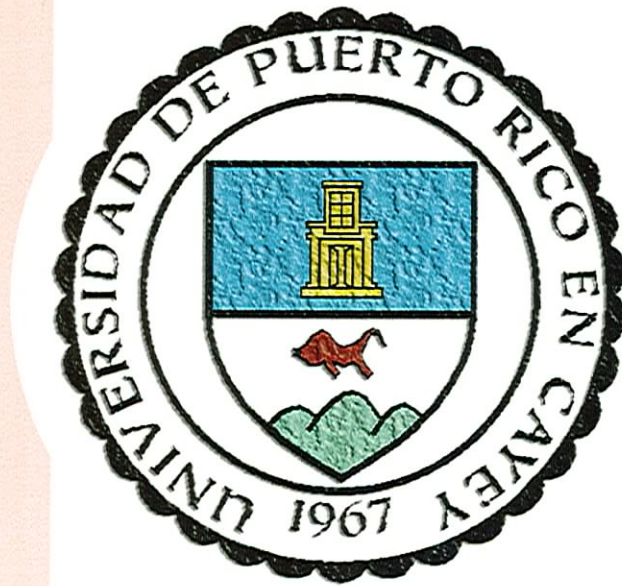# UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO AT CAYEY
Cayey, Puerto Rico 00736

# RESPONSE TO THE MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION REGARDING THE FINAL REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM AT UPRC

May 23, 2005

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The University of Puerto Rico at Cayey (UPRC) has engaged in a comprehensive analysis of the results of the Self Study process and the recommendations recently made by the Visiting Team representing the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. After the completion of the Self Study Report, several actions have taken place in order to guarantee that the institutional renewal is an ongoing and participative process. In this report we clarify and further explain the recommendations and concerns expressed by the Visiting Team in their final report.

The Visiting Team's Final Report emphasized their concern related to budget management and its relation to resource allocation. Throughout the entire Self Study Report and during the evaluation visit, we explained in detail how we have carefully and responsibly planned and used our physical, human and fiscal resources in agreement with the institutional mission and goals. Quality education indicators have improved in spite of the decrease of our operational expenditures, as evidenced by the assessment results reported in the Self Study. We have learned to use the budget more effectively and all important academic projects have continued their fulfillment.

**Standard 1:  Mission, Goals, and Objectives**

UPRC meets all fundamental elements related to this Standard (see Chapter 1 of the Self Study Report/ SSR). We provided sufficient examples throughout the entire SSR on how academic, administrative, fiscal and student support services are all mission-driven at the institution. In particular, Section 2.2 of the SSR explains the annual budget re-distribution process, which is aligned with the institution's Operational Plan and, in turn, with its mission statement. The particular emphasis of our current mission statement on excellence in undergraduate education has guided all curriculum reform efforts, such as the one reported in Chapter 12, for the General Education Component, and those described in Chapters 11 and 13. In addition, our current Institutional Assessment Plan is framed by our four institutional goals and its related objectives (see Chapter 7).

We also made a clear statement on the need to revise the mission, goals and objectives in order to emphasize the role of interdisciplinary activities, research and community service as part of our growing expectations as a liberal arts undergraduate institution (Recommendation #1 in Chapter 1). In the SSR's last chapter we indicated that such a revision should be completed in a year and a half with the input from current institutional level assessment practices. Maybe the

recommendation made by the Visiting Team is intended to remind us that the new mission statement should continue guiding our decision making processes. We are thankful for it. Specific concerns with budgetary decision making processes are answered more rightfully as part of Standards 2 and 3.

## Standard 2 - Planning, Resource Allocation and Institutional Renewal

The Operational Plan is articulated precisely following the Strategic Plan and allows for resource and budget allocations as stated in Section 2.1 of the Self-Study document. The UPRC salaries and benefits are driven by system-wide collective bargaining. Nevertheless, UPRC will continue analyzing the current fiscal situation and assessing effectiveness of institutional resources to that end (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2 of the SSR). The administration is aware of the importance of external funding sources and has seriously taken into consideration the commitment of some of these grants by institutionalizing some of its components. However, since these projects vary in scope and magnitude, adjustments have been made to foresee the continuation of relevant initiatives.

Currently a Strategic Plan for Technology is under development. We aim to continue working this plan integrating faculty, non-faculty and students who will provide their insights. Once the plan is in place, it will be disseminated to all the community. Follow-up will be carried to foresee accomplishments and compliances. UPRC is guided by the ideal of offering a comprehensive education that fosters the integration of technology in all its courses. Through the approval of two USDE grants, Title V and Title V Coop, the institution has technologically been empowered, therefore providing our faculty and students with innovative and first-rate resources. Further information is provided in Section 11.1 of the SSR.

The University has two advisory boards for Technology. The first one, the Technology Advisory Board responds to the Chancellor. The second one is a Consulting Board which is under the Deanship of Academic Affairs. These boards have been providing wise and knowledgeable feedback concerning technological decision issues at the institution. Therefore, the Faculty Advisory Committee for computing is not necessary.

The University has re-examined the reporting lines for academic and administrative computing. Beginning July 1st 2005 a person will be appointed to occupy the position of Chief Information Officer. This person will oversee the functions of all the academic and administrative units and will respond directly to the Chancellor.

## Standard 3 – Institutional Resources

We recognize that the management of institutional resources has been an intricate task at UPRC, but we believe that we have responsibly assessed the institutional contexts in order to maintain quality services aligned with our mission and goals. We ask the Middle States Commission on Higher Education to reconsider the Visiting Team's understanding that UPRC does not meet Standard #3.

Our resource allocation priorities are clearly aligned with our academic orientation as a liberal arts college with a large proportion of bachelor degrees. The Visiting Team rightfully observed that the *"budget allocation for the past four years has remained fixed with additions only for*

*negotiated salary and benefit increases*". However, it did not recognize that budget redistributions were made in order to handle the difficult fiscal situation without hindering our goal for educational excellence.

The Academic Deanship has always had the largest proportion of the total budget (38% of the total in 2004, plus the largest proportion of the 28% allocated to fringe benefits). Budget assignments for library materials were increased by 30% in the past two years. A $60,000 investment was made for the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research (which now has millions of dollars in external funds) and other annual assignments for academic priorities have not been reduced, even under annual budget cuts at the institutional level. As an example of how the priorities defined in the context of our mission are aligned with resource allocation, more than $500,000 dollars have been assigned to continue hiring full-time faculty to add to the regular faculty lines, without further increasing teaching overload. Budget cuts have slowed down the development of new options (new academic programs, more student services or more students) but have not affected the quality of education that we provide to our students.

The periodic assessment of the efficient use of our institutional resources is described in the Institutional Assessment Plan. The Visiting Team recognized that UPRC is still in the beginning stages of implementing its institutional assessment program (like many other institutions), but reported significant accomplishments and progress in this area (see Standard 7 of the Visiting Team Report). A direct linkage between assessment practices and resource allocation is evident since the reported fiscal constraints of the recent past years have made this task imperative.

Most of the available resources of the UPRC are generated at the system level. Annual budget assignments have been approved by the Board of Trustees (for all eleven UPR units) in the past three years as "expense accounts" without requiring specific budget petitions. However, UPRC has carefully allocated its resources in order to attain the high standards that are defined in its mission and goals statement. The annual assessment of next year's student population size has taken into consideration the following constraint variables: physical facilities, faculty overload and operational expenses (see Section 2.2 of the SSR). This is only one of the examples that can be cited on how UPRC has conducted its decision making-process for allocating assets. Other examples include: classroom are strictly allocated to academic departments to promote even distributions of course schedules; computers are allocated for direct student use, in dedicated or centralized labs, according to curriculum priorities; 41% of all physical facilities are dedicated only for academic duties; 15% of all external funds received in the past four years were allocated for academic research. All these actions are clearly described in Chapter 3 of the SSR.

We accepted in the SSR that most of the current assessment reports are highly descriptive (section 2.3). Evolving to more effective methods and clearer institutional assessment indicators is precisely the kind of endeavor that UPRC is engaged on, and this was understood by the Visiting Team, as reported in Standard 7. Benchmarking is always a challenging task and it has been even more complex due to present fiscal situation. However, UPRC has a clear picture of its challenges as evidenced by the specific recommendations made in Chapter 3 of the Self Study Report. We accept the recommendation made by the Team to conduct an "*in-depth analysis of the fixed budget... to identify areas where reductions can be made... allowing for a shift of resources to the operating budget*". This is precisely what we had in mind when made the third recommendation in our SSR (Chapter 3). However, we must be careful with the recommendation of shifting funds form faculty release time to lower teaching overload since this could slow down

our curricular transformation process and the accomplishment of our mission and goals (further details are included in our response to Chapter 10 recommendations). Finally, we gratefully accept the recommendation of using a new format for reporting annual accomplishments related to our Strategic Plan. We have already considered several possibilities.

## Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

A procedure for evaluating administrators already exists and is explained in Section 5.5 of the SSR (Assessment of Administrative Structures and Services). For the past two years, we have been evaluating Academic Department Chairs, the Academic Dean and the Chancellor using assessment instruments and procedures approved by the Academic Senate, and made available to the Visiting Team as part of Exhibit 5.5. In fact, UPRC is the only unit from the UPR that has initiated such a procedure, in which faculty, students and non-faculty personnel participate. We expect to expand this initiative to include many more staff members in the near future.

## Standard 5: Administration

We could not find any recommendations as indicated in the initial statement of the Visiting Team Report. Therefore, UPRC meets this standard with no recommendations.

## Standard 6: Integrity

UPRC will continue its excellent services demonstrating adherence to its ethical standards.

## Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

As indicated in the SSR (Chapter 2, Section 2.1), UPRC's Strategic Plan (SP) has had active participation of the university community. Every update of such plans follows the same widespread involvement of the university community. As indicated in the last chapter of the SSR, this plan is expected to be updated within the next four (4) years by the newly appointed Faculty Committee in Planning and Assessment. The revision of the SP should await for the completion of the new mission and goals statement and will be coordinated with the revision process of the Institutional Assessment Plan (IAP) that is scheduled for 2006-07. We will take the necessary steps to ensure that the revised plans will exhibit specific connections with the resulting operational plans (OP). The linkages of the mission of the SP, OP and IAP plans and the allocation of institutional resources will be guaranteed and the community will continue having an active participatory role in this decision making process.

As stated in the SSR and recommended by the Evaluation Team, the development of outcomes-based assessed plans with a specific time-table for non-academic units will be also in place. It is relevant to point out that UPRC has already begun this process with non-academic units as shown in the SSR document (see Table, Conclusions, Recommendations and Future Plans, p.108). The Chancellor has also proposed to appoint a person by July 1, 2005 who will be coordinating assessment activities on campus and thus will provide support to academic and non-academic units in conducting these activities.

## Standard 8: Student Admissions

Graduation requirements are the products of careful curriculum planning based on expected student learning outcomes and, in addition, requirements from external accrediting organizations. Requirements for the Professional Schools majors, for example, are quite different in depth and scope from the Humanities major. If the Visiting Team is concerned with the expected time for graduation of our students (discussed in Section 9.1 of the SSR) rest assure that sound retention efforts are under way at UPRC. Furthermore, current annual reports of our retention and graduation rates (for every academic program) will serve as standards to assess our success in this area (see Section 8.5 of the SSR). Thus, this recommendation does not seem to be applicable.

The Visiting Team rightfully recommended not restricting the investigation of attrition data to the freshman class. The following chart demonstrates that we have been analyzing student attrition in a more comprehensive way. We have found that most student dropouts occur between the third and fifth semester and a faculty committee is currently studying different retention strategies to deal with these diverse populations. These results could not be presented to the Visiting Team because they were recently completed, a sign of our systematic initiatives to improve student retention. The Team's recommendation is appreciated and further studies will continue.

**Drop Out Rate by Semester at UPR-Cayey**
**Freshman Cohorts: 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97 and 1997-98**
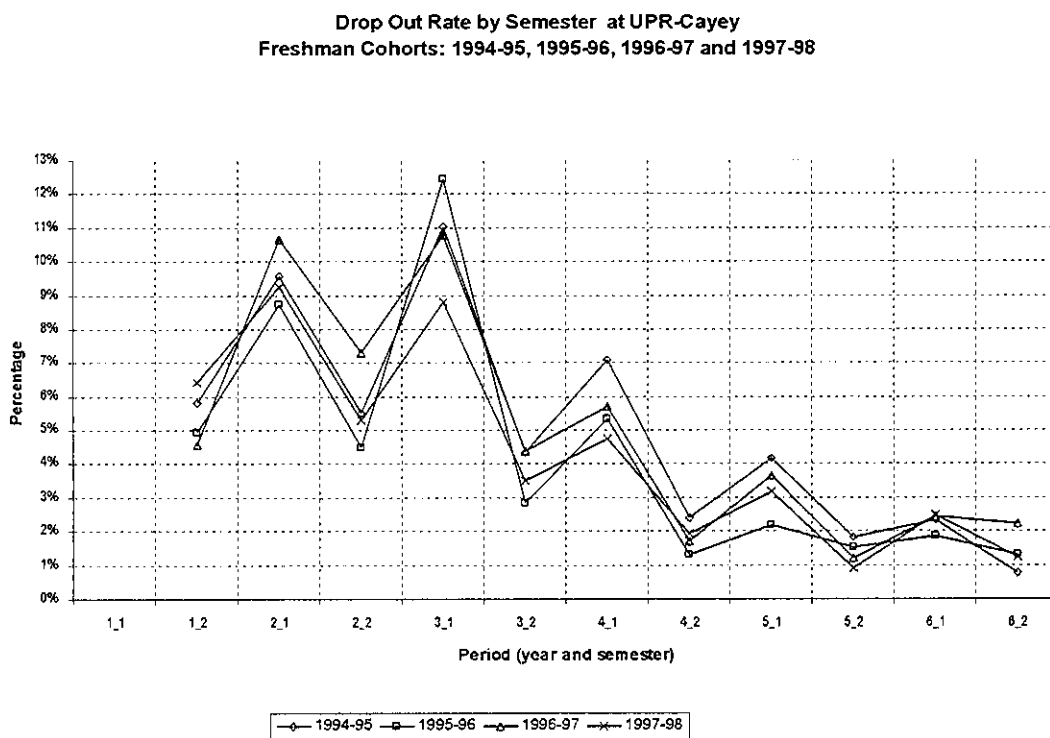


Finally, an evaluation of the Admissions Office operations will take place next year as part of a comprehensive assessment process that is currently being planned for all offices at the Student Deanship.
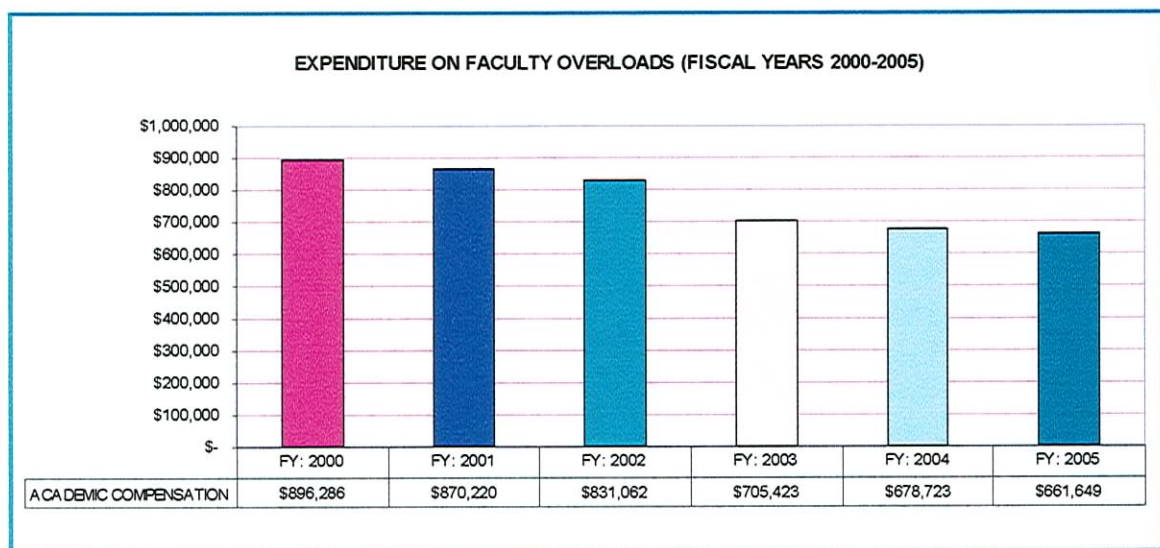
## Standard 9: Student Support Services

As mentioned before, all offices in the Student Deanship will be assessed in the next two years including student satisfaction and outcomes assessment. In particular, the assessment of the Athletic Program will result in a redistribution of resources that will enhance the recreational programs on campus and the intercollegiate athletics. Fundraising is going to be explored within the current institutional administrative policies. The Student Housing Office provides adequate support and orientation to all students and recent assessment of student satisfaction with their services is very high.

Improvements to the Student Center Building are a high priority in the institution and a specific budget allocation will be made in order to begin renovation tasks next fall. The Visiting Team recommendation of revising the contracts governing the services of the Cafeteria and Bookstore is not applicable since UPRC always follows institutional bidding norms and processes. All university policies and procedures that affect student life are contained in the General Catalog (Exhibit #33 of the SSR) which constitutes the primary reference for students. The revision process of the Catalog is in the final stage and will be ready by the end of this year. This will be the main student handbook. We will incorporate the recommendation of designing a student newspaper through a web page which will have a broader impact among students and the community in general.

## Standard 10: Faculty

Expenditures on faculty overloads have been decreasing in the past years, as indicated in the following chart. However, the total overload is still high, as measured by the FTE statistics reported in Chapter 10. As stated in this chapter, we will continue efforts to gradually reduce faculty overloads, particularly in the Professional Schools Area, by frequently assessing student-faculty ratios in all programs and hiring sufficient full time faculty.

**EXPENDITURE ON FACULTY OVERLOADS (FISCAL YEARS 2000-2005)**

|  | FY: 2000 | FY: 2001 | FY: 2002 | FY: 2003 | FY: 2004 | FY: 2005 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ACADEMIC COMPENSATION | $896,286 | $870,220 | $831,062 | $705,423 | $678,723 | $661,649 |

It is important to point out that:
- We are in a transition to a new educational context framed by a revised mission statement and it is important that faculty has the time to develop and shape the new programs and practices, and evaluate its effectiveness. The institution has made an informed decision to maintain a reasonable amount of faculty release time in order to accomplish curriculum renovation, research, assessment and community service initiatives that will translate in higher quality education for our students.
- We are strongly committed with keeping a low proportion of part-time faculty. We affirm that full-time employees can develop a stronger sense of belonging and more active participation in academic transformation projects. Such a decision is contained in our revised policies for faculty recruitment (Exhibit 10.4 of the SSR).
- Many faculty members have expressed that a reasonable level of teaching overload can compensate for the otherwise low salary rates that exists at UPR.

Regarding the second recommendation related to class sizes, it must be pointed out that such options have already been studied in UPRC. All our regular classrooms can sit between 25 and 30 students (this includes the soon to be completed Natural Science Building) which makes it impossible to consider larger class sizes (the few theater rooms that we have can accommodate many more students but are very frequently reserved for the many cultural and co-curricular activities held every day on campus – see Institutional Goal #3). Moreover, the Academic Senate have approved that all Math, Spanish and English courses be taught in groups of no more that 25 students (a similar policy is being considered for Humanities and Social Sciences). **This policy is intended to promote the type of educational experience that characterizes a liberal arts college with our particular mission and goals.**

Finally, the Academic Senate has made progress preparing a new faculty evaluation system (Section 10.4 of the SSR) and is currently planning a pilot project for next fall. With the input from this pilot project and ongoing work to complete the validation processes of evaluation instruments, the Senate should be in position to approve the new faculty evaluation model and procedures by fall 2006. We are confident that the new model will be a valuable assessment tool for the promotion of quality in teaching, research and service. A full implementation report of the new faculty evaluation system will be available in 2009-10.

## Standard 11: Educational Offerings

As stated in the Self-Study (Chapters 11 and 14) the identification and definition of students learning outcomes in the academic programs will be a top priority in the agenda of the Dean of Academic Affairs for the academic year 2005-06. This process will enable each program to develop and implement their outcomes assessment plan.

Several programs are in the process of developing expected student learning outcomes and their assessment plans. The English and Psychology programs have already defined their expected learning outcomes and are implementing successfully their assessment programs. The results of the assessment plan have been used to improve student learning and the effectiveness of the program. The Chemistry, Education and Business Administration departments are currently developing expected learning outcomes (student profiles) and assessment plans as part of the process of complying with the preconditions established by their professional organizations (p. 83, SSR).

The faculty members of the above mentioned programs have expressed their commitment to join forces with the Dean of Academic Affairs to mentor a program where they will produce the expected learning outcomes. The Dean of Academic Affairs is committed with facilitating this process to all academic departments so that every program will have an effective assessment process by the next Periodic Review by MSA (2009-2010).

The maintenance and replacement/updating of all campus computers has been a top priority of the institution. UPRC assigns funds every year to replace scientific/teaching and computer equipment. Currently, the development of the maintenance and replacement/updating plan will be a priority task undertaken by the CIO, as of July 1, 2005.

As mentioned in Chapter 11, librarians, library personnel and faculty members are working together to enhance the educational experiences of all campus constituents. Library personnel are actively collaborating with all academic departments on campus in the development of the collections, revisions of course syllabi, workshops on bibliography instructions and research experiences among others. In each academic department a faculty member is responsible with keeping the department's faculty and students abreast of all library developments.

## Standard 12: General Education

The quality of the General Education component is a high priority at UPRC and we affirm that our institution meets all fundamental elements related to this Standard. We explained to the Visiting Team that this important project is the result of many years of reflection and actions to provide a first-rate educational experience to our students. This year (2004-05), the pilot project included students from the Natural Sciences and the Elementary Education programs. The findings and recommendations of our Self Study Report (page 91) indicated our intention to further expand the project but this process is being carefully planned, in response to ongoing assessment of results. Assessment results have been gathered and specific plans for next year will soon be approved by the Academic Senate. As stated in the SSR, faculty development activities and disseminating efforts will continue in order to make responsible extensions of our project. By 2009-10, all 32 academic programs should indeed be embedded within this transformation.

## Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

UPRC is committed with continuing delivering outstanding institutional programs and activities.

## Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

UPRC's Academic Senate has already approved that all academic programs will be assess every five (5) years (in compliance with the IAP) and the first group of ten (10) programs already completed preliminary assessment reports (made available to visiting team members). We recognized that such program assessment has to make much more emphasis on student learning measures, both direct and indirect. As previously mentioned, the revision of student learning outcomes for all programs will be completed in the next academic year. Thereafter, every academic program will be in position to propose specific outcomes assessment procedures that will be incorporated in the 5-years institutional assessment cycles. The Faculty Committee on

Planning and Assessment and the Committee of Academic Affairs of the Academic Senate will collaborate in the coordination of this process and complete results will be ready in time for he next MSA Periodic Review Report. As expected, this process will be coordinated with external certification or accreditation reviews as appropriate. Those programs involved in external accreditation efforts should inform the Faculty Planning and Assessment Committee and the Senate Committee on Academic Affairs of important review dates in the accreditation process so as not to duplicate review efforts.

A careful revision of the IAP confirms that UPRC has a specific model for the assessment of its General Education Program (as explained in Section 12.4 of the SSR). The plan specifies three dimensions and four stages for this assessment task (Exhibit #37 of the SSR). Both direct and indirect assessment measures will be adopted as part of this task. The pilot and cluster projects described extensively in the SSR are the first steps taken in the institutional agenda for assessing General Education (and included direct and indirect measures of learning).