

Chapter I: Overview of the Campus and the Self-Study



INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Campus and the self-study

The University of Puerto Rico is an institution of higher education dedicated to serving the people of Puerto Rico and upholding the ideals of a democratic society (University Act, No. 1, Jan. 20, 1966, as amended). The university community is pledged to cultivate the love of learning; preserve, enrich, and disseminate the fundamental cultural values of the people of Puerto Rico within the Island's Caribbean and Latin American context; educate students to the fullest extent possible; maximize the intellectual wealth of the people of Puerto Rico; collaborate with other institutions and agencies in studying the Island's socioeconomic and political problems, and in devising solutions to those problems; and maintaining the institution's commitment to the ideals and values of the Puerto Rican society. In 1990, the Río Piedras Campus restated its mission to fit its institutional profile.

This 1995-2005 self-study is guided by our institutional mission, and focuses on the evaluation of the graduate and undergraduate academic programs, a process that has been one of the Campus main concerns in recent years. Program evaluations have been and still are aimed at ensuring that each academic unit furthers the Campus efficiency and effectiveness, fulfills the Campus and programs' missions, goals, and objectives, and graduates students fully conversant with the latest developments in their discipline.¹ This self-study also discusses fundamental aspects of the standards set by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) for

¹ The Profile of the Graduating Student (i.e., the department's or program's vision of the skills, knowledge, and academic and community attitudes that the department or program hopes to have imparted to its students by the time they graduate) is one of the documents that academic programs keep in mind in designing programs and courses and in their self-evaluations, and becomes, therefore, one of the documents essential in unit assessment and in this self-study.

reaccreditation of our Campus and reports on areas regulated by the Puerto Rican Council on Higher Education (PRCHE).

What follows provides a historical account of the Río Piedras Campus as context for this self-study, and explains the methodology used.

History of the Río Piedras Campus

The history of the Río Piedras Campus is closely intertwined with the history of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR). Founded by law in 1903, the UPR started as the Insular Normal School. From the 1910s through the 1930s, the University created new departments, colleges, and schools, that broadened its impact on Puerto Rican society.

The University Act of 1942 reorganized the institution, adding the College of Humanities, the College of Natural Sciences, and the College of Social Sciences to the large academic/administrative units already existing at Río Piedras, as well as the Department of General Studies - which later would become the College of General Studies- in charge of a new core curriculum. The University obtained greater autonomy² and outlined a mission that closely responded to the Island's interest in a center for teaching and research.

The University Act of 1966, reorganized units already in place- the University at Río Piedras, the College of Mayagüez, and the School of Medicine- and created a system with the addition of the Regional Colleges Administration. After further reorganizations, the University of Puerto Rico System consists nowadays of 11 units located through the Island. Each unit is independently structured to maximize its resources in furtherance of the system's overall mission: to provide our students with a holistic, integral education.

² Until this date, the University had been a part, like the Island's public elementary and high schools, of the Department of Public Education, and therefore not only under the governance of a non-university-type administration but also without a separate budget.

As the oldest unit of the UPR, the Campus has just celebrated its hundredth anniversary. The campus centennial celebration has prompted an assessment of its history and current status as Puerto Rico's foremost educational institution. In its first hundred years, the Campus has been home to noteworthy figures in Puerto Rican life. The campus has changed and grown along with society, always at the forefront of other educational institutions to meet social and cultural needs of Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and the world at large.

Methodology of the Self-Study for the MSCHE

Background

The Río Piedras Campus submitted its self-study design in June 2003 as part of the reaccreditation process by the MSCHE and its license renewal by the PRCHE. The previous MSCHE reaffirmation of accreditation occurred in June of 1995. In June of 2000, the Campus presented its Periodic Review Report (PRR, 2000). The MSCHE granted an unqualified reaccreditation, but required a progress report on the implementation of the new bachelor's degree model approved by the Academic Senate in May of 2001. This report was submitted in September of 2002 and was accepted by the MSCHE. For its part, the PRCHE visited the Campus in November of 1997 and issued the Institutional Renewal License in 1998. In February of 2000, the Campus submitted a Compliance Report in response to comments made in the 1997 evaluation. This report was also accepted by the PRCHE, which then required a yearly follow-up report through 2003 on specific physical facilities projects.

Nature and scope of the self-study

In 1997, the University of Puerto Rico began conversations with MSCHE and PRCHE representatives in order to synchronize their respective cycles of accreditation and licensing. The resulting agreement grouped the System's eleven units into two separate cycles, the first of

which was scheduled for academic year 2004-2005 (for five units) and the second, for 2010-2011 (for the remaining six units). The Río Piedras Campus was included in the first cycle. The PRCHE granted the University's request to extend the University's Renewal License from 2003 to 2005, so that the licensing process would coincide with the accreditation process. The model chosen for this self-study is "comprehensive, with emphasis on program evaluation," and has incorporated the fundamental elements of the standards set in the Middle States Commission handbooks *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education* and *Designs for Excellence*. (MSCHE, 2002)

Goals and objectives

The general self-study goals are, first, to gauge the harmony that exists between the Campus programs, services, and organizational functioning, on the one hand, and the institution's mission, goals, and objectives on the other. Secondly, to probe the impact of these elements on students' learning, student services, and research. The aforesaid must be seen, in turn, in relation to the Campus planning processes and strategies. This analysis should lead to recommendations aimed at enhancing undergraduate and graduate programs. The specific self-study objectives are:

- to document the Campus progress since the last accreditation visit in 1995 and take whatever follow-up action is necessary.
- to focus on the Campus strengths and make use of this information to prioritize the necessary actions; to use the academic program and service assessment outcomes, vis a vis program mission, goals and objectives, as well as the graduating student profile, to document our strengths and future challenges so that we may design an improvement and follow-up plan.

- to develop and implement an institutional assessment plan and a plan for the assessment of student learning on which to probe the effectiveness of the Campus academic and administrative strategies, and use these plans for short- and long-range planning.
- to provide the accreditation agencies with information on which to ground their decisions on reaccreditation and license renewal.

Organizational structure of committees and subcommittees

Design and coordination of the self-study was overseen by an Executive Committee named by the Chancellor, Dr. Gladys Escalona de Motta, and the Dean of Academic Affairs, Dr. Sonia Balet. The Executive Committee consists of 14 members distinguished by their expertise, experience on the Campus, and participation in self-study processes for institutional or professional accreditations. This committee also includes student representatives, alumni, and members of the community at large.

The self-study process has had a full-time coordinator and two co-coordinators³, all of whom are members of the Executive Committee. In January of 2003, Prof. Sandra Díaz of the School of Communication was named to coordinate the organization, preparation, and approval of the self-study design that was presented to the MSCHE. Once the design was approved and the implementation phase began, Dr. Rubén Estremera of the College of Social Sciences became chair of the Executive Committee, while Dr. Ina Sheila Figueroa became co-coordinator for the PRCHE. During this phase, the Steering Committee was named to implement Executive Committee decisions and to coordinate all activities relating to the self-study process. A General Management Committee was also created, made up of the members of the Steering Committee

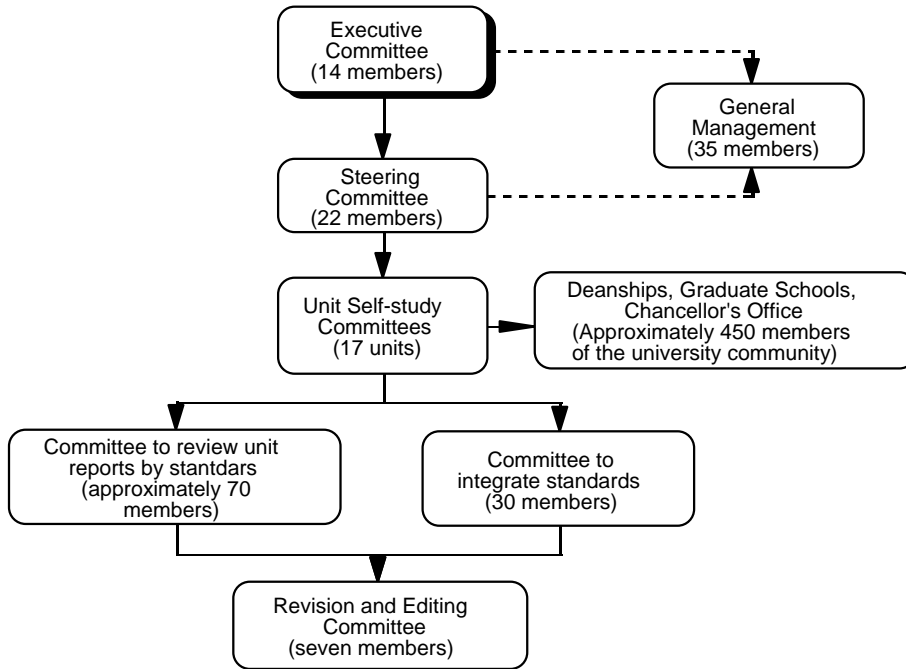
³ Dr. Ismara Ortiz and Dr. Lilliana Ramos acted as co-coordinators in 2003 and 2004 respectively.

and the Executive Committee, whose purpose was to analyze the normative process and implementation of the self-study.

The Steering Committee in charge of information research and analysis, was composed of representatives from 17 campus units (six colleges, five graduate schools, four deanships, the Office of the Chancellor, and the Library) to ensure the broadest participation. In turn, each unit appointed its own self-study committee to perform self evaluation based on the standards proposed by the MSCHE. Fourteen review committees, organized by standard, were created to review the reports submitted by the 17 units and make recommendations. Once the self-study committees completed their respective reports, 14 integration committees were set up to integrate the information provided for each standard units.

This broad participation was essential to the self-reflexive process designed and aimed at creating and upholding excellence. Approximately 600 members of the Rio Piedras Campus community and off campus individuals took an active part in the self-study process. The aforesaid structure of interrelated committees promoted a fast and efficient gathering, integration, and validation of a great deal of manifold information. From June to October of 2004, a seven-member Revision and Editing Committee was set in place, charged with distilling the information and reports into a single document to be presented to the university community for discussion and recommendations. (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Organization of the Campus Self-Study Committees



In mid-September of 2004, following a dissemination plan, a draft report was circulated throughout the university community and public hearings were held. Different sectors of the university community (faculty, administrative and management personnel, students, alumni, and members of the off-campus community), analyzed and evaluated the report, and made recommendations for improving the final self-study document. Three all-day public hearings were held and some 49 written statements and 38 oral statements were presented (Executive Committee, written statements, 2004).