

Certificación Núm. 60

Año Académico 2018-2019

UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO
RECINTO DE RÍO PIEDRAS

Yo, Claribel Cabán Sosa, Secretaria del Senado Académico del Recinto de Río Piedras, Universidad de Puerto Rico, **CERTIFICO QUE:**

El Senado Académico, en la reunión ordinaria celebrada el 21 de febrero de 2019, acordó por unanimidad:

- Aprobar carta dirigida a los miembros del Congreso de los Estados Unidos sobre la situación actual de la Universidad de Puerto Rico como consecuencia de la decisión de "Show Cause" por la *Middle States Commission on Higher Education* ante el reto fiscal que atraviesa.
- La carta forma parte de esta Certificación.

Senado Académico
Secretaría

Y para que así conste, expido la presente Certificación bajo el sello de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras, a veintidós días del mes de febrero del año dos mil diecinueve.


Dra. Claribel Cabán Sosa
Secretaria del Senado

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Certifico correcto:


Prof. Leticia M. Fernández Morales
Presidenta Temporera

Anejo



PO Box 21322
San Juan PR, 00931-1322
Tel. 787-763-4970
Fax 787-763-3999

February 27, 2019

Members of the US Congress
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the United States Congress:

We, the members of the Academic Senate of the University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras, respectfully address you to express our concern and alarm regarding the future of public higher education in Puerto Rico. The 11 institutional units of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) have been placed under “Show Cause” status by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Under this status, each unit is required to thoroughly document its financial standing in terms of resources, funding base, and up-to-date plans in furtherance of our financial stability, educational purpose, programs, and commitments to the people of Puerto Rico. This action could result in the withdrawal of accreditation for all or some campuses of the UPR system, with the immediate consequence of becoming ineligible for federal financial aid funding for students, research and academic support and, eventually, the closure of the only public university in Puerto Rico.

The aforementioned events are a direct result of the precipitous drop in funding for the UPR system in the past few years, which consequently triggered the implementation of fiscal policies and measures that impact its institutional integrity and financial stability. The most drastic measures have been laid out in the latest Fiscal Plan of the Government of Puerto Rico, and certified by the Fiscal Oversight and Management Board (FOMB), an instrumentality established by the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), by the United States Congress in 2016. We respectfully request the U.S. Congress to re-examine the FOMB policies that threaten the future of higher education for the coming generations of the U.S. citizens who live and study in Puerto Rico.

The FOMB policies would impede the UPR from complying with its mission as a Land-Grant Institution as determined by Congress. As the leader of higher education in Puerto Rico throughout its 115-year history, the UPR has provided abundant and comprehensive educational opportunities. It has continued to offer the required technical, professional, and managerial competencies for sustainable agriculture, and manufacturing industries, as well as for an effective public health system. Our mission has become even more crucial considering that Puerto Rico’s economy has been basically stagnant in the past ten years. The two hurricanes that swept Puerto Rico in 2017 aggravated our plight, and the UPR was called upon to provide the trained human power and research expertise for our still-ongoing hurricane-disaster recovery.

In its Fiscal Plan for the University of Puerto Rico, the FOMB acknowledges that our institution plays an essential role as Puerto Rico’s engine of economic development. However, the FOMB has used the powers bestowed upon it by U.S. Congress to impose such a drastic and disproportionate reduction in the UPR fiscal resources that will thwart the institution to secure the full spectrum of educational programs, services, and

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San Juan PR, 00931-1322
Tel. 787-763-4970
Fax 787-763-3999

Patrono con Igualdad de Oportunidades en el Empleo M/M/V/I
Web: <http://senado.uprrp.edu> • E-mail: senado.rrp@upr.edu

research initiatives Puerto Rico needs for our disaster recovery. The UPR system's budget has been steadily reduced from \$1.46 billion in 2006 to \$885 million in 2018. Just this past year (2017-2018), in compliance with the FOMB's directions, the UPR's budget was cut by 19.6 percent, in contrast to the average 6.5 percent reduction for the other government agencies. The dire state of Puerto Rico's economy is a heavy burden that certainly obstructs the UPR's efforts to secure financial resources from other sources.

Honorable members of the U.S. Congress, we urge you to help us advocate for the protection of the University of Puerto Rico.

- This unique public education institution has served our island well since it opened more than a century ago. It has been the driving force behind our economic and community development by creating the professional standards and staff to provide affordable high-quality education based on our first-rate faculty, qualified personnel, and a long history of proactive academic excellence.
- Our institution, which serves an annual average of 50,000 students from all walks of life, guarantees access to higher education to first-generation students, to those who are financially disadvantaged, as well as to those who come from vulnerable communities. In fact, the proportion of cost by family income level is considered the highest in the U.S.A. (64.6%), when compared with an average interval, equal to 30 to 40 percent in the jurisdiction, regardless of the educational costs criteria.
- No other institution or educational system in Puerto Rico holds as many specialized accreditations, and could possibly provide accessible higher education for students in many academic and professional disciplines, indispensable for placing our graduates in the best positions of the job market. Moreover, no other institution in Puerto Rico or in the U.S. provides an equitable treatment to students in the event of institutional closure, as recently required by the MSCHE's "teach-out plan."
- In terms of academic offerings, no other higher-education institution in Puerto Rico holds an array of more than 450 programs, both graduate and undergraduate, 90 of which are unique in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. The UPR has the highest number of doctoral programs on the island.
- The UPR system also provides access to more than 70 collaborative academic and scientific agreements between our institution, and other recognized institutions in United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Europe.
- As an institution that promotes future projects on behalf of our island, the UPR system conducts more than 80% of all post-secondary research in Puerto Rico.

- The public recognition of our alumni in academia as well as scientific, professional and other ventures nationwide, demonstrate that the UPR system not only offers adequate education comparable to recognized worldwide institutions, but also excels the standard level of performance.
- The UPR system is a prominent Hispanic-serving institution with a solid international regard. Because of its recognized educational standards, it is a well-documented fact that UPR graduates are recruited by important federal agencies, and top private companies. Also, several UPR campuses continuously receive grants from diverse government agencies (NSF, NEH, NIH, etc...) and other programs, and renowned private foundations (Fulbright, Mellon Foundation, etc.) for leading research initiatives.

We, as an institution, have been committed from the start to excellence in higher education. We hope that the above-mentioned facts help us persuade you, as a member of the United States Congress to work with us to avert a negative decision that would deprive the UPR of its accreditation, and ability to function under the FOMB's policies; especially considering that the only aspect taken into account by the MSCHE for its decision is the institution's financial situation, that it is currently under the FOMB's control. To take away our accreditation will have catastrophic effects for the economic, social and educational future of Puerto Rico. Therefore, drastically cutting the UPR's budget cannot be treated as a routine enactment of established procedures, nor can it be seen as a mere financial transaction.

Puerto Rico needs the best public higher education, which is exactly the education the UPR has been providing for 115 years, the oldest, largest, most prominent, and diverse academic institution in our island. We call upon Congress, and each of its members, to take prompt action to ensure the allocation of the necessary funding for the UPR to continue to operate as the only Public Institution of Higher Education.

Sincerely,

Academic Senators
University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras

Annex

