

**UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO
RÍO PIEDRAS CAMPUS
SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION REPORT
MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

May 5, 2017

Submitted by:

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Interim Chancellor**



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I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The University of Puerto Rico's Río Piedras Campus (UPR-RP) is the oldest and largest of 11 campuses in the University of Puerto Rico System. A public research-oriented comprehensive doctoral institution, our campus is distinguished by diverse academic offerings that include 68 undergraduate programs, 44 master's degrees, 1 Juris Doctor and 15 doctoral programs, as well as 8 postgraduate certificates and a continuing-education program. Known affectionately as "la YUPI," the campus, which was founded in 1903 as Puerto Rico's first public university, began with a mere 173 students. Over the last 114 years, growth has been exponential, in terms of both size and the achievements that have contributed to our status as the most prestigious and respected institution of higher learning in Puerto Rico.

The UPR-RP is recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as a Doctoral Universities Higher Research Activities. Today our reputation extends beyond national and international borders, crossing languages and academic disciplines. It is bolstered by the solid formation and professional success of UPR-RP graduates as well as the accomplishments of first-rate faculty members committed to the goals of a tertiary education of excellence. Experienced non-teaching staff members provide support and services that enrich course offerings, campus activities, and the intellectual and professional formation of students.

It is the most prestigious institution of higher education in Puerto Rico thanks to its diverse student body, distinguished faculty, dedicated personnel, and long history of academic excellence. Our campus includes 16,056 students, 1,281 faculty members, and 1784, non-teaching staff for FY 2016-17. The UPR-RP has a diverse faculty with academic degrees awarded by world-class universities. Today 52% of the faculty is female and 48% male. Our faculty includes a number of professors who have recently received prestigious international awards and prizes.

We pride ourselves in the success of our students and alumni, who play an important role in a democratic society and are living examples of the mission that we as an institution foster: to contribute to the advancement and enjoyment of ethical and aesthetic values and to encourage academic freedom in the service of society.

As requested in your letter of April 20, 2017 a Supplemental Information Report is presented to demonstrate compliance with MSCHE Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education and Requirements of Affiliation and Standards for Accreditation: ***Affiliation #3*** ("The institution is operational with students actively pursuing its degree programs"); ***Affiliation#8*** ("The institution

has documented financial resources, funding base, and plans for financial development adequate to support its educational purposes and programs and to assure financial stability. The institution devotes a sufficient portion of its income to the support of its educational purposes and programs”); **Standard 3** (Institutional Resources); **Standard 4** (Leadership and Governance) and **Standard 11** (Educational Offerings).

As indicated in our April 7, 2017 update, the University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras Campus is facing difficult fiscal challenges as a result of those faced by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. As is widely known, Puerto Rico is undergoing a severe economic recession that has affected the Commonwealth’s economic stability and significantly impacted its ability to repay its multimillion-dollar public debt.

In response to Puerto Rico’s economic and fiscal crisis, the United States Congress enacted the Puerto Rico Oversight Management and Economic Stability Act or “PROMESA Act”, H.R. 5278 (2016). Among other things, the PROMESA Act creates a Financial Oversight and Management Board (Fiscal Board) empowered with final authority over Puerto Rico’s budgetary decision-making. Pursuant to its legal authority, the Fiscal Board initially proposed a \$450 million budget reduction for the University of Puerto Rico System for 2021, which was later increased to \$512 for 2026. See, **Attachment 1**, April 25, 2017, Interim President Letter to the University Community. As expected, the University community has strongly rejected these proposed cuts.

II. RESPONSE TO MSCHE CONCERNS

1. Please outline the academic calendar for current term

a. When did the term start?

Administrative and Academic activities for the spring semester at UPR Río Piedras Campus started on January 10th and January 18th, respectively. The academic calendar was approved by then Chancellor, Dr. Carlos Severino, on March 10th, 2016 following Academic Senate Certification No. 95 1996-97. This policy establishes the process to elaborate academic calendars on our Campus. Our calendar is based on 3 credit hour courses (45 contact hours) along 15 weeks/90 days. See **Attachment 2** for the Spring 2017 academic calendar.

b. What holidays and breaks were scheduled?

As with other years, the 2017 spring semester included the following regular holidays (February 20th, Presidents' Day; March 22, Abolition of Slavery; April 13-14 Holy Week, and May 29, Memorial Day).

c. When was the term scheduled to end?

Had academic and administrative activities not been interrupted, the spring semester would have finished on May 8th and final exams on May 23rd. At this point, our Interim Chancellor has granted two (2) academic and administrative recesses: March 28th and from April 27th to May 2st, and one (1) administrative recess from April 10 to April 12, 2017.

2. Have students or others voted to strike at your institution?

Yes.

3. If the vote was to strike.

a. When was the vote taken?

During their March 21th assembly, Río Piedras students announced a strike (a "paro") from March 28 until April 5, and an indefinite strike after that date when a system-wide assembly favored an indefinite strike. 1,312 Río Piedras students voted to start the strike on March 28 (while 250 voted against it). Other groups have shown support to students' complaints such as the Puerto Rican Association of University Professors (APPU), the Brotherhood of Non-teaching Employees (HEEND), the Bona Fide Union of Security Officers (UBOS), and the UPR Workers Union, among others. On their April 11, 2017 assembly, HEEND members approved a strike opposing the proposed budget cuts to the University, but so far, they have not put the strike into effect.

b. Is the strike for a specified time or indefinite in nature?

The strike is indefinite. Río Piedras students announced a limited strike until April 5, and an indefinite strike after that date when a system-wide assembly favored an indefinite strike.

Since March 28, we have engaged students and members of the community in an active process of mediation in an attempt to respond to students' demands and to reopen the Campus as soon as possible. For example, before the student strike began the Interim Chancellor held four meetings with student leaders as part of the Academic Senate's Committee of Dialogue and Mediation, two Extraordinary Academic Senate meetings, and one campus-wide Faculty Assembly. (See **Attachment 3** for Academic Senate and Faculty Assembly Resolutions). Following historically-drawn policies designed to avoid violent conflict resolutions, we have been actively pursuing a solution to this situation with the support of professional mediators. As a result, we have begun a process with professional mediators on March 31st. Nine such meetings have been held to facilitate a dialogue in peaceful manner, the last of which was held on May 3, 2017. As part of this process, the administration has presented a number of proposals designed to address many of students' concerns in order to move in the direction of reestablishing academic services in a peaceful manner.

We continue our efforts to pursue every possible path within our regulations to reestablish academic activity as soon as possible. On May 2nd, 2017, the Student Council announced a Campus-wide student assembly, to be held on May 10th, and a termination of the strike is a possible outcome of this assembly.

c. What operations of campus were or are affected?

While administrative offices located outside the main campus are running, most of the Campus' academic and administrative operations are currently suspended by striking students. The Chancellor's Office and the Deanship of Academic Affairs maintain constant communication with College Deans, Program Directors, professors and students, providing guidance and information on the current situation.

Since less than 1% of this semester's 2,760 courses are offered on-line, most courses are in a temporary pause. However, most internships, clinical practices, laboratories, and research activities are off-campus and have thus not been interrupted. Even though access to the campus is limited, a significant array of academic activities that involve both students and faculty have continued throughout the strike across all colleges and disciplines. **Attachment 4** presents examples of such activities.

Moreover, even within the very challenging times we are facing, we have celebrated salient accomplishments of our students during recent weeks, including, among others:

- Keren Rosario Ortiz, student from the College of Education, won the prestigious Harry S. Truman Scholarship, to develop an after-school program to promote reading and writing among children, including deaf students.
- Gabriela Rosa Hernández, student from the College of Social Sciences, won the prestigious David L. Boren scholarship to study Russian at the University of Daugavpils in Latvia.

- Our student-athletes had an outstanding performance during the Interuniversity Athletic League Sports Festival celebrated in the western city of Mayagüez, including winning 8 gold medals, 13 silver medals, and 13 bronze medals.

Student services and administrative activities have been partially affected. However, services under some Title IV programs, such as Talent Search and Upward Bound, are not affected because they are mostly offered off-campus. These offices continue to operate, attending their priorities and fulfilling their daily responsibilities.

Other administrative and academic services and processes have not been interrupted, such as admissions, as we work to receive incoming students in August 2017. As of today, we have admitted 2,212 students, a number comparable to last year's numbers, which is the general trend at our campus in recent years.

Finally, there is constant communication between the UPR Central Administration and our Campus, including periodic meetings of Chancellors and Deans of Academic Affairs, meetings with Deans of Students, and individual meetings with the UPR President. The campus has representation in the University Board, a system-wide administrative body. Regular meetings are held with various administrative divisions, including the Budget Office, the Registrar's Office, Directors of Admission, and Library directors. In summary, UPR Central Administration is providing us support on admissions, student aid and Registrar's services.

d. How many scheduled days of classes have been missed?

When the student strike began on March 28, 2017, we had completed 49 (54%) out of 90 days. Therefore, we must reschedule the remaining 41 days. As of the deadline for this report (May 5), the Río Piedras Campus has missed 31 days of classes.

e. What plans are in place to make up class time in order to maintain the integrity of instruction and academic credit granted for the term?

We will ensure that the learning goals and objectives are met in compliance with our academic policies regarding contact hours. These policies are designed pursuant to P.R. Law 284 of December 20, 2011, and in compliance with our state licensing institution, the Puerto Rico Education Council, and with the standards of the multiple professional and specialized accreditations held by our programs (including ACBSP, AACSB, ABET-CAC, NAAB, AND, ACEND, ACS, CSWE, NASPAA, CORE, ABA, AALS, NAEYC, NCATE/CAEP, ACEJMC, ALA, PAB, ACRL, IACS, and AAM). As previously indicated, the academic calendar shall be revised accordingly.

4. Is there any danger that the academic term will not be salvageable?

No. If, for example, classes were to resume on May 8th the semester would conclude on June 23rd and final exams would be held between June 26th and July 1st. In order for the fall 2017 semester to begin as originally scheduled (August 7), the current term should end no later than mid-July to preserve a two-week space for degree certification by the Registrar's Office. As the closure extends, the likelihood that the fall semester begins later in August increases.

5. What impact might there be on summer terms at the institution?

We had originally programed two summer sessions: A “long” summer session of 30 class days was scheduled from June 5 to July 20, and a “short” summer session of 15 class days was scheduled from June 5 to June 30. If, for instance, classes were to resume on May 8th the semester would conclude on June 23rd and final exams would be held between June 26th and July 1st. In this scenario, a short summer term in July is possible. As the strike continues, the feasibility of a short summer term is jeopardized. The viability of a short summer term in July will depend on whether the strike extends further, and for how long, and whether the Campus maintains (or pushes) its original August 7 starting date for fall 2017.

6. Has the U.S. Department of Education informed you that your institution has lost eligibility for participating in Title IV student aid programs?

Yes.

7. If your institution has been notified that it is ineligible for Title IV student aid programs

a. When was institutional eligibility lost?

On April 18, 2017 the Río Piedras Campus was notified by the Department of Education of its loss of eligibility to participate in Title IV student aid programs, due to interruption of academic activity at the institution (see April 18, 2017 Betty Coughlin Letter to Interim Chancellor Rivera Vega, **Attachment 5**). On April 20, 2017, the Campus requested the reinstatement of the institution’s school code to allow current and future students to complete their 2017-2018 FAFSAs and link them to the Campus (see April 20, 2017 Interim Chancellor Letter to Betty Coughlin, **Attachment 6**). This request was granted on April 28, when the School Code was reinstated. See Jeremy Early April 28, 2017, email to Interim Chancellor Rivera Vega, **Attachment 7**.

In its April 18 letter, the Department indicated that Title IV ineligibility also impacts participation in other HEA programs. Thus, in its April 20, 2017 letter the Campus also inquired about the specific impact on current HEA grants and applications. On May 2, 2017, the Department addressed our questions regarding such programs, ratifying the continued eligibility for funding of two HEA projects (Talent Search and Upward Bound) that provide services to high school students. See Jeremy Early May 2, 2017, email to Interim Chancellor Rivera Vega, **Attachment 8**.

Furthermore, on April 25, 2017, the Chancellor sent an additional letter with a number of questions to further understand the implications of the Department’s action (see April 25, 2017 Interim Chancellor Letter to Betty Coughlin **Attachment 9**). Most of these questions were addressed by Compliance Manager, Dr. Jeremy Early, by email on May 1st, 2017 (see Jeremy Early May 1st email to Interim Chancellor Rivera Vega, **Attachment 10**).

b. What is the status of any application for reinstatement to Title IV programs?

The Department of Education has indicated that the Campus can only submit an application for reinstatement once classes resume. The Campus is in communication with Department of Education personnel and has inquired about the expected timeline for reinstatement. While Department of Education officers are unable to offer a specific timeframe, they understand “the urgency of the situation” and have committed to work “for an efficient resolution”. See Jeremy Early May 1st email to Interim Chancellor Rivera Vega, **Attachment 10**. In the meantime, the Director of the Financial Aid Program, Anibal Alvalle, has begun to complete a draft of the application so that the Campus is in a position to apply for reinstatement immediately when classes resume.

c. How will changes in Title IV eligibility affect the institution’s financial situation going forward?

It is reasonable to assume that, if current and incoming students are unable to secure financial assistance for the 2017 Fall term, the institution’s financial situation might be affected. It is, in part, for this reason that the Campus petitioned on April 20, 2017 for the reinstatement of the school code in the FAFSA platform. See **Attachments 6 and 7**. Particularly with regards to incoming students, the concern was that they might forgo studies at UPR-RP early in their decision-making process and chose eligible private institutions, thus, affecting admissions to UPR-RP and the University’s tuition revenue. This potential impact has been mitigated by the reinstatement of the Campus’ school code on April 28.

Yet, it is difficult to foresee the specific impact of Title IV eligibility on the institution’s financial situation without knowing when classes will resume and how long the reinstatement process will take once classes resume. As to the first issue, we continue our efforts to pursue every possible path within our regulations to reestablish academic activity as soon as possible. The Student Council has announced a Campus-wide student assembly, to be held on May 10, 2017, and a termination of the strike is a possible outcome of this assembly. Furthermore, as stated in response to question 7(b), the Department seems committed to addressing our application with all deliberate speed, and has allocated a resource (Ms. Sherry Blackman) to work with UPR Campuses in this process. If classes resume and eligibility is reinstated before the start of the Fall term, we are committed to address foreseeable logistical challenges in processing financial aid applications in a compressed timeframe, but we can reasonably assume that students would be able to receive appropriate financial aid to cover their education expenses, including tuition. We are further reassured by the Department of Education’s May 1st clarification that, although eligibility reinstatement is not retroactive to previous terms, if reinstatement is reestablished in the middle of the fall semester, UPR-Rio Piedras could award Pell Grants for that term. See Jeremy Early May 1st email to Interim Chancellor Rivera Vega, **Attachment 10**.