

Margarita Benítez

October 17, 2016

PROMESA Board Members

Dear PROMESA Board Members:

Since the University of Puerto Rico is one of the public entities currently under your jurisdiction and direct oversight, I hereby bring to your attention the enclosed documents, and request a response to the issues raised therein. The enclosed letter, signed by more than seventy educators, alumni, and friends of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) beyond the island shores, was sent last week to the six candidates for Governor of Puerto Rico, and shared with the news media.

~~The signers of this letter believe that Puerto Ricans of all social sectors and political ideologies, no~~ matter which side of the ocean they live in, must seek and reach consensus with regard to institutions and values we all cherish and need in order to reconstruct Puerto Rico. We believe the University of Puerto Rico is one such institution. We are asking the political leaders of our island, and now you, as their federal overseers, to make a public statement acknowledging the value of UPR for the people and the future of Puerto Rico, as well as a commitment to act to safeguard it from partisan intrusions. Clearly, the UPR is a public university, and as such, must serve the public interest. However, UPR is not a government agency whose leadership and priorities have to shift every time electoral results bring about a change in government administration.

The members of the Puerto Rican Diaspora that have endorsed this letter have an abiding interest in access and excellence in higher education. We know UPR well, and admire its record on both access and excellence. Many of us have served on accreditation committees that have visited UPR campuses. Others are proud UPR graduates; some have served as UPR faculty or administrators. All of us, while worried about the current circumstances in the island, consider UPR Puerto Rico's greatest treasure and hope for the future. We trust that you will share this view, and decide to treat UPR accordingly.

I am at your disposal for additional elaborations. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Margarita Benitez
Spokesperson

THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO

The undersigned are part of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States, and/or alumni, friends and colleagues of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) beyond the island shores. We write in solidarity and concern about UPR, which is, in our view, Puerto Rico's greatest treasure and hope. We stand in awe of UPR's many accomplishments and contributions throughout its history to the modernization, democratization, and critical understanding of Puerto Rico. However, we have long been concerned about the harmful impact on the institution of the recurring pattern of total overhaul of UPR governance structures, leadership, and priorities whenever there is a change in government between the two major political parties in Puerto Rico. This debilitating zigzag and overall overhaul pattern has been underway for over 40 years. In our view, it is essential to reaffirm university autonomy, to clearly define the significant role UPR must continue to play in the future development of Puerto Rico, and to maintain a level of institutional stability that enables the continued focus on academic excellence at UPR that will benefit all Puerto Ricans.

The undersigned hold multiple political ideologies. Our goal is not to advance any of them at this point. We are signing our names to this letter of solidarity and concern because we are all connected to education in diverse ways, and many of us have taken part in accreditation visits to the various UPR campuses. These experiences have made us very aware, not only of UPR's many achievements, capacities, and possibilities, but also of the valuable time and resources lost in the continued leadership reshuffles; the constant speculation and external pressures both before and after electoral periods; the power struggles and political persecutions that have depleted UPR's human capital, and deprived it of valuable people who were eager to serve it, but who had to move on against their will.

We do not write this letter to denounce or complain. We want to propose actions that will benefit UPR, protect its future development, and enable it to continue being a treasure and a hope for Puerto Rico. In view of the approaching November 2016 election, we present this document to the

leadership of the political parties in Puerto Rico and the independent candidates, and formally ask of them the following commitments to Puerto Rico and to the University of Puerto Rico:

- 1 To make a public statement acknowledging the role of UPR as a major instrument for social justice, as well as economic, civic, and scientific progress for our country.
 2. To create a commission of the citizenry with significant representation of all sectors to clearly state the mutual obligations between UPR and the people of Puerto Rico as represented by their government leaders, and to delineate UPR 's spaces of operation free of external pressures.
 3. To commit to respect and preserve university autonomy in the face of electoral swings, so UPR's leadership and work plans will no longer be tied to election results. While UPR's offerings and services must be attuned to Puerto Rico's needs, UPR is not a government agency, and must not be expected to operate as such.
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We are available for further dialogue on the subject as needed.

In solidarity with the University of Puerto Rico,*

See attached document for endorsements. Institutions are listed solely for identification purposes.

SIGNERS TO THE DIASPORA/UPR LETTER

I. Presidents and Vicepresidents of universities, university systems, and 2- and 4-year colleges

1. **Ricardo Fernández**, past President of Lehman College, City University of New York (CUNY)
2. **José Luis Cruz**, President, Lehman College, CUNY
3. **Félix Matos**, President, Queens College, CUNY
4. **Antonio Pérez**, President, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY
5. **David Gómez**, President, Hostos Community College, CUNY
6. **Estela López**, past Academic Vicepresident of the Connecticut State System of Colleges and Universities.
7. **Wilfredo Nieves**, President, Capital Community College, CT.
8. **Daisy Cocco de Filippis**, President, Naugatuck Valley CC, CT.
9. **Zulma Toro Ramos**, Academic Vicepresident of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and President-designate of Central CT State University.
10. **José Aybar**, President, Richard Daley College, Community Colleges of Chicago.
11. **Mildred García**, President, California State University at Fullerton.
12. **Tomás Morales**, President, California State University, San Bernardino.
13. **Carlos Santiago**, Senior Commissioner of Higher Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
14. **Noemí Lora Custodio**, Executive Director, Lawrence Campus, Northern Essex Community College, Massachusetts.
15. **Tony Báez**, former Provost, Milwaukee Technical College, and current President of the Council for the Spanish Speaking, in Wisconsin.
16. **Elizabeth Conde-Frazier**, Academic Vicepresident, Esperanza College, Philadelphia, PA.

II. Presidents and Directors of educational, cultural, or civic associations

1. **Jacob Lozada**, founding president, UPRAA (UPR Alumni Association and Friends Abroad), Washington, DC
2. **Leonardo San Román**, past president, UPRAA.
3. **Melina Olmo**, president, NACOPRW (National Conference of Puerto Rican Women), Washington, DC. Chapter.
4. **Joanne Rodríguez**, executive director, Hispanic Theological Initiative Consortium, headquartered at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey.
5. **Charles Venator Santiago**, past president, Puerto Rican Studies Association, and professor at University of Connecticut.
6. **Natalia Fernández Granell**, president, Fundación Eugenio F. Granell, Santiago de Compostela, España.
7. **Milton Fuentes**, past president, National Latino Psychological Association, and professor at Montclair State University, NJ.

8. **Carlos Antonio Torre**, president, New Haven, CT Board of Education, and professor at Southern CT State University.
9. **Yanil Terón**, Executive Director, Center for Latino Progress, CT.
10. **Deborah Santiago**, Vicepresident and co-founder, *Excelencia* in Education, Washington, DC.
11. **Luis Cordero Santoni**, Co-founder, PRIDA (Puerto Rican Institute for the Development of the Arts), and member of the Board of Directors, Comité Noviembre, Nueva York.
12. **Ronald Blackburn**, executive director, ASPIRA

III. Professors and administrators

1. **Edna Acosta-Belén**, Distinguished Professor, University at Albany, State University of New York (SUNY).
2. **Christine Bose**, University at Albany, SUNY.
3. **Asela Rodríguez-Seda de Laguna**, Professor Emerita, Rutgers University, NJ.
4. **Lilliana Rivera**, Hostos Community College, CUNY
5. **Felipe Pimentel**, Hostos CC, CUNY
6. **Elba Cabrera**, Board of Directors, Hostos CC, CUNY
7. **Daniel Matos**, John Jay College, CUNY
8. **Loida Martell**, Palmer Theological Seminary, Pennsylvania
9. **Waleska Santiago**, St. Joseph's University, CT.
10. **Pablo Delano**, Trinity College, CT.
11. **José Rosa**, Iowa State University, IA.
12. **Astrid Sheil**, California State University, San Bernardino.
13. **Neici M. Zeller**, William Paterson University, NJ.
14. **Grisel Maduro**, William Paterson University, NJ.
15. **Isabel Tirado**, Professora Emerita, William Paterson University, NJ.
16. **Barbara Sjostrom**, Rowan University, NJ.
17. **Azara Santiago**, Merrimack College, Mass.
18. **Margaret Power**, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago.
19. **Elizabeth Ortiz**, De Paul University, Chicago, IL.
20. **Serafín Méndez Méndez**, Central Connecticut State University.
21. **Michelle Indarjit**, Montclair State University, NJ.
22. **Alberto Sandoval**, Mount Holyoke College, Mass.

IV. Educators, researchers, and administrators

1. **Nilka Avilés**, Senior Education Associate, IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association).
2. **Tomás Hanna**, Dept. of Education of the City of New York.
3. **Grenmarie Agresar**, University of Michigan.

4. **Viviana Abreu Hernández**, Training and Employment Funds, NY.
5. **Natalia Muñoz**, journalist , Mass.
6. **Angel Santini**, Acacia Network, NY.
7. **Ana-Mita Betancourt Ríos**, former legal advisor of the World Bank, and of the Interamerican Development Bank, Washington, DC.
8. **Margarita Benítez**, former Chancellor, UPR-Cayey, and consultant on higher education topics, Washington, DC.

V. Former UPR employees

1. **Nofal Kasrawi**, Portland, Oregon.
2. **Edgar Vergne Fontánez**.

VI. UPR alumni and friends

1. **Arturo E. Betancourt Ríos**, MD, France
2. **Leslie Linares**, Comunicad, Washington, DC.
3. **Melva García**
4. **Mary Z. Delgado**
5. **Patricia Umpierre**, elementary school teacher, Virginia
6. **Damaris García**
7. **Yaritza García Baello**, U.S. Capitol engineer/architect, Washington, DC
8. **Margarita Rosado**
9. **George Hernández**
10. **Theresa Torres**
11. **Jaime Rivera Casanova**
12. **Evelyn Dávila Blackburn**
13. **Taína Caragol**
14. **Lynnette Alvarez**
15. **Frances Colón**