Revision (2). The plan was developed in response to presentations by Dr. James Nichols at an assessment conference in New Orleans in 2004 and then during a three-day workshop in 2005 to faculty and administrators at the IAUPR – PC. Dr. Nichols reviewed the plan and made some suggestions for the development and implementation phases of the project. Personnel from several administrative offices also participated in other workshops in 2005 and 2006. The IAUPR – PC was accepted as one of the 2005 BEAMS cohorts, a five-year initiative to improve retention, achievement, and institutional effectiveness at Minority-Serving Institutions. As part of this initiative, the National Student Satisfaction Survey was administered to a sample of freshmen and seniors in 2005. The MAS identifies eight goals that are derived from the University's Mission. The campus' assessment plan focuses on two principal areas, programs and services, with the first four goals related to programs and the next four goals related to services. The programs level assessment includes all the academic degrees and the general education program. The services level assessment includes all the support activities available for students, faculty, staff and the external community. Each plan is designed to include four phases – design, implementation, data collection and evaluation. A three and five-column template was used as a guideline for the development of all the major campus assessment plans and the Five-Column Assessment Model Template was developed for use in formulating the programs and services assessment plans. Finally, an assessment process timeline, techniques for data collection, an electronic format for planning and reporting, and a process for the dissemination of the assessment results to the entire IAUPR – PC community were included in the MAP. A number of faculty development workshops were offered each year in order to train faculty and personnel on all aspects of assessment as a priority.

Program level results – the PRR acknowledges that the development and implementation of assessment plans for individual programs has taken longer and been more difficulty than originally expected. At the undergraduate (associate and baccalaureate degree programs) level, two new programs are in the design phase, twenty-one programs are in the implementation phase, four are in the collection phase and four

are in the evaluation phase. For the General Education Program, only the Basic Skills program is in the implementation phase; the remaining five programs are still in the design phase. All four graduate programs are in the implementation phase.

In response to the requirement to document evidence that assessment results are being used to improve teaching and learning, the PRR reports on the General Education Program and the results of external certification or licensing examinations in the Teacher Education, Nursing and Radiological Technology Programs. The development of a battery of test to measure the Basic Skills component of the General Education Program is now in the final phase implementation while a test to measure the remaining four components has been constructed and is currently being validated. The university plans to implement these test institution-wide during the 2008-09 academic year so no results are yet available for analysis and response. The PRR includes the results of the 2005 NSSE survey comparing IAUPR – PC students with peers in the continental United States in the areas of Educational Practices, perception of students as to mental activities required for coursework, and reading and writing. In response to the only area where IAUPR – PC student results were lower than students at selected peer institutions, reading and writing, the PRR reports that the campus incorporated computerized models related to reading and writing skills in Spanish virtual laboratories required for all Spanish courses. The institution expects to see improvements in this area when the NSSE survey is administered again in 2009.

Since the students in the Teacher Education, Nursing and Radiological Technology Programs are required to take external certification or licensing exams in order to practice in their professions, the results of these exams were readily available for comparison with island-wide results. Results of the Teacher Certification Tests taken by IAUPR – PC students placed the institution *at risk* since less than 75% obtained passing scores in 2002-03 and 2003-04. In response, the university implemented technological and administrative control to assure that only candidates who met the admission criteria for the Education program were allowed to register for Education courses. Other strategies aimed at improving the results for students taking the Teacher Certification Tests were also implemented and these are identifies in the PRR. As a result, in 2004-05 and 2005-06 the institution was no longer *at risk* and the performance gap between the IAUPR – PC students and student island-wide narrowed considerably. In the Nursing program, while graduates in the associate degree program consistently obtained higher passing rates than the average for Puerto Rico, in November 2005 and May 2006, graduates in the bachelor degree program fell below the average for Puerto Rico. An analysis of these results showed that while the examination had been revised and updated, the Nursing curriculum at the IAUPR – PC had not been changed to include the new material. Curricular changes have since been implemented and the university expects to see improvements in the testing results in the near future. IAUPR – PC students taking the Radiological Technology licensing exam have consistently surpassed the Puerto Rico average although a new seminar course was developed for these students.

Service level results – service level assessment has been based on the NSSE survey and on other institutionally developed surveys. Every two years the IAUPR system administers an institutional undergraduate satisfaction survey to all nine of its campuses

that offer undergraduate degrees. This allows the IAUPR – PC to compare results year-to-year and with the other campuses in the system. Decreases in student satisfaction are noted and the PRR includes accounts for how several concerns identified in these surveys were addressed. Student surveys of the services provided by the distance learning program and the Cybernetic Learning Centers indicate a high level of satisfaction.

*Recommendation:* the Inter American University of Puerto Rico – Ponce campus should continue to document progress in the complete implementation of the *Master Assessment Plan*, especially at the Program level. Evidence must be provided to indicate that for all programs, including the General Education Program, the appropriate data is being collected, and the results are being evaluated and used to improve teaching and learning at the institution as required in Standard 14: *Assessment of Student Learning*.

## VI. INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING

The PRR includes clear evidence of linkages between the planning and budgeting processes and assessment. The Planning and Budgeting process at the IAUPR – PC is tied to the Inter American University of Puerto Rico’s 2012 Vision Statement and the five-year strategic plan developed for the Ponce campus. This plan contains nine principal areas covering all aspects of the institution and is reviewed by every sector of the campus using a SWAT analysis. Each year the campus’ Chancellor shares the priorities for the year with the campus community and this serves as the starting point of the annual budget process. The creation of the Annual Work Plan and Budget begins with enrollment projections for the upcoming year and a review of the strategic plan. The budget is then developed through a five-phase process that begins at the departmental level on the Ponce campus and moves to the System Central Office for final approval by the Board of Trustees. The strategic initiatives discussed at length in the PRR required the establishment of new budget centers and for fiscal years 2005, 2006 and 2007 a total of over \$1.7 million was allocated to the Distance Learning Project and the Cybernetic Learning Centers. During that same time period \$4.56 million was allocated for the relocation and remodeling of the health science facilities. In response to a decline in student satisfaction with classrooms and computer and science labs, as identified in the IAUPR – PC Services and Installations Survey in 2003, upgrades were made in the computer and science labs and all classrooms were equipped with a central air conditioning system. As a result of these changes, the 2005 survey showed a marked improvement in student satisfaction with these facilities.

## CONCLUSION

The Periodic Review Report and the supplemental materials provided by the Inter American University of Puerto Rico – Ponce campus were well done and provided the reviewers with sufficient information regarding the institution’s response to the Commission’s letter of June 23, 2005. The reviewers have identified two areas where recommendations are required in order to demonstrate that the institution continues to meet the eligibility standards in *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*:

- (1) the Inter American University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus needs to provide the Middle States Commission on Higher Education with evidence that it has a sufficient number of “faculty with credentials appropriate to the graduate curricula” (Standard 11: *Educational Offerings*, Additional Elements for Graduate and Professional Education).
  
- (2) the Inter American University of Puerto Rico – Ponce campus should continue to document progress in the complete implementation of the *Master Assessment Plan*, especially at the Program level. Evidence must be provided to indicate that for all programs, including the General Education Program, the appropriate data is being collected, and the results are being evaluated and used to improve teaching and learning at the institution as required in Standard 14: *Assessment of Student Learning*.