

“This is the English translation by Dr. Ada Haiman of an article published in *Universidad*, a publication for University of Puerto Rico Alumni which is widely distributed in Puerto Rico and the United States”

BILINGUAL INITIATIVE FOR HISPANIC STUDENTS¹

“Since my son began studying at the University of Puerto Rico, he has bloomed at the University of Puerto Rico,” says the father of a young man studying at the UPR-Cayey Campus under the Bilingual Initiative for Hispanic students living in the United States.

Alarming Higher Education Statistics for Puerto Ricans in the U.S.

While in Puerto Rico 24.4% of the population over 24 years of age have a college degree, for Puerto Ricans living in the United States it is a mere 13%. This percentage is way below other groups residing in the U.S.: Asians, 59%; whites, 38.8%; and African Americans, 18.5%.

According to Héctor López, Northeastern Regional Director of the National Hispanic Institute, between the years 2000-2003, 2.3 million Hispanics attended high school and of those that completed high school, only 10% go on to post-secondary educational institutions. Of those that continued on to post-secondary school, 40% went to 2 year colleges and only 7% graduated. The other 60% went on to obtain a Bachelor’s degree at a 4 year college. The National Hispanic Institute found that of those that went on to selective 4 year institutions, only 20% graduated. Those admitted to non-selective universities had a 75% attrition rate.

Recent studies show that economics is an important factor affecting Latino students entering college. The amount of hours they invest in working negatively impacts their academic success and lengthens the time it takes to graduate.

Despite the fact that Latinos constitute the biggest minority in the U.S., the educational gap dividing Latinos from other groups continues to grow. Nevertheless, in the world of work, university degrees become increasingly required for high paying positions. In 2004 an employee with a Bachelor’s degree made an average annual salary of \$51, 1554 while a high school graduate only made \$28,645.

Education is an important factor for economic progress and, moreover, it is a critical element in the development of Latino leadership in Hispanic communities across the U.S.

The University of Puerto Rico’s Response: The Bilingual Initiative for Latino Students

The University of Puerto Rico has closely followed this unfortunate educational tendency and has recognized its important role in the education of U.S. Latino students. Four million Puerto Ricans and millions of other Latino youth need access to quality

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higher education at a cost they can manage. The Bilingual Initiative is the University of Puerto Rico’s response to address this growing educational need. This initiative is part of the planned institutional strategic agenda called “Ten Goals for the Decade” (“Diez para la década”).

The Cayey, Humacao and Río Piedras campuses of the University of Puerto Rico, in collaboration with diverse Puerto Rican community organizations such as ASPIRA, has designed the Bilingual Initiative to offer a high quality college experience to Puerto Ricans and other Latin Americans living in the United States.

The program offers its participants academic services and support services to help them successfully integrate into university life. Economically, students pay resident tuition fees. This gives talented students who find themselves unable to go to college or unable to complete their studies because of lack of funds access to higher education.

To insure academic success and adaptation to Puerto Rico, the program offers students their core general education courses in English during their freshman year as well as immersion into the Puerto Rican language and culture. By their second year these students are mainstreamed into courses taught in Spanish. Housing, tutoring and mentoring services are provided when needed.

The Bilingual Initiative is a unique experience marked by cultural enrichment, identification with cultural roots, important formative experiences, and the development of proficient Spanish language skills. This initiative also promotes diversity in the UPR student population; this enriches the experience of the local student body as they learn about the experience of Latinos in the United States.

The Cayey campus pioneered this initiative, the Humacao campus followed in 2005 and the Río Piedras campus joined in 2006. Presently, over thirty students from Maryland, Texas, Georgia, Florida, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Illinois, among other states, are taking advantage of this opportunity.

These students have integrated into the student population and they feel welcomed by their peers and the university staff. They have eagerly met the challenge of Spanish language learning and have thereby increased their linguistic competence in the language.

The University of Puerto Rico serves all Puerto Ricans independently of where they reside. Through this initiative, cooperation with the Puerto Rican and other Hispanic communities in the U.S. is strengthened. Those interested in learning more about the University of Puerto Rico’s Bilingual Initiative can write to **bilingual@upr.edu**.