MSCHE
MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION
ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Self-Study Evaluation
Team Report**

**Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico
Self-Study Evaluation Team Visit: *March 17, 2024-March 20,2024***

Section A: Institutional Representatives

Provide a list of the following institutional representatives at the time of the visit:

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/President
Dr. Jorge Iván Vélez Arocho

Chief Academic Officer
Dr. Leandro Colón Alicea, Provost, Vice President of Academic Affairs

Chief Financial Officer
José Frontera, Vice President for Finance Affairs and Administration

Chair of the Board of Trustees
S.E.R. Monseñor Ángel Luis Ríos Matos, Bishop of Mayagüez, President of Puerto Rico
Conference of Catholic Bishops

Section B: Institutional Context

The Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico (PCUPR) is a Hispanic co-educational, non-profit, private, and minority-serving institution of higher education that serves young and adult students of different faiths, races, nationalities, and economic levels. Founded in September 1948 under the guidance of the Bishops of Puerto Rico, it was affiliated with the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. In that same year, the Board of Postsecondary Institutions of Puerto Rico (*JIPS*, by its Spanish acronym), previously known as the Puerto Rico Council of Higher Education (*CEPR*, by its acronym in Spanish), licensed the University. In 1953, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA), now known as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), also accredited the Institution. The University has successfully maintained accreditation since that time.

In 1959, the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York incorporated the University. It was then granted an absolute charter as an institution of higher learning with programs leading to academic and professional degrees. PCUPR was canonically recognized in 1972, which gave full recognition and status to the University within the Church, and in 1991 was granted the title of Pontifical. Over the past several years, PCUPR has become

a comprehensive institution that offers degrees at associate's, bachelor's, master's, and doctorate levels. The Institution also has a division that provides technical programs and short courses that are in high demand to meet the labor needs of the island. PCUPR contributes to workforce development, fulfilling societal needs by advancing educational progress, promoting scientific knowledge, and integrating cognitive and Christian awareness into the curriculum. PCUPR university system has a main campus in Ponce and two branch campuses in Mayagüez and Arecibo.

MSCHE Accreditation was last reaffirmed on June 26, 2014. The University, having undergone many challenges common to institutions in Puerto Rico over the last six years, chose to approach the self-study as an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of its implemented strategies in achieving its institutional mission through these challenging times. Consequently, the PCUPR self-study was organized using a priority-based approach. The self-study aligned to the seven standards in the MSCHE Standards for Accreditation and fifteen Requirements of Affiliation, addressing the challenges of the 21st century in Puerto Rico. Each chapter of the study was organized to address key lines of inquiry and mapped the lines of inquiry against the specific standards required by MSCHE.

Section C: Requirements of Affiliation

In the team's judgment, the institution *appears to meet* all of the requirements of affiliation.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Provide a brief summary or bulleted points that reflect, collectively, on the institution's compliance with the requirement of affiliation. The summary should reference evidence verified during the self-study evaluation review process.

- The institution is authorized or licensed to operate as a postsecondary educational institution and to award postsecondary degrees; it provides written documentation demonstrating both.

- The institution is operational, with students actively enrolled in its degree programs.

- The institution's representatives communicate with the Commission in English, both orally and in writing.

- The institution complies with all federal and Puerto Rican government laws and regulations.

- The institution complies with applicable Commission, interregional, and inter-institutional policies. These policies can be viewed on the Commission website, **msche.org/policies**.

- The institution has a mission statement and related goals, approved by its governing board, that defines its purposes within the context of higher education.

- The institution systematically evaluates its educational and other programs and makes public how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes.

- The institution's student learning programs and opportunities are characterized by rigor, coherence, and appropriate assessment of student achievement throughout the educational offerings, regardless of certificate or degree level or delivery and instructional modality.

- Institutional planning integrates goals for academic and institutional effectiveness and improvement, student achievement of educational goals, student learning, and the results of academic and institutional assessments.

- The institution has documented financial resources, funding base, and plans for financial development, including those from any related entities (including without limitation systems, religious sponsorship, and corporate ownership) adequate to support its educational purposes and programs and to ensure financial stability. The institution demonstrates a record of responsible fiscal management, has a prepared budget for the current year, and undergoes an external financial audit on an annual basis.

- The institution fully discloses its legally constituted governance structure(s) including any related entities (including without limitation systems, religious sponsorship, and corporate ownership). The institution's governing body is responsible for the quality and integrity of the institution and for ensuring that the institution's mission is being accomplished.

- A majority of the institution's governing body's members have no employment, family, ownership, or other personal financial interest in the institution. The governing body adheres to a conflict of interest policy that assures that those interests are disclosed and that they do not interfere with the impartiality of governing body members or outweigh the greater duty to secure and ensure the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution. The institution's chief executive officer does not serve as the chair of the governing body.

- The institution and its governing body make available to the Commission accurate, fair, and complete information on all aspects of the institution and its operations. The governing bodies ensure that the institution describes itself in comparable and consistent terms to all of its accrediting and regulatory agencies, communicates any changes in accredited status, and agrees to disclose information (including levels of governing body compensation, if any) required by the Commission to carry out its accrediting responsibilities.

- The institution has a core of faculty (full-time or part-time) and/or other appropriate professionals with sufficient responsibility to the institution to assure the continuity and coherence of the institution's educational programs.

Section D: Standards for Accreditation

Standard I: Mission and Goals

The institution's mission defines its purpose within the context of higher education, the students it serves, and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals are clearly linked to its mission and specify how the institution fulfills its mission.

In the team's judgment, the institution *appears to meet* this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings:

● The Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico (PCUPR) has a clearly defined mission, appropriate to higher education, offering degrees at associate's, bachelor's master's and doctorate levels in different disciplines: education, health sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities, law, architecture, business administration and behavioral sciences. PCUPR also provides technical programs and short courses to meet the labor needs of the island.

● Based on the thinking of the Catholic Church concerning the integral education of man and in accordance with its mission, the University has as its fundamental aim the search for truth and the dissemination of knowledge. It pursues both objectives through the study of the various fields of knowledge, while promoting a genuine dialogue among the Arts, Sciences, Philosophy, and Theology, thus fulfilling what it aims at in the mission.

● The University community appears to share a common vision to build a strong reputation and to be the first choice for an integral Christian and academic formation of excellence, aimed towards a life of fulfillment and adventure. They are focused on educating professionals with a spirit of service and moral values necessary to meet the challenges of globalization and to be an instrument of social renewal.

● The University elaborated on its institutional goals, aligned with their Mission and Vision. These goals aim at fulfilling its evangelizing mission, providing a competitive, creative, innovative and pertinent academic offerings, offering a student experience that expands cultural, working, social and spiritual knowledge, attaining the highest academic and administrative excellence, providing natural, physical and technological spaces for exchange and learning and encouraging the constant search for truth through a culture of innovative research and dissemination, with a humanistic and ethical vision.

● The Mission, Vision and Goals were revised in a collaborative effort by the Institutional Planning Committee, with participation of the President, faculty, administration, staff,

students and external consultants, and integrated in a seven-year Strategic Plan (2013-2020), that was extended to 2022.

● The Strategic Plan has eight strategic priorities areas: Integration of faith and life, grounded on the Social Doctrine of Church, Attention to the students' needs, Curriculum actualization, Recruitment and retention of qualified human resources, Technological infrastructure and resources for teaching and learning, Physical infrastructure, Administration and finance and Research culture. The Mission, Goals and Strategic Plan were approved by the Board of Trustees.

● PCUPR has a main campus in Ponce and two branch campuses in Mayagüez and Arecibo. All campuses share the same mission, vision and strategic goals, aligned to the institutional Mission and Goals. The University consists of colleges, schools, departments and institutes. Five colleges and two professional schools enroll a diverse profile of undergraduate and graduate students: Arts and Humanities, Behavioral Sciences and Community Affairs, Business Administration, Education, Science, Law, and Architecture, each one with their respective academic and professional degree programs.

● The University also offers combined programs leading to two degrees, both awarded by PCUPR, and binary programs leading to an upper-level degree, in agreement with other institutions. The Postsecondary Non-University Technical Certificate Institute is responsible for establishing programs for certified technicians in areas with high market demands.

● Each school/college has evaluated their Mission and Strategic Goals according to the University Mission and Goals, with the participation of the President, rectors, deans, academic directors, and the Institutional Assessment office, and with final approval by the President and the Board of Trustees. The goals are reported annually to comply with periodically assessing the Strategic Plan.

● Regulated programs and some non-regulated programs are accredited by their respective professional accrediting agencies: National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences, Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing, Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program, Council on Social Work Education, National Architectural Accrediting Board. The Law School is accredited by the American Bar Association. The Law School has responded to recommendations from the most recent accreditation visit and is awaiting response from the ABA.

● Business Administration College programs, Education in Nutrition and Dietetics, and Sciences in Speech-Language Therapy and in Speech Language Pathology are in candidacy status for accreditation.

● PCUPR´s mission and goals guide the decisions concerning resource allocation, curriculum development, student learning experience, recruitment and admission, research development.

- Aligned with the goal of recruiting and retaining qualified faculty and expanding academic and professional educational offerings, the university has an established and continuous process for faculty annual evaluation, which includes the participation of students, colleagues and administrators.

- The allocation of resources follows a process of internal audit that ensures that each program is adequately funded and that their initiatives are consistent with the mission and goals of the institution and are submitted for definitive approval of the Board of Trustees.

- PCUPR communicates the Mission and Vision and Goals by several initiatives such as posting them in various buildings of the campuses, communicating them during lectures, including them in every syllabus of all programs and in the university's web page and student manual.

- The Mission, Goals and strategic planning are conducted in a very inclusive process, and they are annually reviewed.

Collegial Advice

- The team suggests regularly communicating this alignment of mission and budget through various channels (e.g., institution's website, internal communications, reports) to ensure that all stakeholders understand how unit-level objectives contribute to the mission.

Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices:

- PCUPR is to be commended for its commitment to instilling in its students the values of social justice, respect for the dignity of human beings, social responsibility, service to the community and volunteering, which is consistent with the mission and vision of the University, grounded on the precepts and values of the Catholic Church.

Recommendations
None

Requirements
None

Standard II: Ethics and Integrity
Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions. In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully.

In the team's judgment, the institution *appears to meet* this standard.
This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings:
- It is clear from the self-study statements, documents and interviews that PCUPR places high value on ethics and integrity, however, written documentation of follow up on policies is often not available. A search of the self-study finds 35 mentions of 'ethics', 50 of 'ethical' and 58 mentions of 'integrity' throughout the document. The search for truth is listed as one of six institutional goals. The self-study states that ethics and the development of ethical thinking are pervasive throughout the curriculum especially in the development of syllabi that promote ethics and integrity.

- PCUPR has a stated commitment to academic freedom that appears in multiple places in the self-study from discussions of freedom of expression as a defense of human dignity to statements of academic freedom in the student and faculty handbooks. The Administrative Staff Manual and conversations on campus documents the policy of respect and to "celebrate and promote the life and dignity of the person".

- We found good evidence that PCUPR takes faculty, staff and student grievances seriously and has many policies in place, however, the documentation of some of the processes and procedures controls to assure that these grievances are addressed, promptly, appropriately, or equitably are unclear. Most of these were clarified in conversations but a regular dissemination of these processes and procedures for addressing the execution of these policies to the campus is suggested. Prosecution of other policies was not addressed, e.g. Alcohol and tobacco policies in the student handbook have no mention of what the procedures are for prosecuting violators, nor any process for review of violations or appeals, nor mention of penalties. However, in conversations students appear to understand and be comfortable with these processes.

- PCUPR has conflict of interest policies for employees which is addressed in the administrative staff manual of 1999, however, no regular conflict of interest affirmations are required. Moreover, although a conflict of interest policy from 2019 is documented for the board of trustees, no annual affirmation is currently in place. However, conversations with the board illustrated their active interest and good social habits for avoiding conflict of interest.

- Hiring practices for faculty and staff appear to be fair and equitable, as documented in conversations and hiring rubrics. Documentation of process and criteria for promotion and tenure of faculty is a model of clarity. However, documentation is not available for essential criteria for continuing employment and promotion for non-faculty employees. Although the Employee Handbook asserts that staff are regularly evaluated, conversations indicate that this is not done systematically.

- The self-study, supporting materials, and the institutional website contain no indications that honesty and truthfulness are not practiced in all communications by the PCUPR. The website is checked by VP of planning and development, if infrequently. Statements in the University mission statement, the self-study, and on the website reflect that honesty and truths are respected and valued at PCUPR.

- PCUPR does a good job publishing information that students need to understand financial aid and options for payment, as well as other data enabling the consumer to make informed choices about appropriateness of the institution for them.

- Compliance with Federal, State and Commission reporting policies and regulations is documented on the PCUPR campus *Student Right to Know* on their website, and in discussions, as are various reports to the Middle States Commission.

- There is no substantial description of a procedure or policy for periodic assessment of Ethics and Integrity on the PCUPR campus. However, some policies are periodically assessed, and the dates of their revisions published. e.g. the student handbook had been revised in 2020: Code of ethics of experimentation on human subjects, 2006, 2011.

Collegial Advice

- The team suggests that the University review and update policies across the institution to ensure accuracy and reflect current operations.

- The institution provides grievances policies but more detailed documentation of some of the processes, procedures and controls to assure that grievances are addressed, promptly, appropriately, or equitably could be better documented. It would be helpful if many more ethical policies were available in English.

- Consider reinforcing communication of the university's key data, such as retention, graduation rates, etc with transparency on the public website. Also consider communicating the university's IRB process more publicly. Given PCUPR's emphasis on research it is important to understand how the research process is framed and conducted reflecting the university's Catholic mission.

Team Recommendation:
- The institution should provide further evidence of the periodic assessment of the effectiveness of all institutional policies and procedures and the manner in which they are implemented.

Requirement(s)
None

Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

● The "Financial help" tab under student life goes to a laudable program to help students struggling financially separate from the financial aid process.

Standard III: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience

An institution provides students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence of all program, certificate, and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences, regardless of modality, program pace/schedule, and setting are consistent with higher education expectations.

In the team's judgment, the institution *appears to meet* this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- PCPUR offers appropriate undergraduate, graduate and certificate as well as degree completion programs that are well-articulated in the catalog and appropriate to their fields.

- PCPUR demonstrates several examples of assessment of the curriculum (further explained in Standard V) and in their assessment of multiple types of students' experiences including programs related to spiritual development as articulated by their mission.

- PCPUR continues to offer a range of professional development opportunities for faculty, especially related to teaching effectiveness, both in the online environment through the transition to remote learning during the COVID emergency and following that crisis. The University assesses faculty's teaching effectiveness every semester and their scholarly inquiry and effectiveness through an annual review process (Self-study 2,9). The University also tracks the number of required workshops and institutional, disciplinary and technological training that faculty attend each year.

- PCPUR faculty are well-qualified for the positions they hold and the work they do as demonstrated particularly by their doctoral credentials. An increased focus on research and academic quality is demonstrated by the number of faculty with doctoral degrees. In 2013, only 27% of faculty held doctoral degrees. In 2022, 51% of the faculty held doctoral degrees.

- PCPUR faculty are reviewed regularly and equitably based on written, disseminated, clear, and fair criteria, expectations, policies, and procedures; (Self-study 33; faculty sit to review student evaluations with their chair each semester to plan for continuous improvement).

- The graduate and undergraduate catalogs clearly and accurately describe how students are able to follow degree and program requirements and expected time to completion, these catalogs are published in Spanish and English.

- PCPUR offers robust tutoring and accessibility resources to support students' academic progress, these systems are assessed and evaluated against the retention benchmarks established in the strategic plan.

- PCPUR offers a general education program that is integrated into academic disciplines and offers a sufficient scope to draw students into new areas of intellectual experience, expanding their cultural and global awareness and cultural sensitivity, and preparing them to make well-reasoned judgments outside as well as within their academic field; (Undergraduate catalog 127). This general education curriculum is a traditional distribution model curriculum and is designed so that students acquire and demonstrate essential skills including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy. Consistent with mission, the general education program also includes the study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives; and (Undergraduate catalog, 127)

- PCPUR offers opportunities for the development of research, scholarship, and independent thinking, provided by faculty and/or other professionals with credentials appropriate to graduate-level curricula graduate and professional education, this is articulated in the graduate catalog. Additionally, more undergraduate and graduate research opportunities are being offered across all three campuses each year and students can present their research at an annual symposium. Students have also been given the opportunity to present their research with faculty in the U.S. and Latin America.

- PCPUR regularly assesses the effectiveness of programs providing student learning opportunities. (Self-study 32)

- One example of excellent direct assessment of student learning occurs in the CEIBA program and other programs may consider learning from their colleagues in this Center.

Collegial Advice
- The team suggests that the University review the general education curriculum and outcomes as a whole and separately assess how students are progressing towards the goals of the programs outside of their individual degrees.

Recommendations
none

Requirements
none

Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices
- Under extremely difficult circumstances, from hurricanes, a global pandemic and a devastating earthquake, the University has continued to reevaluate and adjust its strategic plan to continue to support a robust student experience aligned to its historic mission.

Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience

Across all educational experiences, settings, levels, and instructional modalities, the institution recruits and admits students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals are congruent with its mission and educational offerings. The institution commits to student retention, persistence, completion, and success through a coherent and effective support system sustained by qualified professionals, which enhances the quality of the learning environment, contributes to the educational experience, and fosters student success.

In the team's judgment, the institution *appears to meet* this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- The Vice-President of Students Affairs is responsible for planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and evaluating all student services.

- The Dean of Students at the Arecibo and the Mayagüez campuses coordinate student services at their appropriate campus. Services are provided at each campus, in person or remotely. Information about these services is available on the university's webpage.

- The Student Affairs Division offers a wide range of services such as academic advising, counseling, spiritual guidance, career guidance, student activities, and athletic opportunities to enhance and foster student success.

- The Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico (PCUPR) has developed and implemented policies and procedures to admit, retain, and facilitate the success of students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals provide a reasonable expectation for success and are consistent with the institutional mission. The university's recruitment efforts have been extended island wide and internationally. These policies and procedures are well articulated in the university's catalog, the student handbook, and on their website. It was further supported by the various meetings held with staff and students during the visit.

- The Vice President of Planning is responsible for domestic and international recruitment. Information about new and unique academic programs, and the admissions requirements are described in the university catalog, and posted on the university web-age.

- Under the direction of the Vice President of Planning and Development in 2017 a retention and recruitment plan was developed and implemented with short- and long-term goals. The focus of the plan was to identify students at risk, address academic support, enhance communication among faculty and students, increase a sense of belonging, and

expand local and international outreach. The data from this plan was used to develop strategies to support student retention, and student success. An action plan (2016-2022) was also developed focusing on initiatives and actions to increase student retention. The retention rate for the 2021 cohort was 79%. Periodic interviews are held with groups of students to identify their concerns, needs and issues.

● Students experiencing academic challenges are contacted by counselors to address their academic progress. The Tutoring Center offers free in person or virtual tutoring on demand or upon a referral from a faculty or staff.

● Students may access the university's web page to learn about information regarding tuition costs, funding sources, financial aid, payment method, and refunds on the consumer information section of the university webpage. Federal, state, and institutional aid are available to students who qualify. Additionally, the university offers academic and athletic scholarships.

● Students needing remedial courses are placed in courses based on the scores achieved on the Proof of Academic Aptitude Test (PAA). The PAA is equivalent to the SAT in the mainland. Placement in Spanish, English, and Math are based on the scores on the PAA. Students taking remedial courses are supported by the tutoring Center. These tutorial services are free for any student that requests them voluntarily or is recommended by his/her professor.

● First year and transfer students must enroll in an orientation course during their first and second semester. Based on the results of a needs assessment survey administered during the first year, the First Year Office develops an intervention and a follow-up plan for each student. Each college within the university has a designated counselor to address student's issues in their respective academic programs. A graph indicating the number of interventions provided by the professional counselors from 2017-2023 is included in the self-study report, page 49.

● Reasonable accommodation is provided by the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. The Technological Assistance Room provides computers and assistive technology to support and provide accommodations. According to the self-study report about 1,500 students receive services annually. Results of a survey revealed that 100% of the students were satisfied with the services provided by the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities.

● PCUPR provides programs and services that contribute to the development of the academic, social, and cultural aspects of its students. Academic advising, counseling, career development, job placement, student activities, and sports opportunities are offered to enhance student development and success. Emergency interventions are provided to students in the residence halls.   Liturgical services, advice, and guidance in moral and spiritual life are offered through the chaplaincy. Each college is assigned a professional counselor to assist students in their respective areas. As a result of these efforts PCPR's retention rate was 79% for the 2021 cohort.

- The Internship and Employment Office provides student and alumni career information about job search services, workshops on job fairs, interviewing skills, and opportunities for internships in Puerto Rico as well as in the mainland.

- Policies and procedures are in place to evaluate and award transfer credits. Courses with a grade of C or higher equivalent to the curriculum requirements are considered transferable. Credits are also granted to students who take the Advanced Level Examinations and score a three or higher. The university evaluates a veteran's academic military transcript using the guidelines provided by the American Council on Education. Transfer policies are listed in the university catalog, student handbooks, and can be found on the university webpage.

- PCUPR follows the guidelines of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as it pertains to student records and their privacy. The Office of the Registrar is responsible for maintaining and safeguarding privacy of student's records, record retention and security, and release of student records. Records are permanently stored in a secure area in the Registrar's Office. Medical records are kept confidential and secure following the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA)

- PCUPR offers extracurricular activities to promote social integration and support student learning. Student Activities are organized and executed by the Cultural Extension Office, academic student organizations, the Office of the Vice- President for Student Affairs and the Dean of Students at the Arecibo and Mayaguez campuses. Cultural enrichment programs are also offered through the music, theater, and dance departments. A Student Council is elected by the students from each campus. Additionally, a student is chosen as a student representative on the Board of Trustees. Student senators are also elected within each College to represent the student voices at departmental committees. The requirements, responsibilities and the election process for the election of the student Council are published in the student handbook and are available at the Office of the Vice-President for Student Affairs.

- In collaboration with the Physical Education Department, the Recreation and Sports Division is responsible for coordinating sport activities. PCUPR provides opportunities for student athletes to participate and compete at the intramural or intercollegiate levels. The Sport Complex has three indoor basketball courts, indoor volleyball court, a gymnasium, and an Olympic swimming pool. It also has classrooms and meeting spaces. Non-athletic students are also provided with the opportunity to play sports for pleasure and recreation. The sports complex is considered to be the most modern in Puerto Rico.

- The Vice-Presidency for Development and Planning is tasked with developing surveys and questionnaires for evaluating student services. The student's level of satisfaction with services, physical facilities, activities, information and communication systems, academic services, and academic support programs have been assessed at the three campuses. The data was vital for identifying student needs, developing retention strategies, and implementing effective interventions plans to improve these areas.

Collegial Advice

- The team agrees with university 's interest in enhancing and promoting a culture of assessment. Since the student affairs division relies on satisfaction surveys to access their services, the team encourages the university to reach out to professional organizations and institutions of higher education conducting assessment on student services in order to broaden assessment efforts and identify additional models and tools.

Team Recommendations
None

Requirements
None

Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress or Exemplary/Innovative Practices
- PCUPR is to be commended for their commitment and dedication to community services and service learning. Students are placed in community agencies and complete at least 30 hours of community service. Across all degrees, students may participate in courses integrating faith and life, and promoting and encouraging students to commit to community services and social development. The Interdisciplinary Clinic of Community Services promotes mental health outpatients services to the community while providing clinical training for graduate students.

Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment

Assessment of student learning and achievement demonstrates that the institution's students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their programs of study, degree level, the institution's mission, and appropriate expectations for institutions of higher education.

In the team's judgment, the institution *appears to meet* this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- The Institutional Assessment Office, affiliated with the Vice Presidency of University Development, Research, and Planning, oversees the assessment processes at PCUPR. This office also collaborates with the office of Academic Affairs and works with the colleges in providing support and guidance in the assessment of academic programs. In addition, this office is supporting the administrative units in the evaluation of the effectiveness of their services.

- There is an institutional assessment committee that is composed of assessment liaisons for each campus (Ponce, Mayaguez and Arecibo). There is an assessment committee at each college that oversees and coordinates the evaluation of programs and courses following a determined review schedule.

- The assessment process at PCUPR has two components: a five-year program assessment cycle and assessment of student learning at the course level. Courses are assessed at least once in a five-year cycle and assessment processes are similar across instructional modalities. The assessment process includes the participation of curriculum and assessment committees within departments, faculty, and students. As part of the five-year program assessment cycle, faculty align the institutional learning outcomes with program and professional standards.

- Educational goals are aligned with the mission and guide the direction of the Colleges and Schools. Academic offerings are aligned to the mission as they follow a humanistic approach and are focused on a Christian-centered education. The academic catalogs contain the goals established for the Colleges and Schools. Currently, 34 programs are accredited by seven programmatic accrediting agencies and 25 programs are in candidacy status with three accrediting agencies.

- Institutional learning outcomes and program learning outcomes are aligned with the institutional strategic plan. Each program schedules the assessment of general and concentration courses to determine the alignment to the institutional, program and course learning outcomes. Faculty complete learning outcomes assessment forms where assessment data is collected.

- Deans are responsible for implementing the assessment processes at the colleges and schools and appoint liaisons to the departmental assessment committee. Annually, the departmental assessment committee develops a schedule with the courses and learning outcomes to be assessed and informs faculty every semester of the course/courses they must evaluate. The Institutional Assessment Office supports the evaluation process and disseminates the reports resulting from these evaluations with the Deans and the faculty assembly, and other relevant stakeholders.

- Per the institutional assessment process, each program conducts an evaluation once every three to five years to ensure they are innovative and competitive. Results of the evaluation are shared by the Institutional Assessment Office with faculty and relevant stakeholders, including the Board of Trustees and the University Board. PCUPR recognizes the current challenges in the communication of assessment results, in following up on the results of the assessment process, and the implementation of continuous improvement plans.

- PCPUR demonstrates that it uses assessment results for the improvement of educational effectiveness, including using the results to assist students in improving their learning; improving pedagogy and curriculum; reviewing academic programs and support services; planning and conducting a range of professional development activities; informing appropriate constituents about the institution and its programs.

- PCUPR uses assessment results to guide planning and budget allocation for academic programs and student services. Among the areas considered in the budgeting process are institutional accreditation, professional accreditations, introduction of new programs, reactivation of programs, assessing programs for moratorium, and launching of new programs.

- The academic departments prepare the schedules and calendars for program review based on priorities established by the academic programs. These calendars are shared with the Institutional Assessment Office which provides support in the review process. This office shares data with the colleges as they prepare their program review reports.

- Self-evaluation reports are submitted by program directors and reviewed by the Evaluation Committee of Academic Programs. These reports include an action plan, which is shared with the Institutional Assessment Office for monitoring and follow up.

- Data and information collected from the assessment processes are shared with academic leaders and the college and school Deans for course and program improvement. Examples of program review reports and curricular improvement forms were available for review and show the use of internal data for program/course evaluation.

- Deans and administrative leaders use assessment to improve key indicators of student success including retention, persistence and graduation rates.

- During the 2016-2017 academic year, the institutional assessment committee conducted a review of the university's assessment processes and procedures and identified some

inefficiencies and redundancies. As a result, the committee reduced the number of documents required in the assessment reports.

- The Institutional Assessment Office staff noted that PCPUR does not separately assess the general education program. Courses in the general education program are assessed by the Colleges and programs separately but not as a whole and not linked to general education outcomes.

- Among the documents available for team review were the Guide for Curricular Revision and Development of Courses and New Academic Programs, the Manual for Assessment Procedures of PUCPR Academic Programs, the Guide for Self-Evaluation of PCUPR Programs and the Report Template for Self-Evaluation for Programs.

- The Institutional Assessment Office has been evaluating the effectiveness of the university assessment processes informally but this work has not been documented.

Collegial Advice

- There are some examples of academic assessments performed throughout the institution, with that said, the team suggests that the University use the results of the Self-Study process to expand and develop a culture of assessment that is data-driven, measurable, and linked to decision-making.

- The team suggests that the University provide additional support for the Institutional Assessment Office.

Recommendations:

- The institution should provide further evidence of the development and implementation of organized and systematic assessments that evaluate the extent of student achievement in **general education**.

Requirements
none

Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement

The institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges.

In the team's judgment, the institution *appears to meet* this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- The PCUPR has established a process to systematically link new program funding with the budgetary process. During interviews with senior leadership, it was revealed that the results of financial assessments are discussed quarterly with the Board of Directors. Additionally, the PCUPR has showcased examples of financial budgetary reports, demonstrating its commitment to continuous improvement in alignment with its core purpose. This commitment serves as evidence that its activities are purposefully aligned with its mission and core values.

- The PCUPR fiscal year 2023-2024 budget details the diverse funding sources (e.g., tuition, government funding, grants, donations) which demonstrates financial stability and resilience.

- The annual independent audit confirms financial viability. There were no management issues identified in the report of June 2022. Also during the visit the draft June 2023 annual independent audit report was provided and there were no deficiencies noted by the external auditors.

- The PCUPR master planning documents showcased plans for maintenance, upgrades, and expansion of physical facilities to meet future educational needs and goals. During the various meetings, the Head of Capital Infrastructure provided a spreadsheet that outlined the future plans of construction projects and the project priorities.

- During the meeting with the Finance team, additional supporting documentation was presented as evidence of multi-year budgets that align financial planning with the institution's strategic objectives. This documentation showed the allocation of resources to support mission-critical programs and initiatives which were presented to the Board of Trustees for approval.

- During the meeting with the financial team, documentation was provided as evidence demonstrating the alignment of financial resource allocation with the institution's mission and strategic goals. This ensures that priority areas receive adequate funding.

- During discussions with management, documentation was presented showing plans for maintaining, upgrading, and expanding the information technology infrastructure. These plans support educational programs and institutional operations effectively.

- Performance evaluations are being conducted, however a systematic approach of using performance indicators to assist staff and administration with ongoing feedback appears to be insufficient. University-wide training is being offered, however the ongoing impact on employee behaviors and attitudes in areas such as cyber security and sexual harassment prevention is not clear.

- The university's policies and procedures regarding the recruitment and retention of qualified staff does not point to an overall strategy for competitive compensation and employee benefits.

- During the on-site meetings, the University demonstrated a commitment to enhancing institutional and unit effectiveness through the use of data-driven decision-making.

Collegial Advice

- The team suggests that information regarding cybersecurity protocols, policies, and procedures be reviewed. The team also suggests that the university's social media protocol and privacy compliance standards be reviewed.

- The team suggests that the University document and strengthen professional development opportunities for staff. The professional development offerings should include cyber security, sexual harassment prevention training, and information regarding the performance evaluation process.

- The team suggests that the University develop strategies for recruiting and retaining qualified staff and administration.

Team Recommendation:

- The Institution should provide further evidence of the development and implementation of organized and systematic assessment of non-academic units.

Requirement(s):

None

Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

- The University has no outstanding debt bonds and appears to be financially stable at the time of the assessment.

Standard VII: Governance, Leadership, and Administration

The institution is governed and administered in a manner that allows it to realize its stated mission and goals in a way that effectively benefits the institution, its students, and the other constituents it serves. Even when supported by or affiliated with governmental, corporate, religious, educational systems, or other unaccredited organizations, the institution has education as its primary purpose, and it operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy.

In the team's judgment, the institution *appears to meet* this standard.

This judgment is based on a review of the self-study report, evidence, and interviews with campus constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the self-study evaluation team visit.

Summary of Findings

- PCPUR has a clearly articulated and transparent governance structure that outlines roles, responsibilities, and accountability for decision-making by each constituency as seen in the organizational charts and described in the Self Report.

- PCPUR has a legally constituted governing body that has sufficient independence and expertise and is responsible and accountable for the academic quality, planning and fiscal well-being of the institution as seen in the Strategic Plan and Manual de Claustro.

- The governing body, the Board of Trustees, provides oversight at the policy level and is informed in all its operations by principles of good practice in board governance as in the organizational charts and described in the Self Report, and given on the PCUR website.

- Written conflict of interest policies are implemented as seen in the Administrative Staff Manual and the governing body by-laws.

- The governing board appoints a Chief Executive Officer but according to the Board of Trustees during an in-person interview, they do not conduct an annual review of the President.

- A Chief Executive Officer who has appropriate credentials, professional experience, authority and autonomy required to fulfill the responsibilities of the position is described in the Statutes and a biography on the web.

- PCPUR appears to employ qualified administrators, sufficient in number, to enable the Chief Executive Officer to discharge his duties effectively as seen in the Self Report Organizational Charts and the Employee Manual.

- PCPUR has a clearly documented administrative structure with members who possess the skills, time, assistance, technology and expertise to perform their duties as seen in the Self Report organizational charts and the descriptions of the Board of Trustees, Academic Senate, and University Board in the Employee Manual.

- PCPUR's administration regularly engages with faculty and students to advance the institution's goals and objectives through the Academic Senate.

- There is a monthly review of the institutional plan and unit evaluations conducted by the President and Vice Presidents for each of their respective areas.

Collegial Advice

- The team suggests that an avoidance of conflict of interest form be submitted annually by each member of the Board of the Trustees.

Recommendations

- The institution should provide further evidence of a governing board that appoints and **regularly evaluates** the Chief Executive Officer.

- The institution should provide further evidence of periodic assessment of the effectiveness of governance, leadership and administration.

Section E: Applicable Federal Regulatory Requirements

In the team's judgment, the institution *appears to meet* all applicable federal regulatory requirements.

This judgment is based on a review of the Institutional Federal Compliance Report, evidence, and interviews with institutional constituencies to clarify information and verify compliance during the team visit.

Provide a brief summary or bulleted points that reflect, collectively, on the institution's compliance with applicable federal regulatory requirements. The summary should reference evidence verified during the review process.

If the team cannot affirm compliance with all of the applicable federal regulatory requirements, identify each specific area and provide a brief narrative describing the evidence needed to demonstrate compliance.

Section F: Review of Student Achievement and Verification of Institutional Data

Section F does not need to be read during the Oral Exit Report.

I.   Student Achievement Goals

In the team's judgment, the institution's approach to realizing its student achievement goals *appears* to be effective, consonant with higher education expectations, and consistent with the institution's mission.

This judgment is based on a review of the institution's student achievement information provided in the self-study report, evidence, interviews with institutional constituencies, and the student achievement URL available on its website.

In addition, in the team's judgment, the institution's student achievement information data that it discloses to the public *appear* to be reasonably valid and accurate in light of other data and information reviewed by the team.

Provide a brief evaluation of the processes and procedures the institution uses to realize student achievement goals and whether those goals are consistent with higher education expectations and with the institution's mission.

II.   Verification of Institutional Data

In the team's opinion, the institution's processes and procedures that it uses to verify institutional data and the data provided in the self-study report *appear* to be reasonably valid and effective.

Provide a brief evaluation of the processes and procedures the institution uses to verify institutional data and whether or not these processes and procedures are reasonably valid and effective.

Section G: Review of Third-Party Comments

Section G does not need to be read during the Oral Exit Report.

If third-party comments were received in accordance with Commission policy and procedures, describe the process the team used to review them.

Not applicable.
If the third-party comments result in a team recommendation or requirement, the team will include those requirements in the proposal for action in the Team Chair's Confidential Brief.

NOTE: Section G should <u>not</u> include a summary of the third-party comments.

Section H: List of Additional Evidence

Section H does not need to be read during the Oral Exit Report.

List all additional information requested by peer evaluators before or during the visit that was used to verify compliance with Commission standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, and applicable federal regulatory requirements.

Section I: Self-Study Report and Process Comments

Section I to be read during the Oral Exit Report if completed.

OPTIONAL *Please use this section to provide any additional comments you have about the overall self-study evaluation and self-study evaluation team visit. In addition, this is the team's opportunity to commend the institution, if applicable, on the quality of the self-study report or the quality of the self-study evaluation process.*