

**Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and Students
of
Bayamon Central University
by
A Team Representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
Prepared after study of the institution's self-study report
And a visit to the campus on March 17 to 20, 2013**

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I. Institutional Overview

Bayamon Central University (BCU) is a private institution classified as Master's Smaller. It was founded in 1961 by the Dominican Order and first accredited by Middle States Commission on Higher Education in 1971. Fall enrollment consisted of 1929 students.

II. Nature and Conduct of the Visit

On June 1, 2008 Bayamon Central University submitted to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education its Periodic Review Report. On November 20, 2008 the Commission accepted the Periodic Review Report, reaffirmed accreditation and requested a progress report due by October 1, 2010 documenting 1) steps taken to strengthen the institution's finances; and 2) steps taken to improve student enrollment and retention. On November 18, 2010 the Middle States Commission accepted the progress report and scheduled the next evaluation visit for 2013.

III. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Requirements of Affiliation

Based on a review of the self-study, interviews, the certification statement supplied by the institution and other pertinent institutional documents, the Team affirms that the institution continues to meet the requirements of affiliation in *Characteristics of Excellence*.

IV. Compliance with Federal Requirements

Based on review of the self-study, certification by the institution, other pertinent documentation, and interviews, the Team affirms that the institution's Title IV cohort default rate is within federal limits. The Team relied on institutional certification and written documentation to make this determination. The Team also verified that the institution meets relevant requirements under the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008.

V. Summary of Institutional Strengths

The Visiting Team identified during the review and visit the following strengths:

Students' great satisfaction in their institution is palpable. A number of students spoke of themselves as privileged to be able to have the opportunity to study at BCU. What draws many to Bayamon Central is students' certainty that the faculty and administrators deeply care about them as individuals and push them to excel.

Faculty and administrators embrace the mission, are student centered, and are highly committed to BCU. There is a humble and generous attitude toward learning coupled with a strong sense of sincerity and openness, and eagerness to improve.

Student Support Services are appropriate and aligned with the needs of the students.

There is great student participation, reflected in the number of student organizations. The Orientation and Counseling Center is providing services and support to students with positive results.

BCU has made impressive progress in a short time in the area of assessment. There is a centralized office and specialist to support, coordinate and integrate assessment of student learning. There are developed plans, processes and structures to guide assessment activities and workshops and training to build skills. Assessment activity is extensive, varied and mission sensitive. This is a truly commendable achievement.

Successful grant procurements have resulted in new and enhanced academic programs that should be attractive to prospective students. Grant funding has also allowed for the renovation of academic spaces and the acquisition of computers, technology and other program-specific equipment. The faculty and students seem to embrace the use of technology and will benefit from these new resources.

The president has brought a new vision to the university and is sharing information to create a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the institution.

VI. Compliance with Accreditation Standards Under Review

Standard 1: Mission and Standard 6: Integrity

The institution meets these standards.

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the Team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

It is readily apparent that the mission is widely known, accepted and embraced by the entire university community. As noted in the self-study, institutional policies are in accordance with the University's Mission and Vision. For example, the Policy for Course or Program in Distance Education includes the Mission Statement and Vision Statement in the body of the policy.

The university's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan opens with the institution's History and Mission, Vision and Values statements. The strategic initiatives and goals of the Strategic Plan support the Mission and Vision statements.

The university's Institutional Assessment Plan & Guide clearly relate how its mission and values guide institutional assessment.

Institutional integrity is demonstrated by the University's Equal Opportunity Policy, Document Control Policy and its support of academic freedom and freedom of expression as noted in the Faculty Handbook and the Student Handbook.

The missions, visions and/or objectives of the four undergraduate colleges and the graduate college all reflect the University's Mission, Vision and Values. Additionally, all five colleges have documented examples of community service that support the university's stated values.

The Pastoral Coordinators documented how they instill the Values of the University into all aspects of campus life and for all constituents. These efforts also directly and indirectly support the university's efforts in student recruitment and retention.

Students, faculty and administrators all seem to have a common purpose and dedication based on the Mission and Values.

Suggestions:

- The mission, vision and values statement although mentioned in the Faculty Handbook and the Student Handbook should be included in both manuals.
- As noted in the self-study recommendations, the Faculty Handbook should be revised to more clearly define academic freedom.
- Students need to be clearly informed about the likelihood of their completing their degrees within standard time frames based on course availability and other factors.

Standard 2: Planning, Resources, Allocation, Institutional Renewal and Institutional Resources

The institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support development and change to improve and maintain institutional quality.

The institution meets this standard.

Bayamon Central University has been successful in involving the university community in the strategic planning process. Faculty, students, administrators, members of the Board of Trustees and the Council of Founders were part of a workshop that discussed the institutions' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in addition to outlining the main strategy and key initiatives to be developed over the next five years.

A new strategic plan was the product of this process (2013-2018) and has detailed information regarding goals, objectives, indicators and measures. Clear priorities are given to each goal, individuals assigned to complete the task and a timeline for completion. This strategic plan is mission driven.

The plan is too new to assess. However the previous strategic plan has served the institution during that time of economic uncertainty, an ongoing recession and a high unemployment rate impacted the university and all of higher education development in Puerto Rico.

The university has prepared the budget based on the goals and objectives outlined in the strategic plan. Each operational unit has a budget and is responsible for distributing resources according to the strategic plan. The units are in the process of including the resources required in the budget projections.

The strategic plan has been effective in providing the continuity, review, direction and guidance in the development of policies, standards and practices. The plan addresses the important issues involving curriculum revision, development of academic offerings, improvement in infrastructure and technological advancement. It has served and will continue to serve as a guide in the development of institutional grants that have provided for continued development.

The Physical Improvement Plan addresses both deferred maintenance issues as well as several areas in need of renovation. A sum of \$100,000 has been allocated for this purpose with additional funds expected in future years.

The university should be commended for the inclusive process in the development of the strategic plan the result of which is a highly motivated and dedicated faculty, staff, administration and Board of Trustees.

Suggestions:

- The strategic plan should be updated as new information and recent developments affect the current plan and correspondingly update the financial projections, which now include 2013-2016.
- It would be helpful to separate the strategic plan initiatives as a component of the financial projections so that an assessment can be made of their effectiveness in achieving the desired outcomes. Special attention should be given to the enrollment projections to determine the impact of the new marketing efforts.

Recommendation:

- A critical review of the strategic plan in an effort to prioritize the numerous goals and objectives should be done in order to refine the efforts over the next two years to stabilize and grow the enrollments in the undergraduate programs.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The human, financial, technical, physical facilities and other resources necessary to achieve institutions' mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient use of resources is analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

The institution meets this requirement.

The institution has experienced a decline in enrollment at the undergraduate level for the past ten years, which required them to put into effect various savings measures to balance the budget. A combination of cost savings measures including eliminating salary increases for the past ten years, a moratorium on promotions, elimination of multiple year contracts and tenure track positions, position freezes and other routine savings, including refinancing a loan, allowed them to balance the budget.

In light of the current economic situation resulting in fewer dollars for scholarships from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; an increasing unemployment rate currently at above 13.8%; several secondary schools closing meaning fewer high school graduates; an attrition rate hovering around 46% for the remaining schools; and more residents leaving the Island will mean a smaller pool of college bound students. Inflation, the rise in energy costs, a reduction in job opportunities and increased competition also contribute to the already difficult situation.

BCU is dependent on tuition income and Pell grants. Since 95% of the students receive Pell Grants and other Federal Title IV funds, of concern are the cutbacks in College Work Study funds, SEOG funds and the potential cut in Pell Grants for the fall of 2014.

The decline in enrollment of 300 students in the fall of 2012 was in part the result of approximately 200 students who used all of the Pell Grant eligibility and were not able to continue. Another drop in enrollment was experienced in the spring semester as well and will be determined within the next few weeks. The budget will be balanced with additional cost savings to make up for the reduction in revenue before year-end.

Continuing education income increased from \$52,723 in FY 2008 to \$247,850 in FY 2012.

Grant funds are a major source of funds for program development, facility renewal and program enhancement. The institution has been successful in acquiring over \$11,200,000 over the past five years.

The university received a clean audit for the past three years that were included in the documents.

Recommendation:

- Enrollment is the key issue and the team recommends that the University focus its energy on activities that will reverse the 10-year history of declining enrollments in the undergraduate programs.

- The Team recommends a semester by semester review of the enrollments to evaluate the success of the efforts to reverse the serious decline in enrollments beginning with the fall of 2013.

Standards 4: Leadership, Governance and Standard 5: Administration

The Team finds that the university meets standard 4 and standard 5.

BCU has different components to their governance system as defined by its By-Laws. The governing body who oversees the university consists of the Council of Founders and the Board of Trustees. The Council of Founders has five members from the Order of Preachers who are “de jure” members of the Board of Trustees. The main responsibility of this body is to safeguard the University’s Catholic and Dominican mission. Responsibilities of the Council include ratifying the appointment or dismissal of the President; ratifying the rules and regulations approved by the Board of Trustees, and others. The Council may dismiss a member of the Board of Trustees by majority vote. They also have the authority to fire the president.

The Council confers power to the Board of Trustees to govern the institution. Currently the Board has 11 members but up to 17 can serve as trustees. Trustees appoint the president, approve the annual budget, and also approve the salary scale for the university. Members of the Board of Trustees are guided by the university’s conflict of interest policy.

Prior to the Team’s visit the Chair of the Board of Trustees stepped down for personal reasons. Fray Mario Rodriguez O.P. from the Council of Founders is currently serving as acting chair of the Trustees. At present the Board has a number of new members. The Trustees acknowledge the need to continue developing the leadership of board members through seminars and by recruitment of new members with background in specific areas. They also acknowledge the need to do fundraising.

The president is the Chief Executive Officer of the university and presides over the University Senate and the Administrative Council. The Academic Council is an advisory body to the president. In addition to the deans, the council membership also includes a faculty member from each College and a student selected by each College. This Council reviews curricular revisions and new programs before sending them to the Senate for final approval.

The president provides the Trustees with regular updates and reports that represent evidence of her performance. Through these regular updates, Trustees monitor accomplishments and compliance with established goals.

The University Senate is responsible for approving admission and graduation requirements, creation of academic units, faculty appointments and promotion and curricular changes. Regarding faculty participation in the governance system the Team confirms their participation in both the Academic Council and the Senate.

Students participate in the governance process through the Student Council.

In the last few months prior to the visit there were a number leadership transitions including the dean of Academic Affairs who stepped down, the dean of financial affairs who left for another position and the director of Human Resources who also left the institution. Both dean positions were filled with permanent replacements a few weeks before the visit.

The Team examined the reason for leadership turnover and whether this turnover had created instability in the institution.

In the last five years the university has undergone two organizational restructurings to its administrative areas. The most recent restructuring approved in 2011 consists of the following five colleges: 1) Liberal Arts and Humanities, 2) Science and Health Professions, 3) Education and Behavioral Professions, 4) Business Development and Technology, and 5) Graduate Studies. The growth of graduate program offerings demanded they be housed under one college to ensure faculty participation in the curricular process and support.

As a result of the new structure, faculty were redistributed among the newly defined colleges thus strengthening their participation in their college decisions. An evening coordinator was appointed to ensure support systems for evening students.

Suggestions:

- The evaluation procedure for administrators, which has not been revised since 1996, should be updated.
- Professional development opportunities should be offered to administrators.

Recommendations:

- The Board of Trustees needs to appoint six new members to fill the current vacancies. Board diversity as well as different expertise should be considered in the recruitment of new board members.
- The Board of Trustees should develop a work plan that is consonant with the strategic plan and includes short term and long term activities that will strengthen finances and address enrollment decline.

Standard 7: Institutional Effectiveness

The institution meets this standard.

To ensure clarity and guard against redundancy, “Institutional Assessment” in this section of the report is discussed exclusive of “Student Learning Assessment,” which is addressed in the section on Standard 14.

BCU's self-study and supporting materials provide evidence of broad assessment activity in support of strategic and operational planning in administrative areas critical to mission fulfillment and institutional effectiveness. The best example of this interplay is the alignment of grants with the mission and strategic plan of the college. Assessment is evident in the targeted collection of data to support the grant request, the indicators used as evidence that it is meeting its objectives, and the review of the results to determine its effectiveness. It is a strong representation of standard 7 in action.

Assessment is no longer an activity that exists in silos within the institution. The recent creation of a centralized institutional assessment office (IAO) to collect, document, integrate and disseminate assessment information across units and to decision making entities, facilitates the flow of information throughout the organization. It is too new to determine its effectiveness although initial indications are positive. Additional analytical support is provided through institutional research and planning functions. Assessment information is made available to the Academic Program Board, President, and Board of Trustees, every semester and as needed.

BCU's approach to assessment relies on both quantitative and qualitative measures. Assessments are generally straightforward and routine – annual performance reviews, course evaluations, faculty workload studies, and departmental reviews – rather than comparative, longitudinal or cross sectional. Student surveys are a cornerstone of the assessment of institutional effectiveness in many areas at BCU (e.g., student services, advisement, enrollment and registration). Surveys of faculty/staff also have been conducted, albeit less frequently.

Indicators for areas that include finance, admissions, enrollment, physical plant, and completion rates were available in the self-study exhibit room or upon request.

Surprisingly, there does not appear to be formal benchmarking against peer or aspirational institutions. There were however, environmental scans for enrollments, academic offerings and employability that were instrumental in the creation of the strategic plan, at least as described in several interviews.

Program information, including student learning, flows up to the school and institutional levels through the recently created, February 2012, annual report. There is a similar, although much less extensive, report for administration and service units. Both request information related to changes made to improve learning and/or overall effectiveness. The process and templates are reasonable although it is too early to tell if they are achieving the desired stated outcomes – to improve decision making, the quality and relevance of academic programs, and the effective use of human, physical and fiscal resources to improve the teaching-learning process.

The uses to which assessment data are put – the changes that are made or at least considered in the aftermath of measurement exercises – are described in several parts of the self-study (e.g., Chapters 2 and 8). In the area of student learning, it is important to note that there is strong evidence of assessment information driving change in those areas that have an accreditation or licensure exam (e.g., Nursing, Education, and Counseling) and relatively little in the broad array of other academic programs.

Overall, the treatment of assessment tends also to be somewhat skewed toward assessment activities and processes, rather than data and results (although the supporting documents do contain much actual data). The image created is one of great activity and energy, and multiple measurement exercises, but with little of this activity prioritized. BCU would benefit from taking time to determine the assessment information needed to serve its most pressing priorities and primary goals. Moving forward with focused intentionality would have the added benefit of reducing overall workload.

Suggestions:

- Prioritize and streamline the collection of assessment information to best serve planning and budgeting priorities.
- Create stronger and more explicit links between student learning, institutional planning and decision making.
- Ensure follow through of the recently developed plan and process for linking program information, including the assessment of student learning, to the planning and budgeting process.
- Continue administrative support and faculty involvement in assessment efforts as they are critical to success as BCU moves to a more evidence based culture.

Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention and Standard 9: Student Support Services

The Team finds that the institution meets both standard 8 and standard 9.

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with staff, students, and others, the Team concludes that the university has adequate admission policies available to support prospective students and accurate program Information.

BCU has been facing for the last decade a significant enrollment decline. Total enrollment over ten years has fallen by almost a third. Across the past two years the figures are 2185 for fall 2011 and 1929 for fall, 2012. There was also a decline in enrollment for the current 2013 spring semester. Currently 77.9 % of the student body is at the undergraduate level. This year graduate enrollment increased by almost 4% compared to a year ago, so the decline is among undergraduate new students, in-transfers and drop outs. The majority of the student body is female.

As mentioned under Standard 3 narrative, the decline in enrollment of 300 students in the fall of 2012 was in part the result of approximately 200 students who used all of the Pell Grant eligibility and were not able to continue. Approximately 95% of the students receive Pell Grants, a revenue and enrollment source that is vulnerable to downward change. Pell Grant revenues supplied more than 75% of the annual budget in 2009-2010.

BCU has long understood the fundamental jeopardy to the institution that declining enrollment has created. BCU sets targets, adjusts recruiting and retention strategies, and creates new offerings. Trustees, senior administration, faculty, staff, and students are all focused on the problem. Unfortunately, the decline has continued and thus far affords few signs of reversal.

To address the enrollment decline new programs are under development in alignment with the strategic plan. These programs are being planned for implementation within the next three years. The university has an enrollment management plan and a committee which meets regularly. Nevertheless information about enrollment targets is not consistent between the Admission Office and the Planning Office.

The Orientation and Counseling Center provides excellent services and support to students impacting positively student retention. Its processes are well defined with actionable measurement and continuous improvement.

Student retention for both full time and part time students has been quite variable and is currently 70%. Retention for part time students increased from 23 % in 2011 to 65% in 2012. The six year graduation rate was 26% in 2011, but this number increases to 38% for students who complete in eight years.

Both the BCU president and the Admissions Committee mentioned that competition in the higher education sector in Puerto Rico has sharply increased. Students point to the existence of other nearby institutions that provide technical degrees in less time and at a lower cost, allowing faster access to jobs for graduates. In addition to the competition, Puerto Rico is also facing a demographic shift with many young people migrating to the U.S. searching for job opportunities rather than going to college on the Island.

Currently the university has a limited marketing budget allocated for recruitment purposes. Implementing aggressive advertising campaigns was discussed as one of the important strategies to increase enrollment. BCU's president also mentioned the existence of a recent agreement with the municipality of Dorado, an underserved community some 10 miles west of the Bayamon campus to start a recruitment center in the community and eventually develop and offer short programs. In addition, BCU has signed an agreement with the Pontifical Catholic University, located in Ponce, to offer a joint Doctoral program in Business Administration on the Bayamon campus.

During the visit, some students complained about difficulties in completing professional practices experiences. It was also mentioned that some programs lack the professional accreditation needed for certain employment opportunities. This situation affects their employability and wages in both Puerto Rico and the United States.

Suggestions from students and staff regarding how to support an increase in enrollment for the following fall, include improving the condition of buildings and campus grounds, and adding additional recruiters in order to cover more territory and places on the Island.

Student Support Services are appropriate and appear to meet the needs of the student body. The Orientation and Counseling Center is providing services and support to students with positive results.

There has been a significant increase in student organizations (currently 17), however there is no consistent data reflecting student participation in activities, nor a unified method of measuring it. The BCU sports program, emphasizing soccer and track, needs also to be monitored for breadth of student participation and its contribution to new student recruitment and student retention.

There is reasonable access to scholarships and loans, both federal and institutional. But the university recognizes the need to increase the amount of private scholarships available to students. As was stated before, 95% of students receive Pell Grant.

A satisfaction survey regarding student services, including admissions, recruitment, and bursar, showed low satisfaction results and no evidence of a plan to set clear goals to make improvements. It is unclear how much weight to give to the survey since alternative data show high satisfaction rates. It appears that the administration moved aggressively to improve user satisfaction with these services.

In meetings with the Student Council and other students, it was evident the sense of pride and of commitment to the institution. This pride and commitment reflects the values of the whole institution.

The community knows of and appreciates the existence of the successes of prominent alumni. There have been activities to which these alumni have been invited. BCU has more than 9,000 alumni. This represents an untapped resource that the university should utilize for recruitment and fundraising, as well as for strengthening new student recruitment, student retention, internships and practica, and career placement after graduation.

Suggestions:

- Create and implement a plan with clear goals to improve every year the student satisfaction with critical support services.
- The Team suggests creating a single system for measuring student participation in extracurricular activities.

Recommendations:

- Stabilize the enrollment decline. The admissions process should focus the recruitment process by setting specific enrollment targets for each of the admissions initiatives. This process is central to BCU's future and should be supported across the entire institution to achieve enrollment goals.
- The admissions team should thoroughly review the promises made in promotions to the community, providing accurate information regarding the availability of

practicum experience and possible certifications available to students in their course of study and upon graduation.

- It is a priority to establish an office of alumni affairs, to nourish BCU alumni's sense of belonging to the institution. This will serve as a source of inspiration for students and alumni, and can result in their support for the continuous improvement of programs and a future source of university support, curricular advice, and, eventually, fundraising.

Standard 10: Faculty

At present, the institution meets this standard.

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff and students, the Team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard.

Faculty at BCU work remarkably hard. They evidenced strong institutional pride and loyalty. Faculty, both full time and part time, are appropriately credentialed for the degrees and programs they offer. Among full time faculty 66% hold the MA degree and 34% hold doctorates. For part time faculty the data are incomplete, but among 69 part time faculty the masters degree is held by nearly 80%, 19% hold a doctorate, and there is one with a BA. Further, an examination of the credentials of faculty by program indicates that faculty commonly have professional experience that reinforces and extends their teaching strengths.

BCU has about 25% full time faculty and 75% part time faculty. It would be misleading to assume that the former are steady, long term employees, while the part time faculty have only short term, fleeting links with the institution. Rather, faculty in both groups tend to have taught at BCU for many years. The principal differences between the two groups are the number of courses taught, the extension of fringe benefits, and the shouldering of institutional responsibilities.

The number of faculty, relative to the number of students and classes offered, produces a workable average section size at both the undergraduate (17) and graduate levels (12). The duties of both full time and part time faculty encompass the usual distribution of teaching and advising. Infrastructural supports (private meeting spaces, access to student records by computer, class room equipment) are lean but adequate.

At the same time, student council members readily asserted that part time faculty are commonly less available to students, because once their BCU course and office hour duties are done, they need to go elsewhere to fulfill other obligations.

The faculty have primary control over the curriculum, course content, and degree requirements, exercised at the department level and university level reviews. Academic freedom is university policy.

The university makes significant investments in faculty development, mainly in the form of an intensive calendar of mostly on-campus workshops concerning teaching techniques and disciplinary matters. Workshops on new software and the use of new university facilities are also abundant.

Original research as a faculty expectation is relatively new to BCU, with most “research” support going to fostering the completion of PhD requirements, aiding about 4 faculty a year. With persistence faculty can also receive assistance to participate in regional and national disciplinary meetings. More particularly, the university wants to further encourage and support faculty research and grant-getting and is seeking ways to make that happen, and also to involve students in such research. However, little of this initiative has been realized thus far.

The teaching effectiveness of both full time and part time faculty is reviewed annually. BCU has published faculty procedures to regularize personnel decisions; as the university self-study indicates, more effort needs to be made to inform all faculty of these procedures.

With some wonderful exceptions, direct meetings between the team members and BCU faculty were all with the full time faculty. The Team found among all of the faculty in meetings and interviews a group of dedicated professionals exhibiting strong loyalty to the institution. Their salary has not been raised in 10 years; they teach 5 course loads and carry substantial administrative duties (mainly without released time) on behalf of the institution. The BCU faculty strongly embrace the value of the faith-based education of BCU and service to the poor as espoused by the Dominicans.

Two years ago the administration ended the practice of multi-year faculty contracts, instituting a one-year contract with annual review and no guarantee of continuation. There clearly is a reservoir of resentment about this and both the trustees and the president are considering the re-institution of multi-year contracts for long-serving faculty service. A further administrative decision was to suspend academic ranks among faculty. Faculty leaders today tell us that reinstatement of those ranks would be an important step in reconstituting the faculty professional domain and associated morale.

Full time faculty have private work spaces with computer, printing access, and in some cases telephones. Part time faculty have access to small rooms with table and chairs where student advising can be conducted.

At the same time, there are issues and weaknesses including the following:

First, this is a faculty that is stretched very far with little reward. We doubt that this is sustainable, especially if the university experiences further enrollment loss or sizable budgetary setbacks.

Second, the scarcity of full time faculty means that degree programs are often staffed with a very small number of full time faculty. Nursing is atypical, with 3 full time faculty, 19 part time faculty, and hundreds of students. It is unrealistic to expect that the essential functions of managing, evaluating, and revising the program, and infusing it with the sorts of creative innovation what can make it and its students leaders in nurse education, can be sustained. BCU's trustees and administration have discussed increasing the percentage of full time faculty. Certainly that is necessary to provide, for all programs, core set of full time faculty who take responsibility for the academic and intellectual success of their program.

Third, the small number of full time faculty means that they carry very large loads of administrative duties, usually without compensation or released time. This includes representing the university at admissions events.

Fourth, the high percentage of part time faculty has significant costs. For one, students testify that part- time faculty tend to be less available on campus for student consultation, and regard it as a serious concern.

Fifth, students tell us stridently that at times courses are either filled or are cancelled for insufficient enrollment and "a four-year degree becomes a five-year or a six-year degree." The campus authorities need to monitor the impact of course scheduling on student degree progress.

Sixth, the Team was told that BCU does not offer independent study courses for undergraduates that allow an individual student to pursue specialized studies (or in some cases to complete a necessary, but unavailable degree requirement) as an individual tutorial. The high reliance of BCU on part time faculty and the consequent stretching of full time faculty with extra duties has these consequences.

Recommendation:

- The number of full time faculty is now at a minimum relative to the quantity and size of academic programs (graduate and undergraduate) that are now offered. BCU needs urgently to expand the number of full time faculty in order to share administrative duties more widely and to allow full time faculty to devote more of their attention and energy to the teaching program and to their own professional growth.

Standard 11: EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

The institution meets this standard.

BCU has invested considerable resources and time to align and update its curriculum with its mission and strategic plan. Educational offerings are focused on mission and employability.

To increase enrollments, BCU has added programs. A comprehensive cost analysis which includes the return on investment was not readily available. Understanding the financial implications is typically the first step in the development of a program offering.

BCU's off-campus learning experiences are in the form of internships and practica. Course objectives are linked to mission and ethics. The curriculum is designed, maintained, and updated by faculty who are academically prepared and qualified. The Title V grant helped boost curriculum revision.

Measures of achievement are pre and post tests, which they then utilize the comprehensive results to improve the course, projects, licensing board exams, alumni employment rate and placement. The results of learning assessment are used to update the curriculum. Programs requiring licensure are aligned with requirements of the board.

Questionnaires completed by employers or internship sites are used to assess the competencies needed within the field or area of study and to make curriculum adjustments.

Capstone courses have been added to help students synthesize their learning and integrate professional experiences with teacher preparation courses. A research methodology course is added to each undergraduate program in order to develop qualitative and quantitative research skills

Faculty receive training in the development of course learning objectives which are linked to mission, the strategic plan and departmental goals. Academic support service offices reinforce technology and learning skills for students. Information literacy is blended in all courses.

BCU is ambitious and committed to offering quality programs. Objective B in Bayamon's strategic plan for 2013 -18 is to "be recognized for the quality of education as defined by Puerto Rico's and accrediting organization's criteria" and to be accredited by the accrediting bodies for each and also to obtain international recognition. Objective C is to evaluate the teaching process and integrate new technology and innovations in the classroom and also increase student academic performance rates.

Some of the major accomplishments are the following: 1) In 2010, a Title V PPOHA grant was awarded to strengthen graduate education. Through this grant 21 workshops were held for faculty from 2010-12 to emphasize technological development and its integration in the classroom; 2) BCU completed the following goals of the strategic plan – revising all academic offerings, developed an undergraduate and graduate distance education program, completed an analysis of the external environment and job market, and established consortiums with private and public organizations (transfer agreements); 3) In 2010-11 BCU increased the Continuing Education budget by \$190,000 to fund seminars, courses, and workshops for professionals required to

compete with CEU's to practice their profession; 4) Twenty-one majors were developed to improve student job opportunities; 5) Undergraduate capstone courses were developed to improve teacher certification scores.

Suggestion:

- Focus on the premier programs where there has been significant enrollment growth (such as Nursing). Complete an assessment and action plan to ensure there are appropriate financial and human resources (including practicums). Complete an assessment of current program offerings and consider phasing out programs that are not a good fit and under enrolled.

Recommendation:

- BCU is ambitious about offering additional programs. The Team recommends that the curriculum be tied to faculty growth. A realistic business plan needs to be developed and approved for any proposed programs.

Standard 12: General Education and Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

The institution meets these standards based on the evidence presented in this chapter.

Bayamon Central University strives to ensure that students gain the essential skills and knowledge necessary for their success in College and in their major program. The various educational offerings and the General Education Program are of sufficient rigor and do, to a degree, form a comprehensive educational experience for students. The mode of delivery of the essential skills and knowledge—in introductory or developmental courses, through distance education, in certificate programs—is consistent with the university's Christian Humanist Mission.

At the non-degree level, the Central Institute (CEDEPT) offers non-degree certificate programs, some of which permit students to fold their credits into an associates' or bachelors' degree (practical nursing, a 64-credit program, and child development, a 46-credit program). Faculty is involved in teaching and evaluating these programs. The self-study states that faculty participation is "encouraged." Last year, faculty updated the program and established assessment instruments.

Upon students' admittance to the Associates or Bachelors' degree programs, students' readiness for College-level work is reviewed systematically. College Board scores are evaluated and students are conditionally admitted and/or assigned to one or more remedial courses in Spanish, English or Mathematics if their scores are below 450. Students are informed of the remedial and tutoring requirements. Each of the three remedial courses carry three credits, counter to MSCHE fundamental elements. It is unclear why this is the case, except for the belief that students want their work to "count." Pre- and post-tests are administered to the students, and passage of the course indicates student learning. The long-term progress of students who enter remedial courses and the programs of Student Transition and Support Services (STSS)

are not assessed beyond the individual course. To improve retention rates, STSS needs to analyze the success rates of the remedial and conditionally-admitted students at a future point in their college career.

The General Education Program (GEP) has been substantially revised in the past 5 years with assistance from the Title V grant. The GEP requires courses in the liberal arts that will impart core knowledge, enhance students' intellectual growth, and foster critical thinking skills that will assist students in any major. The humanities are heavily represented in this curriculum; students must take three courses in philosophy and religion, two in western civilization as well as a course on the history of Puerto Rico. These courses—though valuable to liberal arts students—may have less value to majors that will prepare students for careers in nursing or education, for example. The GEP is, however, entirely consistent with the Mission of the College and with the “Graduate Profile” established by the Curricular Review Committee, and the courses offer subject matter with a breadth and scope appropriate for a general education curriculum. The curriculum is comprised by four broad competencies that are aligned with a total of 48 credits. Now that the GEP is comprised by fewer credits, BCU faculty believe the university will be more competitive in enrollment of new students, particularly transfer students.

While the program clearly imparts the values and traditions of Christian Humanism, the core knowledge students receive is limited largely to the western world. The College's mission is indeed western-oriented, but secondary considerations such as diversity and globalization do not appear among the course descriptions or syllabi. It may be that diversity and globalization are treated in the subject matter, but this aim is not apparent in the syllabi.

The statements and policies created by the Curricular Review Committee and assessment committees do reference the goals of information literacy and technological competency. There is no specific course among the General Education courses that provides any significant instruction in the use of technological resources. Nor do goals and objectives in course syllabi stress instruction in information literacy. The Learning Development and Research Center, of which the library is a part, offers workshops, conferences, and modules to develop and strengthen information literacy skills and competencies. It is not clear when students have the opportunity to avail themselves of these opportunities, as they seem not to be embedded in coursework. It should also be noted here that the total number of LDFC users declined by 34% from 2010 to 2011; the self-study suggests this decline is due to the increase in the use of remote access to databases. This is very probably the case. But also note that the number of users of the circulation room *increased* 33% in the same period. This may suggest that students want or need more hands on assistance with librarians to access the best and most useful materials.

Course-level assessment of the general education courses is taking place regularly, but the GEP, at the program level, is not assessed, to see whether the desired goals of the program, in its entirety, are met. The Policy on the Evaluation of the Institution states that “Multidisciplinary Working Groups “ will be set up that will develop assessment for the general education competencies. The goals to be assessed, the timeline, and the

assessment methods and tools are yet to be established. Individual courses that fulfill the General Education Program are assessed, and it appears that course grades are used to determine success. The general education program is not assessed at the point where students move into the upper levels of their coursework.

The distance education offerings are in compliance with the MSCHE requirements for distance or correspondence education. This is based on a review of relevant policies and the signed certification statement. The university does not have distance learning programs but it currently offers 59 online courses with approximately 1000 students enrolled. The university has appropriate measures for assuring the identity of students who study online through university-issued user names and passwords.

The technology systems that support distance learning seem to be adequate to support the current online offerings but upgrades and expansions of systems did not seem to be included in a comprehensive technology plan. This will be necessary to ensure that the university's plans for increasing distance learning, including offering entire programs online, can be realized. Distance Learning action plans are described in the university's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan.

Plans to implement an online portal will provide students and faculty access to support services and resources necessary for a successful distance learning program. Until the portal is implemented, students will have to come to campus to access most services.

Faculty must complete a documented training program before they are permitted to teach online or hybrid courses. Online courses must follow a consistent format.

Adequate Library resources are available online to support the university's distance learning courses.

The faculty recognizes the importance of the remedial ("pre-basic") courses for student success and retention and they are willing to work with students until they are ready to pass into regular coursework.

Faculty participated substantially in the creation, oversight and revision of the GEP. They regularly assess the strength and weaknesses of the assignments in their courses. Improvement through assessment should continue through a committee of the faculty that will regularly assess and improve this program and ensure that GEP courses remain in alignment with upper-level courses.

Faculty members have pride and facility in utilizing the Moodle platform, as they demonstrated the interactive and multimedia components of their online courses. This indicated sufficient proficiency with the technologies. The faculty members feel that they are preparing themselves to meet the needs of current and future students.

Suggestions:

- The MSCHE stresses student's ability to locate and recognize valuable information as a significant element of critical thinking and a crucial building block to student success. Information literacy—incidental in several courses but not systematically integrated—is a critical educational offering that should be foundational to the general education coursework and then reaffirmed in upper level discipline-specific coursework.
- Likewise, the assessment of the general education courses, in terms of the desired student learning outcomes, is well established. That said, the overall competencies established by the Curricular Review Committee are not assessed as a whole. Are students obtaining the writing, communication, leadership, problem-solving skills, etc., that they will need to succeed in their upper level courses? Are the selected courses the most useful to address these needs in major-area coursework? Faculty should work to translate the overall GEP competencies into observable and measurable student learning outcomes. Also, the ties between the GEP and specialization coursework should be assessed periodically. It is hoped that institutionalization of the Curricular Development Committee will serve this function.
- Assessment of remedial courses and tutoring services is systematic and ongoing, but it does not seem to be analyzed in terms of overall student success rates. Are students who enroll in remedial courses likely to succeed in their general education courses? How likely are conditionally-admitted students likely to graduate within 6 years? These assessments and analysis should be conducted periodically.
- In collaboration with the Technology Planning Committee and the Technology Infrastructure Committee, long range technology planning needs to occur to ensure that the infrastructure and systems are maintained, upgraded and replaced based on industry-standard practices in order to support the university's distance learning initiatives.
- Vacant positions in the department of Information Systems and Telecommunications should be filled as soon as possible to ensure that there is adequate technology support for the planned expansion of distance learning courses.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

Based on a review of the self- study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the Team finds that the institution meets this standard.

The last 15 months have brought significant advancements to the assessment of student learning at BCU with the establishment of an Institutional Assessment Office (IAO), the appointment of an Assessment Specialist, assessment workshops and the creation of documents that articulate the structures and processes that guide and inform assessment activities in the units where student learning occurs. Still in the early

stages of implementation, BCU is poised to make progress in both the assessment of student learning and in the use of the information collected for continuous improvement. Although some progress has been made, the Team feels there is still work to be done to fully comply with this standard.

In keeping with Strategic Direction 1 of the 2007-2012 plan, BCU invested considerable time and resources revising and developing curricula and offerings to ensure alignment with accreditation requirements and with the institution's expressed educational mission. Additionally, there was a systematic effort to align program-level learning goals, objectives, and graduate profiles with those of the institution. This alignment is evident in the school and program descriptions in the 2011-2014 undergraduate catalog. These activities were supported by several grants that addressed the revitalization of offerings from general education to graduate programs. It was not until these activities were largely completed that attention turned to the development of a formal assessment process. This appears to have begun in earnest in late 2011 with the establishment of the IAO office. At that point the self-study process was well underway.

Under the guidance of the IAO and newly hired Assessment Specialist (January 2012), BCU is transitioning from the use of indirect and informal assessments conducted in academic colleges and service units to a more planned, systemized and integrated process that uses direct evidence and identifies the individuals and groups responsible for oversight and integration. The recently developed "*Institutional Assessment Plan and Guide*" and "*Policies of Institutional Assessment and Academic Program Assessment*" are examples of comprehensive documents that create a shared set of expectations regarding assessment at BCU. They specifically address the assessment of student learning for all academic programs, from the General Education Program (GEP) to graduate programs. They are a solid first step in the creation of assessment plans, structures, and processes that focus on student learning for units throughout the college.

Assessment plans and processes have at their core, student learning outcomes. These are clearly articulated written statements, expressed in observable terms, of key learning outcomes: the knowledge, skills, and values that students are expected to exhibit upon successful completion of a program of study. At BCU a different approach was adopted that used program goals/objectives and graduate profiles to guide teaching and learning at the university. The intent was the same. The result however, was a co-mingling of student learning outcomes (what a student knows, can do or values) with program goals/objectives (what a program offers or what it will deliver, promote, or encourage). The latter represents a teaching-centered approach (what a student is given) and the former a student learning approach (what a student can demonstrate). Differentiating program goals/objectives from student learning outcomes will help to clarify the relationship between student learning assessment and the program evaluation/review process. These are related but not interchangeable activities.

As discussed in the narrative for Standard 12, although the four "competencies" developed through the GEP are at the core of a BCU education, clearly articulated statements of expected learning outcomes are not linked to each competency.

Without clearly articulated statements of expected student learning for every program, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which students are meeting the outcomes deemed important. Making student learning outcomes an explicit and identifiable part of every learning program – from certificate to graduate – would greatly facilitate understanding of what it is students are expected to know, be able to do, or value as a result of their BCU educational experience.

Turning to the assessment process, there has been a heavy reliance on indirect assessment methods such as surveys/questionnaires, student perception/reflection, and summative grades to document student learning. As reported in the self-study document, grades were used to determine the effectiveness of learning in pilot GEP courses and to determine the effectiveness of tutoring in Spanish and English. A graduate student satisfaction survey was used as evidence of student achievement. Such indirect evidence is a valuable method for understanding the teaching-learning process and student perceptions of their programs of study. However, such information alone is insufficient evidence of student learning unless accompanied by direct evidence and clear evaluation criteria that have a demonstrable relationship to the learning outcome. When direct methods are employed, the standards or criteria (e.g., rubrics, test blueprints) used to evaluate what students learned are not available for review. This makes it difficult to determine if the methods/measures are clearly linked to the outcomes they purportedly assess. This is not to say, however, that there is no evidence of direct assessments – quite the contrary. Internships, portfolios, presentation reviews and capstone projects are examples of assessments present in each of the schools. What is missing is the evidence of learning and the link between this evidence, its assessment, and the expected learning outcomes of the program.

For the last year, BCU has focused on course-level assessments with every faculty submitting a lesson plan template that describes what was taught and what was assessed for every course taught that term. This information is reviewed by the program faculty and the Assessment Specialist who integrates the information and provides feedback to the program. This is a very time- and labor-intensive approach to formative assessment. There are no summative assessments except for programs that are served by licensure or certification exams. Finding a balance between formative and summative assessments, and between work done in the assessment office and within the programs themselves, will be necessary if assessment is to be sustainable into the future.

Assessment of student learning is often a component of the standards set by national accrediting bodies and the pass rates on licensing and certification exams are a useful global measure of program-level learning. BCU has several programs that utilize certification exams (e.g., Education, Nursing, Social Work, and Rehabilitation Counseling) and the 5 year pass and success rates are quite varied by program and cohort. In programs with historically low pass rates (e.g. Nursing and Teacher Certification), the self-study states that there was an assessment of variables affecting outcomes and numerous actions taken to improve student learning. These actions included faculty training, revised admissions policies, course revisions and the development of a capstone course. What is unclear however, is the basis or justification

for these actions as they relate to the actual evidence gathered about student learning. Further, it is unclear if the result of the actions taken to improve a specific area of student learning were assessed and compared to the earlier results to determine their effectiveness. "Closing the loop" to determine the efficacy of actions taken to improve learning is an important part of the assessment process.

A great deal has been accomplished in very short time. BCU has a created and staffed a centralized office to support, coordinate and integrate assessment of student learning activities and information. It has developed plans, processes and structures to guide assessment activities and provided workshops and trainings. Assessment activity is extensive, varied and mission sensitive. Taken together, this is a truly commendable achievement.

Suggestions:

- Use the existing program goals/objectives and graduate profiles to construct student learning outcomes that are expressed in observable terms for each end-point program.
- Utilize summative assessments for those programs that do not have licensure or certification exams to ensure students are meeting the learning outcomes that each program has deemed appropriate for its students.
- Document as much as possible with direct evidence of learning as well as the results of actions taken to improve student learning.
- Simplify and prioritize what is done on an annual basis to ensure the sustainability of the overall process.

Recommendations:

- To comply with the standard, *each* program (certificate through graduate) must (1) have student learning outcomes, *stated in observable terms*, that are accessible to all constituent groups (students, parents, faculty, the community) and that indicate the knowledge, skills and values that are *expected of students at the conclusion of their course of study* (2) assess the evidence of student learning, when possible with *direct methods*, at or near the end-point of the program of study and (3) use this information to improve.
- Integrate learning outcomes assessment with the strategic and operating plans of the institution and link this to budget priorities. Although it is implied that student learning assessment informs institutional decision making, there is relatively little to indicate that student learning assessment information is being used in the planning and budgeting process.

VII. Summary of Recommendations for Continuing Compliance

- A critical review of the strategic plan in an effort to prioritize the numerous goals and objectives should be done in order to refine the efforts over the next two years to stabilize and grow the enrollments in the undergraduate programs.
- Enrollment is the key issue and the team recommends that the university focus its energy on activities that will reverse the 10-year history of declining enrollments in the undergraduate programs.
- The Team recommends a semester by semester review of the enrollments to evaluate the success of the efforts to reverse the serious decline in enrollments beginning with the fall of 2013.
- The Board of Trustees needs to appoint six new members to fill the current vacancies. Board diversity as well and different expertise should be considered in the recruitment of new board members.
- The Board of Trustees should develop a work plan that is consonant with the strategic plan and includes short term and long term activities that will strengthen finances and address enrollment decline.
- Stabilize the enrollment decline. The admissions process should focus the recruitment process by setting specific enrollment targets for each of the admissions initiatives. This process is central to BCU's future and should be supported across the entire institution to achieve enrollment goals.
- The admissions team should thoroughly review the promises made in promotions to the community, providing accurate information regarding the availability of practicum experience and possible certifications available to students in their course of study and upon graduation.
- It is a priority to establish an office of alumni affairs, to nourish BCU alumni's sense of belonging to the institution. This will serve as a source of inspiration for students and alumni, and can result in their support for the continuous improvement of programs and a future source of university support, curricular advice, and, eventually, fundraising.
- The number of full time faculty is now at a minimum relative to the quantity and size of academic programs (graduate and undergraduate) that are now offered. BCU needs urgently to expand the number of full time faculty in order to share administrative duties more widely and to allow full time faculty to devote more of their attention and energy to the teaching program and to their own professional growth.
- BCU is ambitious about offering additional programs. The Team recommends that the curriculum be tied to faculty growth. A realistic business plan needs to be developed and approved for any proposed programs.
- To comply with the standard, *each* program (certificate through graduate) must (1) have student learning outcomes, *stated in observable terms*, that are accessible to all constituent groups (students, parents, faculty, the community) and that indicate the knowledge, skills and values that are *expected of students at the conclusion of their course of study* (2) assess the evidence of student learning, when possible with *direct methods*, at or near the end-point of the program of study and (3) use this information to improve.
- Integrate learning outcomes assessment with the strategic and operating plans of the institution and link this to budget priorities. Although it is implied that student

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