

The University of Puerto Rico: Empowering the Puerto Rican Community Through Education

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As COMITÉ NOVIEMBRE embarks on the 22nd Anniversary celebration of Puerto Rican Heritage Month, the University of Puerto Rico recognizes the many contributions of our community to the state of New York and the country. Within the Latino community in the United States- the largest minority since 2003- Puerto Ricans have actively sought to create awareness of the rich culture, language and heritage we share. Our culture strongly values postsecondary education as an important stepping-stone for social and economic advancement. In 2006, 20.7 % of the people 25 years old or over on the Island held a bachelor's degree, a rate higher than three states (US Census, Bureau News, April 2, 2008).



The challenge is to continue promoting higher education for Puerto Ricans. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2006) the economic gap between people with a high school diploma and a bachelor's degree is widening. While in 1980 - a college graduate earned 19% more than a high school graduate; by 2004 the percentage grew to 67% and indicators point to a further increase in the gap.

Due to the mobility of Puerto Ricans between the Island and mainland, the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) and private higher education institutions on the Island have made possible that generations of stateside Puerto Ricans obtain post secondary degrees. Graduates from our institution are found in every state, contributing to the professional and cultural enrichment of their communities and society at large.

While the average persistence rate (retention of students from the first to second year of college) in US universities is 75.8 %, the average for the UPR is 81%. Every year the UPR awards an average of 10,000 degrees in 600 undergraduate and graduate programs.

To illustrate the quality of programs just consider one example. In 2006 the University of Puerto Rico was the top institution awarding Engineering Degrees to Hispanics among 336 reporting institutions (ASEE engineering by the numbers, 2006). The caliber of our graduates is such that they are actively recruited by organizations such as NASA, as well as many other engineering and pharmaceutical companies across the United States.



There is worldwide interest in graduates in STEM fields –science, technology, engineering and mathematics. However, a longitudinal study by ACE reported in The Chronicle of Higher Education (2006) found that although Latino students have the same probability of entering the STEM fields of study, they face difficulties in completing their degree. One of the factors is the need to work longer hours to pay their way. Thus the cost of higher education is affecting our student population.

Although the median family income in Puerto Rico is about one third of the United States, Puerto Rico spends about the same amount per student in its public university as the mainland public universities. The cost of tuition at the UPR is very low- currently \$49.00 per credit for the entering class of 2009. The affordability of tuition and the quality of academic programs makes studying at the UPR an attractive option for the college bound Puerto Rican youth residing in the States.



In the UPR's Planning Agenda for the decade - *Diez para la Década* -our institution underscores its commitment to recruit youth from our communities on the mainland to obtain a bachelor's degree through a specially designed program known as the *UPR's Bilingual Initiative for Latinos Students*. Under this program students pay tuition as residents of Puerto Rico, the application fee is waived and in most cases, first year courses are offered in English. Other benefits include a specially designed for Spanish as a second language course as well as cultural and social activities to reacquaint them with their culture. Additional assistance is provided to facilitate their academic success.

In celebrating Puerto Rican Heritage Month we promote empowerment through education. Come to the University of Puerto Rico- ***la Universidad de todos los puertorriqueños.***

For additional information on the Bilingual Initiative contact us at: dirivera@upr.edu