

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

Of

University of Puerto Rico - Aguadilla

By

**An Evaluation Team Representing the
Middles States Commission on Higher Education**

**Prepared after study of the institution's self-study report
and visit to the campus on April 3-6, 2011**

The members of the Team:

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This report represents the views of the evaluation team as interpreted by the Chair; it goes directly to the institution before being considered by the Commission. It is a confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution. All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist the University of Puerto Rico - Aguadilla. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and of the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.

INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

The University of Puerto Rico – Aguadilla is one campus of the University of Puerto Rico System a public institution offering Associate and Bachelor degrees. UPR - Aguadilla serves approximately 3000 students at its campus in the city of Aguadilla.

AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Chancellor and CEO: Prof. Ivelice Cardona Cortes
Chief Academic Officer: Dr. Sonia Rivera
President of the University of Puerto Rico: Dr. Miguel Munoz Munoz

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Date when instruction began: 1972
Year of the first graduating class: 1974

Institution type: Public

Degrees Offered: Associate and Bachelor

Enrollment (As of Fall, 2010): 3,076

Total unduplicated for-credit headcount = 3,278
Total non-credit enrollment = 2,589

Affirmation of continued compliance with Eligibility Requirements: Based on review of the self-study, other institutional documents and interviews, the team affirms that the institution **meets** all eligibility requirements as described in the *Characteristics of Excellence*.

Compliance with federal requirements; issues relative to state regulatory or other accrediting agency requirements: The Self-Study document includes a certification signed by the Chancellor and the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the University of Puerto Rico attesting to their compliance with all requirements relating to Title IV participation including relevant requirements under the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008.

INTRODUCTION

The members of the Team named above visited the University of Puerto Rico - Aguadilla from April 3 through April 6, 2011. Over that period of time, the members of the team visited with and interviewed many members of each of the institution's constituencies. On the basis of information received during those interviews and after reviewing the self-study report and the exhibits presented the Team hereby offers this report on how the College is meeting the Standards detailed in the *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education* of the Higher Education Commission of the Middle States Association.

We were invited by the institution to provide an evaluation of how UPR – Aguadilla is meeting the above mentioned Standards. This report to the UPR - Aguadilla community is the result of our observations, and it is made in good faith. The members of the team have simply validated what was contained in the Self-Study Report prepared by the institution and the additional exhibits presented. This report is for UPR - Aguadilla and for the Commission on Higher Education of the MSA. It is formatted to follow the listing of the Standards as found in *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*.

All members of the Team reviewed and concur with the statements contained in this report. A separate *Chair's Brief* will be submitted directly to the Commission. This document will contain the Team's recommendation on accreditation status. The Commission will consider the recommendation and, in turn will recommend action by the Middle States Board of Directors.

The members of the Team express their appreciation to the administration, faculty, and students of UPR - Aguadilla for their hospitality during our visit at the institution. We are pleased to report that all materials necessary for a fair and thorough evaluation were provided and that there was a sense of openness and collegiality that made the visit productive and pleasant.

UPR – Aguadilla is seeking reaffirmation of its accreditation. The team was impressed with the level of preparation that has taken place to ensure that the institution meets the Standards contained in *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education* of the Higher Education Commission of the Middle States Association.

In the body of this report we will detail that, in the Team's opinion, the UPR - Aguadilla meets all the standards contained in *Characteristics of Excellence*. Although faced with serious budgetary issues, both UPR – Aguadilla and the UPR Central Administration have done an admirable job of converting this crisis into an opportunity for renewal and development.

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

The institution’s mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates whom the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution’s stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are utilized to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

The institution meets this standard.

Based on a review of the Self-Study, other institutional documents, and interviews from all institutional constituencies, the Team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

UPR - Aguadilla has a clear and concise mission focused on providing access to higher education in the Northwest area of the Island. The mission statement was revised to coincide with the 2006-2011 Strategic Plan and was developed with the involvement of all campus constituencies. This mission is rooted in the institution’s history as a regional (community) college. Its 2006-2011 Strategic Plan is framed around the UPR-System’s *Ten for the Decade* (the System’s strategic agenda) and the goals and objectives of the campus’ plan are driven by its mission. Action Plans and the Institutional Annual Reports are evidence of the high degree of alignment of the institutional initiatives with the mission. There is no “mission-creep.”

Commendation: The team commends UPR – Aguadilla for remaining faithful to its original mission as a teaching institution, committed to its students and to the geographical area it serves.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.

The institution meets the standard.

Based on the review of the Self-Study, other institutional documents and interviews with members of the pertinent institutional constituencies, the Team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

The University of Puerto Rico - Aguadilla is a public, coeducational institution, one of eleven autonomous campuses within the University of Puerto Rico System. Established in 1972 as part

of a network of regional colleges, it was granted institutional autonomy in 1999 and was renamed by the UPR Board of Trustees in 2000.

In the mid-90s, the University began the revision of the mission and goals transferred to it through the autonomy process. In 1995, the campus used the system-wide UPR Strategic Plan “as a framework for guiding the strategic planning process” which resulted in institution’s first Strategic Plan: 1995-2000. Two additional planning cycles, both aligned with the UPR System planning agenda *Ten for the Decade*, have produced the University’s Strategic Plans: 2000-2005 and 2006-2011. A close scrutiny of the Strategic Plans: 2000-2005 and 2006-2011 indicates that both plans are “centered on teaching and learning...in connection with the needs and demands of the contemporary society...and emphasize academic program development that...are aligned with quality standards as set forth by external accrediting bodies.”

The Team found strong evidence to support the advancement and institutional funding of two core initiatives as directed by the 2000-2011 Strategic Plans: 1) instructional technology including upgrades to infrastructure and 2) program accreditation. The Team concurs with the Self Study’s observation that these two initiatives “are having a most significant impact on the institution.” Several academic departments, academic support services (i.e. the Library) and other administrative programs have or are in the process of being accredited by their respective external accreditation groups. The ongoing upgrade to the institution’s technology infrastructure as well as the continuing integration of technology within the classroom and student support services is notable. In 2001, a multi-year Title V Grant from the Department of Education fueled the IT initiative in its initial years. Institutional funds continued this initiative, providing an IT operating budget in 2005 approximating \$490,000. By 2009, the operating budget allocation had grown to around \$903,000. Currently, 90% of the campus has wireless connection.

One of the important aspects of a strategic plan is to align an institution’s goals and objectives directly to its budgetary resources giving focused direction to the allocation of funds. At the beginning of the prior ten year cycle, the institution’s annual operating funds were relatively stable and predictable. Funds were based on an allocation from the University of Puerto Rico’s general fund revenues. The revenues each year for the UPR System was based on a long standing 1966 legislative approved “formula.” Until 2006, when the global recession began to impact the local economy, the 1966 approved “formula” had provided stability to the budgeting process and long-range forecasts for both UPR and UPR-Aguadilla. On average, prior to the 2007-2008 operating budget, the University could depend annually on an approximate 7% increase in funds over the previous fiscal year. This increase was reduced to 5% in 2007-2008. It was further reduced to 2% in 2008-2009. In 2009-2010, the funding allocation dropped by minus 2% of the prior year’s funding. The current year 2010-2011 has experienced a major budgetary cut of over \$3.5 million compared to funding available last fiscal year. This represents an almost 15% reduction in available resources.

During the last two years, the institution has experienced a move from a “proactive” operating mode to a “reactive” mode. Areas of focus that were growing in importance and capacity over the prior ten years (especially the IT initiative) have experienced reductions as resources tighten. For example, allocations for the IT initiative dropped from its 2008-2009 funding level of \$903,000 to \$772,000 in 2009-2010 (-14.5%).

Ample evidence in the Self Study suggests that continuing need for strategic planning by the entire University community will be paramount as revenues continue to decline over the foreseeable future, creating institutional challenges. Internal measures must continue to be implemented in order to assure the continuity of critical operations that support the institution's primary mission and goals. Several contingency measures listed in the Self Study have already begun to be initiated to reduce costs. As the University experiences a prolonged reallocation and cost-cutting environment, all campus constituencies must be committed to the same "institutional page." Courageous and consistent leadership will need to be evident at all levels of the administration and faculty.

The University has been well served by its Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR). Over the past five years, OPIR has served as a linchpin in strengthening the University's long-range planning model and its annual budgeting process. This office, along with the combined efforts of both Budget and Finance, has provided the institution with valuable current and consistently formatted information for its planning efforts. An ongoing commitment to the principles of broad-based and collaborative strategic planning must remain a central focus of the institution's framework.

The University should continue its already admirable planning progress as it prepares to create the next Strategic Plan 2012-2017. The development of the upcoming Plan should be collaborative in setting institutional goals, priorities, contingency alternatives, and the five-year budget projections covering this planning cycle. As resources continue to be severely limited, it will demand of the institution a sharpened awareness of the essential importance of a long-term, mission-driven resource allocation process.

The strategic planning model linked with the annual budgeting cycle currently in place and utilized by the University will bode well for the institution as it uses these processes to tackle the existing and future budgetary limitations. Transparency of the institution's "methods of analyzing the good use of its resources" will be essential to keeping the campus community focused on this mission.

The Team urges the University to continue to embrace the processes of strategic planning as a catalyst for change, renewal and recovery, as it strives to achieve economic viability. Over the next few years, the institution should benefit by its focus on the value and necessity of a strong planning component. Strong strategic planning will be required in order to advance the institution's progress toward fiscal recovery and financial sustainability. This is especially relevant given the current weakened financial environment. The continuing efforts of campus community outreach will benefit acceptance and support of institutional strategies and resource allocations that, undoubtedly, will involve significant compromises. Systematically sharing strategic decisions with all campus constituents will foster the University's desired goal of achieving "a more informed and engaged community."

Commendation: While the University is by no means free from significant challenges, it is well poised to achieve the collaborative long-range planning required of an increasingly mature and sophisticated institution.

Suggestion: A viable long-range institutional plan based on sound and realistic financial projections is necessary if the campus is to continue meeting its stated educational aspirations. To achieve these aspirations, the University should make sustained progress toward a strengthened institutional financial capacity.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The human, financial, technical, facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

The institution meets this standard.

For almost four decades now, UPR- Aguadilla has survived a number of economic changes and transformations. Over that period, even in light of continuing financial challenges, the University has been able to maintain a level of financial solvency. To date the institution has never ended a fiscal year with a deficit. These financial efforts have resulted in a continuous evolution of its academic programs. From the institution's founding in 1972, through its transformation to a four-year degree granting institution in 2000, to its present emerging non-traditional student academic offerings, the University has remained faithful to its roots to provide "educational alternatives...that respond to the economic, social, and cultural needs of Puerto Rico particularly those of the Northwestern part of the Island."

As a public institution, the University has a high level of dependency on government appropriated funds for maintaining its financial stability. Negatively exacerbating this heavy reliance on government funding is the current global recession, impacting the Island's economy since 2006, which has resulted in steadily declining tax revenues. The government loss in revenues is estimated at approximately 14%. Consequently, this shortage has been reflected in a proportional decline in the University's 2010-11 budget allocation (almost 15% below 2009-10 level). Lower revenues are expected to continue "in upcoming fiscal years." Because of this, the institution has recognized the need to identify a set of financial strategies to direct its day to day efforts. Given the economic constraints, a series of control measures were approved by the UPR Board of Trustees aimed at reducing costs at its eleven university campuses, including UPR- Aguadilla. These measures were taken to allow "the System to adjust to funds available...and to guarantee the integrity of the institution with the necessary budget adjustments."

Approximately ninety per cent of the University's budget centers on salaries and benefits of 179 faculty (64% tenured) and 194 administrators (most are tenured). A large number of personnel are covered by existing multi-year negotiated labor agreements. Because such a high percentage of institution's budget relates to salaries and fringe benefits, a major portion of the Board approved control measures addressed both the personnel and benefits areas. These personnel measures included freezing administrative positions, freezing educational positions, moratorium on salary increases, moratorium on a new salary scale for faculty promotions, reductions in

compensation for extra duties (faculty and administrators), and elimination of special bonuses, special summer funds and excess sick leaves. Although these measures have achieved substantial cost reductions, none of these personnel related “precautionary measures” should be seen as long term solutions to establishing a more robust financial base.

Prior to these current economic control measures, employees were fairly compensated and received professional development. To the extent possible, the University should seek to continue salaries and benefits packages that fairly compensate faculty and staff. Within the context of tightened financial projections predicting relatively “flat” budgets over the next five years, maintaining a wise balance among investments in faculty and staff, operations and programs, technology and plant. These investments may well be the most critical decisions made by the institution as it maps its future.

Ultimately, a continuing delicate condition of financial health will impair the institution’s ability to fulfill its mission and academic obligations. If the current fragile budgetary status is left unchecked, in time the UPR-Aguadilla will find itself continually driven by financial rather than programmatic decisions. Continuing to explore and capture new revenue opportunities will be critical if the University is to progress toward a healthier financial future.

Prudent financial leadership and management are required. The institution does not have adequate financial strength or resources to support a management team that would be primarily reactive, with limited plans and strategies for the future. The University must expand its financial vision and initiatives far beyond past endeavors if progress is to be made toward a higher degree of long-term fiscal equilibrium. Any recovery plan remains vulnerable to unpredictable external conditions. Rising expectations must be guarded. However, for UPR-Aguadilla, at bottom, financial constraints hardly preclude the institution from showing remarkable determination to bring its program costs and resources into equilibrium.

The Team found ample evidence of a sound financial accounting context within which the institution accomplishes its business. Financial procedures appear clear and in compliance with state and federal law. Written policies have been developed for a wide variety of financial operations. There is also a wide range of budget management guidelines. As resources decline, the need for timely budget monitoring reports is most important.

The System-wide Oracle financial software installed in 2006-07 should prove most useful in the achievement of well-timed financial data and documents. Payroll and grants management are two remaining data bases that need integration within the Oracle system. This final enhancement should be implemented as soon as possible to complete the final phase of this software conversion. The Team urges that continued attention be focused on ensuring that budget and financial information is available in a timely manner.

As a public institution, the University is subject to an annual audit performed by the Office of the Comptroller of Puerto Rico. The institution has satisfactorily met all the standards and criteria of this annual audit for compliance with good fiscal management practices. Federal audits also are performed on fiscal resources obtained through federal funds. These audits appear timely and indicate compliance. An independent audit firm conducts annual audits of the financial

statements of UPR. This independent audit was not yet available for 2009-2010. The completion of these external audits would seem to have a 9-10 month lag time after completion of the fiscal year.

All academic departments, administrative offices and student services annually submit their operational plans of actions to their respective deans. Plans and budget requests submitted by departments are evaluated and acted upon based on alignment with the University's strategic plan which "gives direction to the allocation of resources." Both academic and administrative directors are expected to request and justify operating funds based on "indicators of success" results. As resources have tightened, the University community has been tasked with "using more creative ways to allow the reduction and/or redistribution of operational expenses." Some of the initiatives for more efficient and effective use of limited funds recommended are 1) review of course occupancy to permit maximum enrollments per course, 2) moratorium on programs with sustained low demand, 3) re-engineering office, positions, and tasks, 4) reduction in expenses identified as non-essential, and 5) energy conservation measures. Given the fiscal challenges faced by the University, the institution will continue to need focused financial discipline in regard to budget distributions, revised planning strategies, and identification of creative ways to achieve operating efficiency.

As the Self Study indicates "the Central Administration and the institutional units of the University are developing collaboratively the five-year financial projections 2011-2015 with updated external and internal parameters and a specific set of assumptions." The Team applauds this collaborative approach. Broad-based consultation and up-to-date financial data are both critical to producing sound and reliable five-year budget projections. This is especially essential within the current environment of financial restraints. Clarity of vision, understanding, and communication will be vital to the success of this collaborative long-range budget projections process.

At present, the most pressing problems relate to financial matters and the achievement of a broad-based financial structure. The present financial circumstances will require the cooperation from all sectors, not only, of the campus community but also of the UPR Central Administration. The collaborative goal should be to advance a proactive strategic budget planning process that will set future agenda for institutional improvement and a sustainable financial capacity.

Prior to the current economic recession, the Aguadilla campus was making considerable strides toward gaining a more sustained capacity to carry forth its mission. From 2005-2009, operating budgets continued to show modest increases, only to drop, in 2010-2011, by a precarious -15% decrease. However, the securing of external funds is beginning to show some positive trends ranging from approximately \$1.5 million in 2005-2006 to \$2.6 million in 2007-2008. For 2010-2011, external funds are projected at approximately \$3.6 million. Most of these funds represent resources from federal and state sponsors with only a minimal amount from private donors and foundations. One of the University's strategic objectives relates specifically to external fund resources. The goal of the institution states that "at least 20% of the total operating expenses will be self-generated funds and external resources funds." This goal will be exceeded in 2011-2012 with \$6.7 million in grant funds already secured and another \$4.3 million of grant proposals submitted and awaiting approval. The institution is to be commended for this impressive

progress to date.

As the institution continues to be fraught with uncertainties in regard to its largest revenue source – government budget allocations-, it has acknowledged the need “to continue existing initiatives” to secure external funds as well as “develop new ones to increase and diversify funding sources.” As reported in the Self Study, the University’s stated goal of strengthening “a culture of external funding and donations” is endorsed highly by the visiting team. A further Self Study recommendation, that of creating an administrative position for external resources, could serve as a catalyst to accelerate the pace of both short-term and mid-term external financial arrangements that would augment and strengthen the institution’s revenue base. This degree of University commitment to advancing the need for external resources would serve to highlight an institution squarely facing its fiscal limits.

Institutional advancement initiatives must cultivate as well as elevate awareness of the importance of fund raising among donors, alumni, and friends. With the institution’s short longevity of only 40 years as well as the absence of any strong tradition of giving among its existing alumni, the University is wise in nurturing alumni outreach through the activities sponsored by the Alumni Relations Office. In addition, the University administration should continue to foster close ties with the Board of Trustees whose members have established the financial foundation on which the institution operates. Members of the Board have a personal obligation to support the University’s mission and strategic vision. Providing access to individuals or other sources of financial means should be an initiative of high focus for the Board.

Another University priority, for improving the institution’s fiscal base, is to increase the non-traditional student population within its existing Continued Education and Evening Programs. These expanded evening and Saturday degree options will address not only the more efficient use of facilities but also the educational needs of a growing non-traditional student population. This increased enrollment of non-traditional students will open up opportunities for the continuing development of institutional online offerings. The University has an aggressive plan to double the number of non-traditional students over the next five years – growing from the current 275 students to over 600.

The Aguadilla campus, that currently serves 3,000 enrolled students, has over 226,000 square feet of building space. Campus facilities accommodate programs ranging from a library to multi-media classrooms, laboratories equipped with computer technology, faculty and administrative offices, student activity and general use spaces. The University is located on 35 acres within the premises of the former Ramey Air Force Base in Aguadilla in the northwestern region of Puerto Rico.

As noted in the Self Study, a Master Plan has been developed that addresses the long-range needs of campus facilities. Capital improvement funds are assigned to the University, by the Board, to fund major campus projects based on this long-range planning document. In addition, campus guidelines have been established for the annual funding of facilities and equipment renewal as well as modernization projects. An ongoing modernization, deferred and cycled maintenance program is a prerequisite for the proper preservation of aging facilities. On the Aguadilla

campus, 90% of its buildings are 40 years in age or older. This inventory of aging and heavily used facilities makes a systematic approach to annually funding a deferred and cycled maintenance program an essential institutional initiative.

One of the goals of the institution is to provide a physical environment that invites teaching and learning and encourages excellence for both faculty and students. To this end, in the past few years, the University has invested in the renovation and improvement of its facilities. These include a new library (adding close to 26,000 square feet of expanded library space), increased multi-media classrooms, expanded general use space, a new electrical substation, and a new music classroom and bursar's office is under construction. One pressing problem faced by the institution is limited space allocated to faculty and staff. However, the University has remodeled several offices in order to increase efficiency and employee satisfaction. Plans for the future include the renovation of existing vacant space (once occupied by the library) for additional faculty offices and classrooms.

A major investment of funds has been directed to the information technology area during the past decade. Since the resulting technology inventory has become more extensive, a more systematic approach to equipment preservation and replacement will need to be addressed. In addition, the University has heavily invested in technology support services. An impressive IT staff has guided the institution over the ever-changing and challenging landscape of technology. The visiting team would urge that continued staff training and development be a top priority in order for the campus to benefit fully from the dollars spent to date.

The Aguadilla campus is to be commended for its well managed physical plant operations, for its utilities energy management system, for its upgraded technology infrastructure, and for its good preventative maintenance efforts including compliance with ADA, safety, environmental, and security issues. The Team acknowledges the recent physical plant improvements.

The Team urges members of the campus community to continue to “celebrate yourselves” even as you acknowledge the financial, facilities, and resource realities with which you must deal. Although the target of full fiscal equilibrium may be many years in the future, this awareness – the institution's financial limits – has not daunted or discouraged the University's faculty, administrators, or staff who so fundamentally believe in its programs and core mission. This extraordinary energy and commitment is a positive force for enabling institutional resiliency as the campus community strides toward gaining a more sustained capacity to carry forth its mission.

Commendation: Even in light of all the revenue reductions, the University community, by working together, has made great progress to achieve not only a projected balanced budget at the end of this fiscal year, but also anticipates a modest surplus. This is an achievement that all campus constituencies should acknowledge with a sense of real accomplishment. The institution is fortunate to have a team of strong, dedicated, and collaborative leaders in the areas of budget, finance, and institutional planning.

Suggestion: With enrolled students experiencing the same economic recession as the institution, and with 80% of University students receiving financial aid, the special stabilization fee of \$800 per student proved to be a problematic stopgap measure for increasing tuition revenues. However, since tuition “is among the lowest in the nation, accounting for less than 10% of UPR revenues,” an opportunity exists to undertake a longer-view, comprehensive study of more sustainable ways to restructure the current tuition policies.

Suggestion: As the University progresses toward the goal of strengthened financial stability, and since facilities, equipment, and technology are essential components, a continued understanding of these future liabilities needs to be systematically addressed in order to plan effectively for the decade ahead.

Recommendation: The Team endorses the University’s recommendation for Standard 3. It should continue to strengthen the progress made to date in the area of external funding through the creation of an administrative position for external resources. This action would demonstrate the strong will of the institution to begin planning vigorously to expand its financial base beyond its annual government appropriations.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

The institution’s system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill the responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.

The institution meets this standard.

Based on a review of the Self-Study, other institutional documents, interviews with the President and top academic and financial administrators from the UPR Central Administration, and interviews with members from all institutional constituencies, the Team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

The University of Puerto Rico at Aguadilla is part of the University of Puerto Rico System, a large publicly supported multi-campus, co-educational university system. The Central Administration, located at Río Piedras, oversees the operation of the eleven academic units, including UPR - Aguadilla. The Board of Trustees is the highest governing and administrative body of the University of Puerto Rico System, and was created by the Government of Puerto Rico on June 16, 1993, under University Law Act number 16.

The University Law Act Number 1, January 20, 1966, as amended, clearly defines the university’s governing structure, including the composition, duties and responsibilities of each university constituent in the development of policies and in the decision-making process. The

internal management of each Campus is governed by applicable disposition of law, UPR General By-Laws, and general applications complementary by-laws, as well as by resolutions adopted by the Board of Trustees, by the guidelines established by the University President, and by the rules and regulations adopted by each institutional governing body

Executive authority at the University Of Puerto Rico - Aguadilla Campus is delegated to the Chancellor of the institution for a term no shorter than three and no longer than five years. The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning, research and scholarship, foster quality improvement and support the institution's vision and mission.

The team found that the UPR - Aguadilla has an Action Plan to achieve and sustain compliance with Standard 4 organized in three areas: Foster an Enhanced Institutional Climate and Identity, Cultivate an Open University Culture, and Revisit and Empower Leadership and Governance at all Levels.

The team also found that UPR – Aguadilla's managerial policies allow for a structure with clearly defined functions.

Commendation: The team commends both the UPR Central Administration and the local campus administration at UPR – Aguadilla for facing a serious financial crisis in a responsible way and coming up with solutions that allowed the institution to continue its educational mission and refine its programs and structures , building a solid foundation for continued development.

Standard 5: Administration

The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution's organization and governance.

The institution meets this standard.

Based on a review of the Self-Study, other institutional documents, organizational charts, and interviews with members from all institutional constituencies, the Team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

The administrative officers of UPR – Aguadilla include the Chancellor, the Dean of Academic Affairs, the Dean of Administrative Affairs and the Dean of Student Affairs. The UPR-Aguadilla Senate consists of representatives of the UPR - Aguadilla faculty, students and administration officers. The ten academic departments , the library, CETEM, and Continuing Education and Professional Studies all fall under the supervision of the Dean of Academic Affairs. The Dean of Administrative Affairs oversees offices such as Finance, Human Resources, Physical Resources, Communication and Transportation, Reproduction Center, Office of Security, and the Document Administration Office while the Dean of Students Affairs heads the Guidance and Counseling Office, Admissions, Financial Aid, Medical Services, the Athletic Center, Social and Cultural Activities, the Student Center and Quality of Life Office. The three Deans report directly to the

Chancellor who is the chief executive officer of the campus, reporting to the President of the University of Puerto Rico whose office is in San Juan.

The University recognizes the necessity to efficiently and effectively convey official information to its stakeholder groups on issues that affect them. The information technology initiatives have contributed significantly to networking infrastructure and computing capability and to the development of effective faculty and student skills.

There is evidence of participation opportunities among the different sectors of the institutional community, which all provide input for decisions that affect them, within the dispositions and frame of actions established in the University of Puerto Rico Law, General Bylaws and applicable institutional policies.

The managerial policies allow for a structure with clearly defined functions.

The university has management norms, policies, and rules that keep the university community fully informed.

Standard 6: Integrity

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom.

The institution meets this standard

Based on a review of the Self-Study, other institutional documents, and interviews from all institutional constituencies, the Team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

The UPR - Aguadilla, as a constituent institution of the University of Puerto Rico System, is subject to the System's General BY-Laws and certifications (policies formally adopted by the Board of Trustees); to policies of the Puerto Rico Council on Higher Education; and to the Puerto Rico Commonwealth's Law of Government Ethics. All employees of the UPR - Aguadilla must complete a minimum of ten hours of continuing education on ethics topics every two years. The campus Institutional Ethics Committee is charged with providing various activities and workshops yearly to promote ethical practices. The Library also contributes by offering workshops to students on copyright laws; research and copyright, and plagiarism. The institutional discipline committee is in charge of dealing with ethical and disciplinary norms and procedures and on faculty-student relationship. The System's student by-laws address issues such as student discipline, grievance procedures, student right to freedom of expression, student evaluation, sexual harassment, illicit use of drugs, plagiarism, and student ethical rights and responsibilities. The UPR - Aguadilla adheres to the UPR System's policies and regulations regarding integrity on issues such as academic and intellectual freedom; fair and impartial practices in hiring and equal employment opportunity; equitable procedures for student

admission and for the selection, evaluation and promotion of faculty and non-faculty personnel. The UPR - Aguadilla has a Student Ombudsperson, an employee of the University appointed by the Chancellor, to represent the interest of any student with a seemingly valid grievance. The UPR - Aguadilla adheres to ethical practices in public relations announcements and marketing practices. Required and elective courses are sufficiently available to allow students to graduate within the published program length. The catalogue and schedule of classes are available to students in printed form. The Fact Books and data reports appear to be an accurate and honest representation of the campus and are widely available to the University community. The campus also complies with all federal and state reporting requirements and the Chancellor has certified that it is in compliance with all federal requirements regarding the administration of student financial assistance funds.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment plan for process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

The institution meets this standard.

There are three dimensions through which UPR - Aguadilla assesses itself. The first and foundational level is rooted in its strategic plan. UPR -Aguadilla has a 15-year tradition of disciplined planning. Its strategic plans have been framed within the overall UPR-System's strategic priorities. Each strategic plan's update has been preceded by a *Comprehensive Assessment of the Implementation of the Strategic Plan* covering the previous period, and by surveys and focus groups of the different university constituencies. The campus strategic plans have been developed with broad participation of its constituencies and are linked to the System's strategic agenda. The 2006-2011 plan includes ten goals or priority areas rooted in the campus mission and linked to the *Ten for the Decade*, the System's most recent strategic agenda. The alignment between the campus and the system strategic plans is explicated in *Alignment of Strategic Plans*.

There are two "signature" initiatives of particular importance and meant to be funding priorities. The first - information technology - is deemed to be the "distinctive" campus project in alignment with the system UPR strategic plan. The milestones and metrics to assess progress achieving this initiative are clearly spelled out in the *Distinctive Emblematic Project* document. The Center for Educational Multimedia Technology (*CETEM*) was assigned the lead role for this signature goal. The second initiative aims to achieve, by 2012, professional accreditation of academic programs offered by the University that are accreditable by a professional association: education, business administration, information systems, electronic technology, and environmental technology. Also slated to acquire external accreditation are the library and the counseling center.

The strategic plan includes budget projections to fund priorities. The Office of Planning and Institutional Research develops *Annual Action Plans* to accomplish goals of the strategic plan

through the development of specific objectives and activities. Each Dean (Academic, Administrative, and Student) and key administrative offices develop internal planning documents called *Unit Plans* or operational action plans dynamically related to the institutional *Action Plans*. The planning office also produces *Annual Reports* summarizing information on progress toward the achievement of the strategic goals. The *Action Plans* and the *Annual Reports* follow the *Strategic Plan* organization, allowing for clear linkages between plan, action and assessment. These are shared with the different university constituencies.

The second dimension of the institutional assessment efforts of the UPR -Aguadilla involves reports from the Office of Planning and Institutional Research, which also publishes a “Fact Book” that includes certain outcomes data like retention and graduation, grade distribution, etc. by program and institution-wide. The Office also conducts surveys of students and graduates. Perhaps more critical, it has a schedule of reports on key topical areas (retention, financial aid, course supply and demand, etc.) that provide analysis and data on the topic and are presented to the Academic Senate. These reports are meant to educate the University on trends and problems in each area and have led to the development of various strategies for improvement that are monitored through specific metrics. In some cases, reports have led to very detailed action to improve service and increase efficiencies – for example, in the area of course offerings and class size.

The UPR - Aguadilla is developing a third dimension through a draft institutional assessment plan. This is a comprehensive plan that includes key institutional metrics across programs and services intended to provide a macro view of the institution’s performance.

Finally, UPR - Aguadilla is audited by a range of agencies as is typical in public higher education: State Comptroller, internal audits by its Board of Trustees, external audits contracted by the University of Puerto Rico System, federal audits of federal financial aid and veterans benefits.

Commendation: The linkages and alignments with departments between the strategic plan, annual action plan, and annual report are exemplary. The process is focused, results-oriented and guided by the strategic plan.

Commendation: The Office of Planning and Institutional Research fulfills a critical role in the University and its topical reports and data presentations, the Action Plans, and Annual Reports are of excellent quality.

Suggestion: The University should continue to develop the draft institutional assessment plan and insure its wide dissemination to all its stakeholders.

Suggestion: The University should continue to strive to make its institutional assessment efforts action-oriented (“closing the loop”), particularly as it formalizes and implements the draft institutional assessment plan.

Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention

The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students' educational goals.

The institution meets this standard.

According to the Characteristics of Excellence, an institution's admission practices should ensure that students have a reasonable opportunity for success in meeting their educational goals. Standard 8 states that at some institutions additional support services may be required to ensure student retention and success.

To determine if UPR - Aguadilla meets the standard's requirements, the Team met with the directors of Admissions and Counseling, and their supervisor the Dean of Student Affairs, as well as with currently enrolled students. Among the documents reviewed were the Student Handbook, the Retention Plan and the syllabus for a non-credit 15 semester hour course called "Integration to University Life," offered through the counseling and guidance department. The Enrollment Management Plan has been incorporated into the Strategic Plan.

The Admissions Department follows the guidelines of each academic department for admittance to various programs. Department chairs and faculty in their departments, in cooperation with the academic dean, determine the appropriate GPA and quotas for their programs; admissions decisions are based on that criteria and made by the director in conjunction with faculty in each academic area. The goal is to ensure that students admitted have the necessary educational preparation to succeed in a specific program of study. Exceptions are made for a small number of students with special talents (such as athletes and those with artistic abilities) who fall 20 points below the requirement but nonetheless are granted admission. These students are required to enroll in "Integration to University Life," designed to help them succeed. Other students who are in academic jeopardy at the end of their first semester are encouraged to take the course.

The counseling area focuses on improving retention. The director meets each semester with students whose GPA falls below 2.0, making suggestions on ways to improve their performance and referring them to staff and peer tutors. Her area offers an initiative called "Walking Counseling," in which both counselors and peer students reach out to all those with low GPAs, encouraging them to seek help.

The Self Study acknowledges that retention is a serious issue, especially in the Freshman class, where 25% of those admitted do not return. In areas of the Self Study the institution indicates that a high percentage of students are failing introductory mathematics, but no efforts have been made to develop a remedial course below the college level to help students strengthen their math skills. The university has a retention plan but a committee has not been formed and charged with making recommendations to support student success and improve retention.

In response to student requests, the deans of student and academic affairs have extended office hours for admissions, financial aid, counseling and guidance, medical services, registrar and

bursar. This initiative will not only support the current student population but also the non-traditional students the University will be recruiting for its anticipated evening program.

In conclusion, the Team finds that the admissions policies on campus support and reflect the institutional mission but more needs to be done to support student success and retention.

Commendation: The counseling area should be commended for its outreach efforts to freshmen and at risk students and for the creation of a special course to help improve their academic performance. Their “Walking Counseling” initiative is an innovative program designed to improve retention.

Commendation: The extension of office hours in the student affairs area and also in the registrar and bursar’s offices is to be commended and should improve student satisfaction.

Suggestion: Efforts should be made across the University, including the academic area, to prevent attrition and support at-risk students.

Suggestion: Specific personnel from admissions should be tasked with recruiting students for the evening division.

Recommendation: The Retention Committee should be formed as soon as possible and should begin implementing a plan that includes specific activities and deadlines. The Committee should include not only members of the student affairs area but also faculty, including a professor from the mathematics department.

Recommendation: The University should consider the feasibility of a one-stop service, placing all areas related to student admissions and enrollment in one physical space, so that students are not required to walk about campus seeking assistance during the registration process.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution’s goals for students.

The institution meets this standard.

This conclusion has been reached after a review of the self-study, other materials available on site, interviews with admin staff, faculty and students.

Middle States expects an accredited institution to offer a well-organized program of support services appropriate to student strengths and needs, reflective of institutional mission and consistent with student learning expectations. These services should be complemented by good staff leadership and broad-based institutional commitment. To determine if UPR - Aguadilla satisfies the requirements of Standard 9, the Team held meetings with the Dean, students, and all the directors in the Student Affairs area as well as the registrar and faculty member serving as

Student Ombudsperson. The team reviewed documents and materials relevant to student support, such as the course catalog and student handbook. The college website contains information regarding tuition, fees, financial aid, admissions, retention and graduation rates, academic programs, athletics, campus security and accreditation.

The Dean as well as the directors and staffs in each of the student support areas appear deeply committed to ensuring student success. Each area has incorporated technology into its operations, allowing students greater access to services such as admissions, financial aid and counseling. Students reported to the Team that they are pleased with their new online access to services and plan to continue using more services as they become available. Students interviewed indicated they have computer access at home and that those who do not own PCs are able to borrow them or use the computer lab.

Students at UPR - Aguadilla are heavily dependent on Pell Grants and though recent government budget cuts affected the total amount of money deducted from grants, accommodations seem to have been made by central administration, creating a comfortable atmosphere on campus. Students interviewed expressed great appreciation for the support they receive from the various units, but would like to see all student affairs offices in the same location, along with the offices of the registrar and bursar.

UPR - Aguadilla has a small student center adjacent to the bookstore and hopes to build an athletic facility when funds become available. Architectural plans for that building have already been submitted.

In response to student requests for psychological counseling, a master's prepared psychologist is available to students 40 hours a week.

Students have opportunities to work on campus and are encouraged by faculty to apply for internships in their fields of study. Some science majors have served as summer interns, conducting research at various universities stateside, including Indiana University, Rutgers, Notre Dame and the University of Iowa.

Students are also engaged in formal community service activities, in many cases as projects connected to a specific academic course. For instance, members of the American Chemical Society visit local schools to perform experiments with students; other students conduct seminars on campus and in elementary and high schools on alcoholism and the consequences of driving under the influence.

In conclusion, the University services are responsive to the full spectrum of student needs and are consistent with the institutional mission.

Commendation: The University should be commended for upgrading its technology, allowing potential students to apply for admissions and financial aid online and receive decisions electronically.

Commendation: The community service requirement in various majors is commendable, since it promotes public service, supports the local community and is in keeping with the overall mission of the institution.

Suggestion: The University should attempt to make the website more user-friendly to students.

Suggestion: The University should continue to encourage students to apply for admission and financial aid online and to make payments electronically.

Recommendation: The Student Affairs Evaluation Committee should prepare instruments and ask students to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of each area of student support.

Recommendation: So that students are not required to repeat courses when transferring to another UPR campus, the University should continue developing an articulation agreement for each degree program and work with other campuses and the central administration to ensure these agreements are honored.

Standard 10: Faculty

The institution's instructional research and service programs are devised, developed, monitored and supported by qualified professionals.

The institution meets this standard.

Based on the review of the self-study, faculty members are qualified professionals as a result of their education, training, experience and skills, and are central to the institution's teaching and learning process. The faculty effectively perform their teaching responsibilities and other related roles like student advising, curriculum development, academic policy making and governance. Faculty participate in institutional governance through the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board. Members of the Academic Senate are eligible to represent the campus at the University Board. In spite of the budget situation the climate at the college has been cordial.

A plan for faculty development exists, but institutional funding has limited this process. Nonetheless, faculty attend conferences, forums and courses on the current needs of students and discuss theories and models of education amongst themselves. The Multimedia Educational Technology Center (CETEM) offers a variety of workshops on the integration of technology in teaching and learning that faculty are urged to attend.

In most cases these research activities are limited to Puerto Rico. The Self Study indicates that institutional certifications have been proposed to create a culture of continuous assessment and faculty improvement and to increase opportunities for faculty members to complete higher education studies and research projects.

The regular course load for most faculty is 12 credits a semester. The plan shows that a faculty recruitment process is in place. The process for tenure and promotion takes place in accordance with the University of Puerto Rico's General By-laws. Faculty are actively involved in program

revision, program improvement and program assessment. They are also involved in the accreditation process, evaluating curriculum, the teaching and learning process and infrastructures in place at the College--all in relation to the institution's objectives and financial resources.

Budget control measures have impacted on salary increases, promotions, summer session allocations, faculty benefits, tuition exemption policies, travel funds and class size.

Suggestion: Since travel is now limited to Puerto Rico , faculty should find other ways to learn about new research methods in their fields , such as participating in internet conferences, and seeking out new trends and research in their fields via electronic forms of communication.

Suggestion: Faculty should find ways to expand their online learning offerings , consider ways to better identify student needs for online courses, and develop best practices for online learning.

Suggestion: Though for the time being no faculty can expect raises following a promotion, points accumulated in the promotion process for the next rank should begin to accrue as soon as certification is received for movement to the next level.

Suggestion: Junior faculty need more guidance regarding achieving points in the promotion process. The University should implement a mentoring process in each department.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

The institution meets this standard.

Based on a review of the Self-Study, other institutional documents, and interviews from all institutional constituencies, the Team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

The university has a well developed program of educational offerings that provide students with academic options at the baccalaureate and associate degree levels, as well as professional certificates within the arts, sciences and technologies that respond to the economic, social, and cultural needs of Puerto Rico, particularly those of the northwestern part of the island. The Program offerings have been developed within the context of the University's institutional goals, the assessment of expected learning outcomes of each academic program, and the efforts aimed at improving teaching and learning.

UPR – Aguadilla academic programs' learning goals have been designed to achieve academic excellence, in response to today's dynamic, and technologically inclined global economy. Within this general context, the institution's educational offerings aim to provide a holistic and balanced

education that focuses on the development of students who are both technologically and professionally proficient as well as socially adept. This balance of practical skills and social awareness is reinforced by the alignment of the program curricula and course-specific objectives to the general goals of the institution.

The institution's clear and precise curricular goals and objectives guide the procedural processes of program and curricula/course creation, assessment, evaluation, and revision that ensure continuous improvement of UPR - Aguadilla's educational offerings. All programs have clearly stated objectives that respond to specific educational needs; the course syllabi and curriculum activities show good congruence with these objectives.

One of UPR - Aguadilla's goals stated in its *Strategic Plan 2006-2011* is the development of information technologies. The institution has made a major financial investment in developing a technological infrastructure and in the technological training of administrative and teaching personnel. The institution has worked diligently to provide online services for students, among them the processes of admission and the electronic payment of scholarships.

The development of technical and pedagogical skills is reflected in the University's growing expansion of on-line and web-based course offerings. The success of the University's efforts in this area is found in the *Alumni Questionnaire (2003 -2005)*. Seventy-five percent of graduates reported that learning in their specific discipline was influenced greatly by the integration of technology. Seventy percent of the alumni indicated that using technology increased their logical and critical thinking ability. And more than 70% of the graduates said that they were able to develop and use learning skills on their own. Lastly, about 80% credit the institution as the key to their development in the area of technological knowledge and skills.

The Team found the educational offerings of the University have evolved and improved in response to the University's Strategic Plan 2006-2011.

Evidence was found that curriculum offerings are evolving in response to current educational trends.

The proposed academic program for a Bachelor of Arts in Multidisciplinary Studies of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean is similar to the BBA since the student can select a major with one or two minors in different areas. This degree was developed in response to the growing focus on global reorganization that has been occurring during the last twenty years.

The flexible bachelor in Business Administration is a non-traditional approach to the BBA, with 5 majors and 21 minor options. This program is similar to the Morse Academic Plan (MAP) developed by the New York University, but in UPR-Aguadilla's case, it focuses not only on general education but also on minor concentrations, either business or non-business.

The Team found that in order to comply with accreditation requirements, curricular syllabi evaluation and revision were carried out by the departments of English, Business Administration, Electronics, Education, and Office Systems. The assessment and subsequent revisions process assured that all programs have clearly stated objectives and that these respond to specific

program goals and educational needs. Furthermore, the Team determined that course syllabi and curriculum activities show effective congruence with program and institutional goals.

Admission requirements were clearly stated and informed, both for freshmen candidates as well as transfer students.

The institution has made great progress in integrating computer related skills into classroom instruction.

UPR-Aguadilla's assessment initiatives have been reinforced in an effort to develop a culture of continuous assessment and improvement of academic programs.

The team confirms the University's conclusion that during the past five academic years (2005-2010), it has effectively accomplished many important objectives on its way to achieving the emblematic goals set out in its *Strategic Plan 2006-2011*.

Commendation: The University is to be commended for its continuing efforts to validate educational programs through specialized accreditation. The accreditation process has yielded positive results.

Standard 12: General Education

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and thinking and informational competencies.

The institution meets this standard.

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, including syllabi and interviews with faculty, students and administrators, the team developed the following conclusion relative to this standard.

The self-study indicates that the mission of the institution is to prepare students for courses related to their program. General education courses stress analytical reasoning, quantitative and informative literacy, critical thinking, and communication skills.

An assessment plan for student learning was developed by all departments with the exception of mathematics, and includes a grading rubric. It presents evidence of how well students acquire specific general skills.

The Self Study indicates that over 50% of students have problems with quantitative reasoning and are failing mathematics. Many students are also having problems in courses that require math skills, such as chemistry, physics, accounting, statistics and electronics. Mathematics

tutorials and workshops have been developed. However, no program has been designed by the Mathematics Department to remediate poor quantitative skills.

Recommendation: As recommended in the self-study, the University should develop a process to identify students deficient in basic quantitative skills and develop the necessary interventions.

A monitoring report will need to be sent to Middle States that demonstrates the development, implementation and outcomes of the mathematics assessment process by June 1, 2013.

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities:

The institution's programs or activities are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship and meet appropriate standards.

The institution meets this standard.

Based on a review of the Self Study, other institutional documents, and interviews from all institutional constituencies, the Team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

The University offers several programs covered under Standard 13, which include study abroad, experiential learning, non-credit offerings and online classes. All these offerings meet the criteria for this standard.

Study Abroad:

The Study Abroad Program, one of the Ten for the Decade Goals defined in the institution's strategic plan, was established by central administration in 2002-03 and is available to students on all UPR campuses. The university system has established 22 agreements to provide exchanges with other higher-education institutions. The central administration provides a guide for students interested in study abroad and the university's registrar and financial offices assist students who participate. A number of students study abroad annually, enrolling in courses and working as interns, often on research projects.

The institution has 25 students participating this academic year in research projects and internships at universities and government agencies within the United States and Spain. Students are recruited for research projects by the sponsoring university. At Aguadilla faculty require students to engage in intellectually rigorous research projects to ensure they gain beneficial experience and knowledge. Students in the business program participate in international studies in Spain at Complutense, Carlos III and Autonoma Universities. Aguadilla's faculty provide workshops to assist students in the application process and offer other activities to ready them for this experience. Professors and the Registrar assist students in the transfer of credit from the sponsoring university.

Experiential Learning:

The University does not provide credit for experiential learning that is used in place of completed course requirements but it does award experiential credit for well-defined and faculty managed internships and practices. In the past five years, over 1,300 students from business, education, healthcare and English have engaged in programs for which they received credit. Faculty serve as coordinators to ensure internships meet standards for their department and the institution. Students complete periodic reports on their experiences, and the supervisor at their internship or practice location also provides a review of their progress and evaluates student outcomes.

Assessment information from the Experiential Learning Program has resulted in changes to courses and programs or the elimination of topics and skill requirements. An example given during faculty interviews was the need to improve student use of business software applications. Faculty indicated that 97% of students were satisfied with their experiential learning experience and felt it improved their skills.

Continuing and Professional Education:

The Continuing Education and Professional Education Division provides credit and non-credit offerings for professional development and an evening college for non-traditional students. The University expects this division to be financially self-sustaining. It is a well-managed organization that provides a great variety of programs within the scope of the University's mission. The division assesses its offerings and makes appropriate improvements.

The division's credit offerings are taught in the evening college, where adult students and professionals pursue a bachelor's degree in business administration. Enrollment in the evening college is currently about 250 students. The college wants to expand by 25% annually over the next five years to better serve the community, increase the utilization of the college facilities and provide additional revenue. The college has plans in place to accomplish this by using their full time and contract (adjunct) faculty. The current evening college's students are supported with services by offices such as Financial Aid, Admissions and Registrar, which provide extended hours of service.

Additionally, the division offers a dual-enrollment program in science and technology for area high school students. Courses are taught during the academic year and provide a classroom learning experience that encourages students to enroll in the university after graduating from their secondary schools.

The non-credit classes offer professional development in a variety of business topics including new green business opportunities. The division also provides workshops for area teachers and healthcare providers, directed at recertification and professional improvement. The division provided evidence to the Team of their non-credit workshop evaluations for 2010. The evaluations address mastery of the subject by the teacher, methods of teaching, interaction with the students and communication, and include qualitative information. A review of the summary evaluations of classes and workshops revealed high satisfaction among students.

The division also provides diverse community outreach programs directed at life-long learning and offered to a variety of age groups. Students at the University are required to participate in at least one of over 18 community programs, which allow them to engage in a variety of service activities , including interaction with families of Down syndrome children. This commendable program is in alignment with the mission of the University and helps to instill in students the concept of life-long learning.

Distance Education:

The college started offering ten online courses in the last academic year following a systematic approach which prepared faculty and students. The initiative is managed through the Center for Education Technology in Multimedia, housed in the university's new library and is part of the university's strategic plan. The college offers online and hybrid courses.

Faculty members are certified prior to teaching online, using the LMS ; they engage in peer-to-peer training. Online courses have the same requirements as traditional courses. A course approval process is in place that involves faculty chairs and the academic vice president. A committee established to review new online courses evaluates the course and makes recommendations for revision.

Students participate in a two-hour workshop to prepare for taking the course. Those taking online courses are required to meet with the online faculty member at the start of the course.

A plan has not yet been developed to determine the extent of online offerings and to define the infrastructure needed to support them. Because the initiative is new, the university has not developed an assessment plan for online courses. The university plans to continue to develop more credit and non-credit offerings.

Commendation: The accomplishments and contribution by the Continuing and Professional Education Division are commendable. The planned expansion of the evening college will give the university the ability to increase offering to the community and will provide additional revenue. The division's practice of using students to participate in public service offerings is a very creative partnership with the academic departments.

Commendation: The design and development processes put into place for the online course offerings provide an excellent example of a well-planned and successful integration of a new academic initiative.

Recommendation: The University needs to develop a strategic plan for the further deployment and expansion of their online offerings, to determine the direction and extent of offerings and plan for the resources, staffing and technology infrastructure to support them.

Standard 14 – Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution’s students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education standards.

The institution meets this standard.

Following up on the previous self-study and Middle States report, the UPR – Aguadilla designed and implemented a plan to assess actual student learning, building on previous institutional assessment work focused on more traditional measures like retention and graduation rates, students and graduates satisfaction. This plan and implementation has been led by an institution-wide assessment committee made up of faculty from each academic department except the math department.

UPR - Aguadilla initiated a comprehensive assessment portal in its web site that organizes in one place institutional and departmental plans, reports and resources related to the assessment of student learning. The UPR - Aguadilla has adopted six general education skills expected of all its graduates (in addition to program-specific expected outcomes): oral and written communications; mathematics and computing; critical thinking; management and application of technology; the ability to access, manage and use information; and the ability to engage in team work. The assessment of these key areas was phased in over the last four years. By the 2008-2009 academic year, all areas were being assessed. Departmental plans (except the math department, which has not developed an assessment plan) integrate these expected general education skills with program-specific outcomes.

The general education outcomes are mapped to specific courses and assessment is embedded through the use of rubrics and instruments and methods. The mapping and assessment approaches to be embedded in those courses are also specified in the departmental plans. For example, the department of electronics and physics includes essay questions in exams administered in several of its courses. The responses are graded and corrected not just for content but also for writing skills. Students deemed to be in need of improving their writing skills are referred by the faculty to workshops taught by the Spanish department. However, since there is no academic penalty for not participating in the workshops, many students fail to attend them.

Departments provide summaries of assessment results and summaries of actions taken as a result of the assessment. The Office of Planning and Institutional Research plays a key role in the assessment process, providing expertise and data. Meetings with members of the Student Learning Assessment Committee provided evidence of improvements in teaching introduced as a result of assessment activities.

The University designed a “*General Education Acquired Test*” to measure basic knowledge in Social Sciences, Humanities, Spanish, and Natural Sciences. The test also includes an essay to measure Spanish writing skills. The test was administered to the incoming freshmen in 2008-

2009 and again when this cohort reaches its third year of study. This is the University's attempt to measure the value added to the students learning by their academic experience. The University has designed some strategies to compensate for the weaknesses revealed by the test – for example, workshops to improve writing skills.

The University also uses results from the assessment of student learning in its program review process. Each program is reviewed every five years (except those which are externally accredited). This process requires a review of the program learning objectives and the update of all course syllabi as required by program changes. The University also monitors passing rates of its graduates sitting for professional licensing (e.g., Puerto Rico Teacher Certification Program). Capstone courses in certain programs are also a vehicle for assessing program-specific student learning outcomes as well as for providing evidence of critical thinking. Rates of admission to graduate programs is yet another vehicle used by the University to monitor student performance. Finally, one of the two key emblematic initiatives of the UPR-Aguadilla involves seeking external accreditation for relevant academic programs and services (e.g., NCATE). In today's environment, the process of professional accreditation places critical emphasis on the assessment of student learning.

Commendation: UPR -Aguadilla should be commended for the development and implementations of a comprehensive program to assess student learning in key general education areas (except in basic quantitative skills) as well as in program specific expected outcomes – again, except in Mathematics. Mapping of courses to expected outcomes, adoption of measurement and metrics, collection of relevant data, report of results, and using results for improvements form a well linked and holistic approach that should serve well the students of the UPR-Aguadilla. The University's emblematic initiative to seek professional accreditation for all relevant academic programs and services (e.g., ASCB, NCATE) has been instrumental in creating a culture of assessment on this campus.

Commendation: The UPR - Aguadilla should be commended for the development of a comprehensive assessment portal, which gathers in one place plans, reports and resources related to the assessment of student learning. It is an impressive resource available to all faculty and administrators and represents a key element in the University's assessment initiatives.

Suggestion: As recommended in its self-study, UPR - Aguadilla may consider assigning resources to help the departments and faculty evolve toward the next steps in the assessment of student learning, with particular emphasis in assuring that results of the assessment process are used to improve student learning.

Suggestion: The team endorses the further development and implementation of the *General Education Acquired Knowledge Test*. It has the potential to become a key component of the University's assessment efforts.

Recommendation: Faculty from the Mathematics program should be appointed and should actively serve on the UPR - Aguadilla's assessment committee. Like other departments, the Math department should develop and implement a program to assess the learning of its students and should embed in its curriculum the assessment of appropriate general education skills in its

students. The Recommendation in Standard 12 regarding the assessment and remediation of basic quantitative skills in all UPR - Aguadilla entering students is relevant here.

The monitoring report requested in the Standard 12 recommendation should also address progress in the Math department in assessing its students on the six general education skills

