



November 15, 2021

Dr. Idna Corbett  
Vice President Institutional Field Relations  
Middle State Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)

Dear Dr. Corbett:

Thank you for contacting us with respect to our current situation regarding student stoppages and strike on the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus (UPRRP). I will address the four questions you listed in the November 1st email to Dr. Sonia Balet, MSCHE Liaison, and provide a detailed summary of the impact of student events on classes, services, and administrative operations.

We have directed all efforts to guarantee the continuation of academic offerings and services via distance education and implementation of TeleWork (work from external locations). The learning experience during the critical months of 2020 when the Campus had total closure due to Covid 19 has facilitated prompt implementation of alternative modes of operation in this new context.

An important feature of the present situation is that only 8% of this first semester 2021-2022 academic offer was programmed in- person or on site at UPRRP. Thus, adjustments for the continuation of classes in remote mode were mostly needed for a relatively small group of sections. Attention was also directed to guarantee and support offerings already ongoing in distance education modality or with intensive use of technology, which constitute 92% of the first semester offer.

**Issues of Concern:**

1. What is the current status of your institution as it relates to student strikes?

On November 3, UPRRP's students convened in a General Student Assembly voted in favor of an indefinite Student Strike, that took effect on that same day. In an Assembly scheduled for November 15, students will evaluate the results of the strike. Presently physical access to the Campus is blocked for classes and most services.

Dialogue continues directly with me and through various other means. The Dialogue Committee and the Security Coordinating Board have held three meetings with students' representatives (on November 10, 11 and 14), and are focusing their efforts to better understand the current situation and generate solutions promptly in consensus with student leadership.

2. If students at your institution engaged in strikes, what was the duration of these activities? Are they ongoing?

As presented in Question 1 above, on November 3 students convened in a General Assembly approved a student strike. Evaluation of results will be continued in a General Student Assembly to be held November 15. As of now physical access to campus, in general, is blocked.

The Office of the Chancellor promptly responded to maintain the Campus and the external community informed through multiple Circular Letters. TeleWork was reactivated, and instructions were issued to that effect. These Circular Letters, as listed below, were posted in the campus web page, <https://www.uprrp.edu/category/circulares/>, and were sent by email to the UPRRP community.

The following chronology lists dates of stoppages, and communications with the Campus community with instructions and needed information. They give you a detailed description of what has gone on and continues to this date:

### **CHRONOLOGY OF STOPPAGE AND STRIKE EVENTS AT UPR- RP 2021**

#### OCTOBER

- October 20 - students convened a Plenary Assembly at the College of Education from 5:00 p.m. onwards. That same night students decreed the first 24-hour stoppage. CIRCULAR LETTER- Río Piedras UPR Campus will remain in operation, fulfilling its duty as manager and disseminator of knowledge <https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/10/recinto-se-mantendra-en-funcionamiento-cumpliendo-con-su-deber-como-gestor-y-difusor-del-conocimiento/>
- October 21 - Students convened another plenary session the following day, during which they extended the stoppage another 24 hours. CIRCULAR LETTER- Continuity of operations tomorrow - <https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/10/continuidad-del-funcionamiento-del-recinto-durante-este-viernes/>
- October 22 - A meeting was held with representatives of the General Student Council, in the afternoon, to discuss student complaints.
- October 24 - Students lifted the student strike after the decreed hours expired.

CIRCULAR LETTER- Student strike is lifted with the administration's commitment to address their complaints - <https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/10/se-levanta-paro-estudiantil-con-el-compromiso-de-la-administracion-de-atender-sus-reclamos/>

- October 25 - The Chancellor met with deans and directors of certain units and of the Library System to instruct them on increasing the number of face-to-face class sections to more than 50% and greater opening of space and library hours (the great majority of students, teachers and non-teachers are vaccinated), for next semester.

CIRCULAR LETTER-Planning of academic offer for next semester-

<https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/10/planificacion-de-oferta-academica-para-el-proximo-semestre/>

- October 26 – The Chancellor had a telephone conversation with the president of UPRRP’S Student Council, Fabiana Marini, to inform them about the meetings held with the deans, librarians and the instructions given.

- October 27 - The General Student Council called a new student plenary session in the College of Education in the afternoon. In this plenary session, they decreed a new 48-hour stoppage.

CIRCULAR LETTER-Continuity of academic and administrative work-

<https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/10/continuidad-de-labores-academicas-y-administrativas/>

- October 28 – An academic recess is notified by means of a Circular Letter for the General Student Assembly on Wednesday, November 3.

CIRCULAR LETTER-Academic recess for the general student assembly –

<https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/10/receso-academico-por-asamblea-general-de-estudiantes-7/>

October 29 - Instructions were given to Campus staff for continuity of administrative work by remote means. TeleWork. Office of Human Resources.

- October 30 and 31 - Students did not block the gates, but there was no announcement that the walkout had ended. Several presidents of College Student Councils announced that they continued to be on stoppage until the day of the General Student Assembly, which was scheduled for Wednesday, November 3.

- October 31- CIRCULAR LETTER- Continuity of academic and administrative work-

<https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/10/continuidad-de-labores-academicas-y-administrativas-2/>

## NOVEMBER

- November 1 and 2 - At dawn on November 1, students again blocked the gates in continuity with the announced strike. Through a circular letter, the Chancellor reported

that the academic work assisted by technology and operations through teleworking continued.

- November 1 - The second face-to-face meeting was held with students of the Student Council and two representatives of the Student Movement. That same afternoon the Chancellor called a meeting with the deans to inform them of the dialogue with the students.
- November 1 - Communication is received from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) to learn about the Status of the Institution.  
CIRCULAR LETTER- Continuity of academic and administrative work in distance mode-  
<https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/11/continuidad-de-labores-academicas-y-administrativas-en-modalidad-a-distancia/>
- November 3 - The General Student Assembly was held - after having met the quorum in the UPRRP Theater. They decreed an indefinite strike with the support of more than 1,800 students in favor.
- November 4- The Chancellor reiterated continuity of work on campus. The Security Coordinating Board meets.  
CIRCULAR LETTER- Continuity of academic and administrative work on Campus due to a strike declared by students in the assembly -  
[https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/11/continuidad-de-labores-academicas-y-administrativas-en-el- Precinct-before-strike-decreed-by-students-in-the-assembly /](https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/11/continuidad-de-labores-academicas-y-administrativas-en-el-Precinct-before-strike-decreed-by-students-in-the-assembly/)
- November 6 - Academic Recess CIRCULAR LETTER was sent to the university community on Monday, November 8. Message to professors- Request for information on continuity of courses remotely. CIRCULAR LETTER-Academic recess Monday, November 8 --<https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/11/receso-academico-lunes-8-de-noviembre-de-2021/>
- November 8 - Academic recess is decreed to hold a second General Assembly.  
CIRCULAR LETTER-Academic recess for the General Student Assembly on November 15, 2021. /<https://www.uprrp.edu/2021/11/receso-academico-por-asamblea-general-de-estudiantes-15-de-noviembre-de-2021/>

We continue an open dialogue and have requested that both the newly created Dialogue Committee and the Security Coordinating Board merge to better understand the current situation and speed up the necessary steps to reach consensus with student leadership. An Academic Senate resolution in Extraordinary Meeting on November 10 addressed this issue.

3. How have these strikes/protests impacted the institution's operations?}

TeleWork has allowed the continuation of practically all administrative activities and services. On October 28 Interim President Mayra Olavarría reactivated TeleWork and referred to Certification Num. 51 of the Governing Board, 2020-2021 to be applied to all offices in the UPR System. Certification Num. 51, available through <https://www.vcertifica.upr.edu/>, puts forth norms for implementing TeleWork in cases of emergency or when physical access is obstructed significantly to hinder operations and services.

Also, the October 29 Circular Letter of the Campus Office of Human Resources, follows Certification Num 51, and imparts instructions for TeleWork. Supervisors were assigned accountability for effective implementation. Thus, this work modality has been implemented throughout the Campus's offices with positive results. Specific effects and the experience in main offices are detailed in Question 4 below.

Regarding physical plant projects the campus closure has affected their continuation and a new schedule of operations is being outlined.

4. How have these strikes/protests impacted the institution's academic offerings and student support services?

#### Academic Offerings and Services

On site and hybrid courses were reconverted to remote when the stoppages began, in accordance with Certification 33 (2020-2021) of the Governing Board. This certification specifies that on site courses can offer up to 25% of their time by alternative methods assisted by technology. <https://www.vcertifica.upr.edu/>. Certification Num 33 also establishes professors' responsibility in the development of alternative modes of course offering in case of emergency or if classes are interrupted.

Moreover, Series Num. R-2122-29 emitted in November 3 by Interim UPR President, Dr. Mayra Olavarría, encompasses the above norms and reiterates authorization of the use of distance education modality whenever operations and academic offerings are affected by interruptions. It must be noted that during this semester, UPRRP has approximately 21% hybrid courses, 20% distance courses, 0.4% online courses, 50% assisted by technology courses and only 8% on site courses as part of its academic offering. And 2.58% (or 60 course-sections) are on site courses given during the Thursday / Friday combination.

In summary, all academic offerings have been transformed or continued in the distance education modality originally scheduled. The November 8 report of the Registrar's Office makes known that 96.2% of all mid- term grades, 2147 of a total of 2230, were submitted

by professors on time. Once more, the resiliency of our faculty and their commitment to the continuation of academic offerings at crucial moments is a Campus strength.

#### Evidence of Continuation of Courses

In addition, on November 3, the Chancellor implemented communication R2122-29 from Interim President Mayra Olavarría requesting that each UPR Campus present evidence of the continuation of all classes in remote modality. To that end the Deanship of Academic Affairs prepared a form to be filled by every professor, full or part time, except for those in UPRRP's elementary and high school that are not affected by the strike. The form is accessed at <https://form.jotform.com/213075360453854>. The survey is ongoing for the next 2 days, yet up to present almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of teaching faculty has informed that they continue with their classes using some form of distance education modality in implementation of instructions in Official Letters.

#### Academic Calendar

The academic calendar has been amended to cover for days granted for Student Assemblies, November 3 and 15; for an academic recess granted on November 8 by UPR President as requested by students; and, for the Campus General Faculty Assembly on November 12.

The days added to the Calendar include:

November 11, a holiday, to cover for November 8

December 10 to cover for November 12 Campus Faculty Meeting

November 19, a holiday, to cover for the Student General Assembly on November 15.

Since classes continue remotely no other changes have been made to the Academic Calendar. Classes end on December 10 and final exams will be offered from the 14th to the 21st of December.

#### Services

##### Registrar's Office

All divisions at the Office of the Registrar have continued its operations in accordance with the various circular letters. Officials have been attending online meetings as requested. For example: On November 1, the Registrar participated on a virtual meeting with the accrediting agency ABET as part of the Bachelors' in Information Systems and in Computer Science reaccreditation processes. In fact, all Accreditation meetings with ABET continued as scheduled and the Exit Interview took place successfully via Teams.

All processes concerning academic offerings and pre-registration were changed for November 12 through 18 and November 22 through December 9 respectively. Furthermore, the direct student services provided by the Office of the Registrar such as: transcript processes, graduation processes, certifications, partial and total withdrawals, and verification requests to name a few examples have been provided electronically via email by its corresponding official. Services that require human intervention are being scheduled to be completed at Plaza Universitaria, presently not affected by the closure, taking the proper safety and security measures. For example: On November 3, 212 official transcripts requiring manual handling were processed and put in route for delivery by the postal service.

### Libraries

Contact has been maintained remotely during regular hours, via phone calls, emails, and institutional social media. The Library System WEB page provides access to multiple virtual services at <https://www.upr.edu/biblioteca-rrp/>, including electronic collections available 24/7. However, books, thesis, and other physical collections are not available. Thus, requests for printed material located in specific buildings and specialized libraries are presently not being met. Research activities that must have access to books are being delayed.

- In general terms, a significant part of the cataloguing, acquisitions, and automation work is being done remotely.
- Virtual reference service continues in two modalities. One synchronic through a chat in a person-to-person basis. The chat is available Monday to Friday from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm. The asynchronous service is available 24/7 at <https://uprrp.libanswers.com/>
- Students and professors can request an interlibrary loan 24/7 in electronic form available at [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdeF-cQ19r6Yxi\\_cpaJcHMAqmMpjDnN7vSdT9xgDTdNk3Kaxw/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdeF-cQ19r6Yxi_cpaJcHMAqmMpjDnN7vSdT9xgDTdNk3Kaxw/viewform), though delivery of printed material like books is being delayed.
- Workshops, and classes are being offered online in compliance with the Information Literacy Standards of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL).
- Students with special needs are receiving services. Requests are received by email and personnel respond according to needs. The visually impaired send documents in digital form and personnel converts it to an adequate format for student use.
- Most work, except microfilming, is being carried out.

### Research

In general, research has continued, though some limitations occur brought about by an environment of stoppages and strike, and no in person administrative support.

Reasonable flexibility has prevailed regarding campus researchers and graduate students who need physical access to their labs and work spaces.

Many library services to support research are ongoing as listed above. As mentioned, campus access to printed library materials is hindered affecting particular areas such as the Puertorrican Collection in the main library building. Also, interlibrary book loans are being postponed.

However, natural science research is distributed among many facilities outside the campus, such as Gurabo -Research on bees, Molecular Science Building which houses a considerable amount of research projects, Cancer Comprehensive Center and El Verde in el Yunque. Those locations have not been affected by the strike and activity continues.

### Admissions Office

We could say that the biggest impact of the student strike and stoppages has been to return to TeleWork, and to strengthen online or technology-based services that were designed and established successfully during last year's pandemic. TeleWork permits full time operations at regular office hours. During 2020 personnel were provided with equipment and materials to work effectively from external locations.

Since March 2020, practically all admission processes have been worked on remotely. Students can access admission application forms through the WEB at <https://admisiones.upr.edu/> and <https://www.uprrp.edu/english/admissions/>. A tutorial was prepared for Admissions 2022 at (<https://estudiantes.uprrp.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/TUTORIAL-SOL.-ADMISION-UPRRP-2022-I.pdf>), and steps to complete the process can be found at: (<https://www.uprrp.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Pasos-a-seguir-para-completar-el-proceso-de-admisio%CC%81n-2021.pdf>)

During 2020, via remote methods, 99 schools were visited, and 4,186 students contacted. This experience allowed the development of mechanisms to expand services that are now part of the Office's regular operating procedures. Group and individual orientations about academic offerings using the Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Zoom platforms is available. Help is provided to complete and submit the application for admission. Notification of the admission decision can be accessed through the admissions portal and by email. In addition, reconsideration requests and the admission responses are processed electronically (email).

Orientations and visits to schools continue through the different platforms. School visits, "College Days" have been programmed in various modalities through December 2021. The onsite visits are being supported by Campus transportation that is made available from other localities of the institution.



The approach in general is one of flexibility and service oriented. Student questions are addressed through email, telephone, or virtual meetings. Chats have been created for personnel communication. The Covid experience with online and remote methods is being continued and implemented in the Admissions Office, as of now, very successfully.

#### Student Deanship

Staff can be contacted through the Student Deanship WEB page for orientation and access to different services. <https://estudiantes.uprrp.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Directorio-Decanos-Auxiliares-Asuntos-Estudiantiles-extensiones-SUBGRADUADOS.pdf>. Requests are channeled through these contacts via email. Specific services also continue. For example, TeleMedicine through email [atcitas.medicosrp@upr.edu](mailto:atcitas.medicosrp@upr.edu) is available. Students' emails are answered and addressed as usual. In general, services that were transformed to online during 2020 continue as such.

Various student activities have been rescheduled or moved to new locations, for example sports events were relocated. But several activities regarding sports and visits by high school students and other guests have been cancelled. Student inquiries for which they must visit offices, on very special occasions, cannot be addressed and are being postponed or rechanneled. However, via emails or regular mail most needs are met.

It must also be said that UPRRP continues to serve as a COVID 19 vaccination center using facilities just outside the campus.

We continue to work intensely to reach a solution to our present situation. We understand students' claims but have reiterated emphatically that closing the Rio Piedras Campus is not a solution. It is our position that an open Campus, vibrant and in continuous access to both the internal and external communities is the best way to evidence the value of UPRRP to Puerto Rico and maintain our very respected accreditations.

Please, let me know of any additional information you need. I greatly appreciate the opportunity you have provided me to inform you directly.

Cordially,



Dr. Luis A. Ferrao  
Chancellor