



## **V. OVERVIEW, CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE ACTIONS**

### **A. Overview of the Program Presentation process and product**

This final part of this Preliminary Program Presentation presents key points relating to the compliance of the GSIST-UPR with the *2008 Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies*. It provides a synthesis and an overview of the results of the School's self-study experience within the Program Presentation process. It highlights important aspects of the preliminary report so as to contribute to a better perspective and understanding of the School's experience.

This section is organized in five parts. The first one provides an overview of the program presentation process and final product. The second highlights key accomplishments in relation to each of the areas that the Standards cover. Important strengths and achievements are presented. The third part focuses on limitations and challenges. The fourth part identifies future planning and evaluation activities, which will impact the School's program. The fifth, and last part, reflects on the self-study experience, its value and importance, from different perspectives or points of view.

### **B. Overview of the Self-study Process and Product**

The self-study process in preparation for the Program Presentation has involved a collaborative effort among faculty, students, alumni, employers and professionals working in the field. The faculty is serving as coordinators of the six steering committees, each corresponding to one of the six standards. Based on an established work plan, each team has identified and examined relevant documents used in preparing their section of the preliminary Program Presentation. The first draft of each section, prepared by the teams, were read and revised by Dr. Luisa Vigo-Cepeda, a senior member of the faculty who was given three credit release time to serve as Coordinator of the School's accreditation process. The revised version of the first draft was sent back to each team for further work. A second draft version was prepared, and revised by Dr. Vigo-Cepeda, as well as by members of the Offices of the Dean

of Academic Affairs and the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. Revisions submitted were incorporated into the preliminary Program Presentation, which was distributed to faculty and administration. The document was discussed at length during a faculty meeting convened for this purpose. Additional comments and suggestions have been incorporated to produce a second draft version which will be sent on 13 December 2014, to all ERP members and the ALA Office for Accreditation, for review and comments. Based on the feedback to be received, the final version of the Program Presentation will be prepared and sent to the External Review Panel and the Office for Accreditation by March 2015.

The structure of the preliminary Program Presentation document includes an introductory section identifying mission, goals and objectives, discussing the value of the Program Presentation process, its structure and organization. The members of each team are identified. A section on the School's external environment follows, including the context in which the School functions, trends and issues affecting the School, and an introduction to the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras campus. The third section provides an overview of the Graduate School of Information Sciences and Technologies. The fourth, and major part of the preliminary Program Presentation consists of six sections, one for each of the Standards, which present the compliance of the School with each Standard. These sections follow a prescribed structure, including an introduction, objectives aligned with the Standard, achievements, evidence, challenges, and steps to be taken. The document concludes with a final section including key accomplishments, limitations and challenges, future planning and evaluation activities, and a brief reflection on the self-study experience.

## **B. Key accomplishments in compliance with each Standard**

### **Standard I. Mission, Goals and Objectives**

The School's focus on planning is reflected in the development and implementation of work and action plans, as well as strategic planning documents (particularly Strategic Plan to Address the Key Challenges, [2008-2011](#) to [2012-2016](#)). These documents identify areas of priority, objectives, responsibilities, and steps to be taken. They are carefully analyzed, discussed and revised during each annual faculty retreats. The strategic plans form the basis for decision-making relating to all aspects of the School's Program. They were the guidelines for the [updated curriculum approved in 2011](#), and for the design of new areas and developments in the program.

The alignment of the [School's vision, mission goals and objectives](#) within the University of Puerto Rico's planning environment, as reflected in the documents, *Vision Universidad 2016* [[Vision University](#)] and *Diez para la Década 2006-2016* [[Ten for the Decade](#)] has placed the School within the context of University planning efforts.

The School's [newly reactivated Advisory Board](#) includes representatives from different

constituencies. It is contributing with useful input to the planning process, identifying areas for future development and specialization.

Since 2008, the climate of [learning assessment and evaluation has been intensified](#). The School's objectives have been aligned with student competencies (educational results to be achieved), as well as with curricular development, faculty development, student services, administration, physical resources and facilities, and services to alumni and the field.

The focus of the School, stated in its vision, mission, goals and objectives, which pinpoints the quality of the educational experience, in terms of student learning, faculty teaching, research and service, administrative support, physical resources and facilities, is reflected in all aspects of the Program. It is an essential part of the School's environment.

The breadth and scope of the School's program objectives identify key competencies of an information professional and key aspects of the field. These aspects are in turn reflected in the curriculum. There has been a concerted effort to include contributions from other fields of knowledge in the development and revision of courses in the updated curriculum.

The continued focus of the School on service to the field is reflected in the objectives relating to this area, and in the leadership role faculty have played at the University, in government agencies (particularly with the Department of Education), and in working with professional associations. It is also reflected in the successful implementation of community projects, such as ENLACE. This community informatics project has provided technological literacy skills to Dominican immigrants, merchants, students and others living and working in downtown Río Piedras.

The School's commitment to research is evidenced in the creation and continued development of the [Observatorio de Estudios Relacionados a la Información](#) (OERI). This research center, responsible for providing support for faculty and student research, has enlarged its responsibilities. The Observatory is also responsible for publication of the School's electronic journal, [Simbiosis](#), a venue for dissemination of research results.

The School has evidenced a strong commitment to an adequate, up-to-date technological infrastructure and environment for faculty and students. The existing infrastructure facilitates effective application and use of technology in all aspects of the study, teaching and research environment.

The School's emphasis on and attention to internal and external evaluation and assessment processes is reflected in the development of evaluation and assessment plans and policies, as well as instruments to use in implementing them. The emphasis that the School has placed on commitment to teaching, teaching excellence, as reflected in its objectives relating to faculty development, is reflected in the criteria used in evaluation and assessment instruments. A culture of evaluation and assessment continues to be developed at the School.

## **Standard II. Curriculum**

The School's curriculum is aligned with specific program objectives, and with a series of objectives that delineate its characteristics: allowing application of theory to practice, introducing multicultural elements, responding to changes in a global, technological society, providing distance education courses to expand access, collaborating with other faculties to offer an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary focus.

At the time of the last accreditation process the School was undertaking a curriculum update. The [GSIST updated curriculum](#) was submitted for consideration by the University Administration in 2011. The curriculum's update was approved by the [Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs](#), on April 2011. The updated curriculum was implemented in the [Fall semester of 2011](#). [http://egcti.upr.edu/images/pdf/2011/Programa\\_Academico/EGCTI\\_PROGRAMA\\_ACADEMICO\\_I\\_Semestre\\_2011\\_2012.pdf](http://egcti.upr.edu/images/pdf/2011/Programa_Academico/EGCTI_PROGRAMA_ACADEMICO_I_Semestre_2011_2012.pdf)

The program now consists of two tracks, one in [Library and Information Sciences \(LIS\)](#), and the other in [Knowledge management \(KM\)](#). The content matter of core and required courses have been revised and new courses have been introduced to reflect changes in the field. Although there are two tracks within the same MIS degree, a single graduate profile has been conceived since the aim is that all graduates share common capabilities, albeit with different areas of emphasis.

The Master in Information Science (MIS), which is an academic and professional program, is offered to full and part-time students. In the master's program, students learn to identify information needs of diverse user-communities; to evaluate, acquire and organize resources; to create new content, products and services; to manage and preserve information in various formats; to implement a variety of tools and technologies; and to facilitate equal access to information and knowledge. With these core competencies in place, the GSIST wants to move forward and seize the opportunities offered by KM, both for individual career development and advancement of LIS. The decision of establishing a track in Knowledge Management responds to GSIST's interest in widening the scope of preparing information professionals within the trends of the knowledge society.

Some specializations continue to be offered in post-bachelor's (Teacher Librarian Specialist and Archives and Document Management) and post-master's certificates (Law Informatics, Academic, Special and Public Library Administrator, Information Services Consultant).

Integrated throughout the curriculum is the importance of identifying, analyzing, and responding to user needs and interests in the provision of value added library and information services.

Another key element integrated throughout the curriculum is the theory, application and use of technology, as a tool to expand and improve library services. There are specific courses focusing on new technology applications, which are offered each semester, as well as many electives which deal with technology. The School's strong technological infrastructure supports the development of these courses.

The inclusion of the findings of basic and applied research is an important element in the curriculum, reflected in the required research methods course, as well as in the development of a research proposal, an essential part of the thesis process.

Multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual aspects of Puerto Rican society, including meeting the needs of underserved groups, are included in the School's curriculum, particularly in those courses focusing on community service. In addition, fieldwork, independent study and theses courses give students the opportunity to work directly with underserved groups.

The newly established Continuing Education and Professional Development Program at the School has expanded the alumni and students opportunities for students to learn about new trends and developments affecting the field. The program also caters to the needs of other information professionals inland as well as in the Caribbean region.

The School has successfully offered distance education courses, focusing on the teacher librarian certificate program. An international project with the Dominican Republic involved offering a continuing education program via distance education to a group of library personnel at the Biblioteca Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña.

Throughout the curriculum, faculty emphasize the importance of keeping up to date and continually learning new skills to meet changing societal needs. The faculty serves as role models for students in promoting a commitment to continuous professional growth through their active participation in professional associations, conferences, seminars, workshops and other learning experiences.

The curriculum offers opportunities for students to develop leadership skills and demonstrate these skills by participating in local and regional professional association activities, presenting results of their research.

The curriculum provides the flexibility for students to develop the competencies they need for successful careers in the field, taking advantage of the clinical experiences or fieldwork course, special topics, independent studies and research courses to explore areas of specific interest and gain practical experience in the field.

The School's formal collaboration with the University of Tennessee's School of Information Sciences has the potential to significantly expand and enrich student's opportunities to take new courses, participate in research and experiential learning.

The updated curriculum process has stimulated critical review and evaluation of courses, development of new courses, and identification of areas, which need to be developed. This process is an integral part of the School's strategic planning.

The [student learning assessment plan](#), begun in August 2007, has focused attention on the curriculum, and the assessment of student learning using a variety of strategies, including questionnaires, focus groups, exit interviews and finally the [Electronic Professional Portfolio](#). The results of this experience provided valuable data in the curriculum update process.

### **Standard III. Faculty**

The School's full-time teaching faculty holds advanced degrees in the field. They are able to handle the teaching Program's core and required courses with excellence. The student/faculty ratio is low. Classes are small (generally between 8 and 12 students). The situation provides a rich opportunity for interaction between faculty and students.

Faculty backgrounds reflect a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual diversity. Their interests are diverse and varied, covering many areas of the field. Part-time faculty complement the areas of interest and expertise of full time faculty, bridging the gap between the University and the field.

Faculty is supported in pursuing their specific teaching, research and service interests, including obtaining release time to carry out research, special projects and activities. There is flexibility in faculty assignments, which relate to individual competencies and interests.

Faculty members have received release time for research, publication, special projects and administrative responsibilities. Faculty members may take advantage of sabbaticals to carry out research projects.

Faculty members have taken a leadership role in professional organizations and associations, and regularly attend conferences both within and outside of the Island. They have regularly received support from the School in the form of travel funds to attend these conferences.

Faculty members are committed to nurturing an intellectual environment in the School that facilitates accomplishing program objectives. They have taken advantage of professional development activities offered by the University's Center for Academic Excellence, to update and improve their teaching and research skills.

Faculty research activity has increased with support from the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research (DEGI), which has assigned students assistants for this endeavor. Several faculty research proposals have been funded by DEGI. The School's research center, OERI, has strengthened its research agenda in 2014 with new projects.

Faculty evaluation involves students, peers and administration, using a variety of approaches, both formative and summative.

### **Standard IV. Students**

The [School's web site](#) provides a wealth of information for students relating to admissions, financial aid and placement, in addition to information on Program requirements, faculty and curriculum. In addition, the School's [Boletín Informativo](#) describes admission requirements, policies and services offered to students.

There is a full time Student Affairs Officer available to respond to student questions and concerns relating to admissions, graduation requirements, financial aid, placement, courses

offered, class schedules, etc. At the end of the first semester 2014-2015, the School introduced the [Mentorship Program](#) with faculty members geared to 1<sup>st</sup> year students and will be launched in January 2015. This action will also contribute to guide students in competency development and future program success. The School has clear and consistently applied admissions policies and procedures, including use of an interview as part of admissions requirements.

The student body is diverse in terms of educational backgrounds and interests, socioeconomic levels, ethnic groups. Students from the Spanish speaking Caribbean (particularly the Dominican Republic), Mexico, Central and South America have contributed to this diversity.

The School has been successful in providing financial support for international students in the form of research assistantships from the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research (DEGI).

The School has actively promoted its program on its web site, through use of email, at local and international professional association meetings, at graduate studies and educational fairs held on campus and at other Universities on the Island. Brochures and other information about the School and its program are available at these activities.

The effective use of new technologies, including email, WWW and collaborative technologies has improved communication to students, and created a more dynamic, intellectual environment in the School.

The School has used international visiting professors to expand the curriculum and offer students opportunities to enrich their learning through interaction with visiting scholars.

The School's graduates have assumed and continue to assume leadership roles in the profession in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Mexico and the United States. They have made important contributions to the field. They are recognized as competent information professionals, and are strongly supportive of the School.

Students participate as part of faculty committees, the Student and University Councils, the Academic Senate and the advisory body to the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. Their ideas and input has been important in the work of these committees, councils and university bodies.

Evaluation is a strong component of the School's program. Students are evaluated in the classroom through their participation and completion of assignments, as well in a comprehensive examination and during the thesis process. Exit interviews, surveys and focus groups are other evaluation strategies in which students participate that enrich and make the process valuable. Results of student evaluations are carefully considered in strategic planning, and in decisions about all aspects of the Program.

#### **Standard V. Administration and Financial Support**

The University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras campus, has continuously provided the School with the necessary resources, financial and administrative support to successfully carry out its Program and accomplish its objectives.

The School's faculty has been successful in receiving institutional funds, from the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research (DEGI), for research, professional development, and travel which provide the support to carry out their projects and activities. It has received increased support from the DEGI for student assistantships, which currently provide financial aid to 11 international and Puerto Rican students. International students in the Program have consistently been supported through scholarships and assistantships.

The School has consistently received funds from the University for travel, and has regularly supported faculty traveling to annual conferences and meetings of professional associations at the national and international levels.

The School's directors have strongly supported and encouraged faculty and student research, continuing education and professional development, stimulating an intellectual environment in the School that facilitates accomplishment of goals and objectives.

During the past seven years, the GSIST has achieved greater visibility, status and position as a leading graduate professional school within the University of Puerto Rico, and within the wider community. This is in part due for having some faculty members contracted to manage two important Federal grants, the Title V and the HRSA/HUD projects, which end in 2015.

The formal partnership with the University of Tennessee's School of Information Studies to implement collaborative initiatives in teaching, research and service has continued.

The School's administrative and technical staffs adequately support the Director, faculty and students in successfully carrying out their responsibilities, and contribute to accomplishing the School's goals and objectives.

The School's students and faculty have taken an active role in campus wide councils, committees and boards, demonstrating leadership skills in positioning the School within the University.

The School's monthly faculty meetings and annual retreats provide opportunities for planning, evaluation, communication and decision-making. They serve to facilitate greater collaboration among faculty, administration and staff.

The School's strategic plan has guided development, identifying priorities and areas that need further attention. Planning and evaluation processes involve faculty, students, administration and staff. They have been critically reviewed and revised to more effectively respond to the Program's goals and objectives. The results of assessment and evaluation provide important data to use in making planning decisions, and in developing new planning documents.

## **Standard VI. Physical Resources and Facilities**

The School's space and physical facilities provide the environment needed to successfully carry out Program goals and objectives. Physical resources and facilities are recognized by the School's constituency as an important strength of the School. This is reflected in the results of a recent ([October 2014](#)) [student survey](#).

All the School's classrooms are well equipped with furniture and technology (projectors, screens, PC's) to provide a supportive environment for teaching and learning. There are three servers: two at the Data Center of the Academic Technology Division and one at the School.

The School has also taken advantage of alliances with SIRS/Mandarin Automation and the Pan American Health Organization (due to the Virtual Health Library in Puerto Rico Project) to receive free access to electronic platforms to be used in teaching and research. School. They are integrated into the teaching/learning process.

Wireless Internet access is available throughout the School, in classrooms, faculty and administrative offices.

The School has its own staffed computer and multimedia lab available to students, from Monday through Friday, which adequately supports student needs and demands.

All full time faculty members have their own offices with a computer and a laptop, provided by the School. They also have printers and access to scanners in their offices.

There is strong technical support available provided by the School for faculty, staff and students to effectively use technology in carrying out their responsibilities. The School's IT personnel include an IT specialist, a lab technician, and a graphic artist, each with specialized training in his field.

Students and faculty have easy access (on the same floor) to the largest and best library and information sciences library in Puerto Rico, [the BCBI](#). This Library has an [excellent journal collection](#), as well as a strong collection of new books (in both English and Spanish) to support the GSIST curriculum; satisfy the needs and interests of faculty and students. The BCBI has been used as a learning lab in several courses.

The faculty/library advisory committee has played an important role in identifying BCBI needs, supporting library projects, and facilitating closer collaboration between the School and the BCBI.

The School's technology committee prepares an annual budgetary petition presented to the Academic Technology Division which identifies new hardware and software, document management and online collaboration strategies to be acquired by the School. Input from faculty, students and staff are included in the petition.

The School has received strong support from the University's Academic Technology Division (in the form of funds from a student technology fee) to update and strengthen its technology infrastructure. This infrastructure adequately supports staff functions, faculty and student research, teaching and learning.

### **C. Limitations and Challenges**

The School's [statements of vision, mission, goals and objectives](#) successfully guided the updated curriculum process, implemented in 2011, and represents a continuous important

challenge.

The School continuously face important decisions in determining how to most effectively restructure and redesign its curriculum to respond to changes in its internal and external environment, specifically student needs and interests, faculty research and projects, demands of the field in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean and Latin America, results of assessment and evaluation activities.

Another challenge we face is to develop an improved faculty profile, identifying and prioritizing criteria to use in recruitment and selection of new faculty. In addition we need to recruit faculty with an appropriate fit with our plans and goals. Closely related to this, is the challenge of effectively identifying areas for faculty development so as to allow them to address the changes in the School's curriculum, and new directions in which the School will be moving.

There is a need to improve faculty evaluation, so that the feedback and accountability necessary for consistency and quality in teaching, service and research can be obtained, and used to make the necessary changes. This is contemplated along with Certification #38 (2012-2013). The challenge is to strengthen collaborative efforts, as well as teamwork in accomplishing specific projects and activities.

Building alliances with other professional schools and faculties within the University, as well as with schools of library and information science in the Caribbean, Latin America and the United States; what priorities should be given to this collaboration, what directions should be taken, represents an important part of the School's agenda.

There is a need to expand and improve the opportunities for students to learn outside of classes, by providing seminars, workshops, lectures and other professional activities, in addition to regular course offerings. Innovative and creative strategies need to be developed to stimulate and motivate students to take advantage of these opportunities; to participate more actively in them.

Recruitment of students from outside of Puerto Rico needs to be emphasized and increased. Effective strategies need to be developed to attract more students from both Spanish speaking countries and from the United States. How to successfully market the School in these countries presents an important challenge that needs to be addressed.

There is a need to explore creative ways to work together more closely with professionals in the field, particularly with those in the University Library System, in developing and providing student opportunities in the field.

The School faces a challenge in planning future growth and development in terms of its physical resources and facilities, in deciding how to best utilize present physical facilities and/or plan for major changes in this area in the future.

#### **D. Future Actions: Planning and evaluation activities**

The ways in which the School is evaluating its Program and activities form the basis for future planning. Results of the evaluation processes provide data to help determine directions for planning.

Each semester, the level of student satisfaction with all aspects of the Program is determined, by means of questionnaires, exit interviews, focus groups and the electronic Professional Portfolio. Specific instruments are used to gather this data, which is then used to make needed changes and improvement within the Program. These changes and improvements become part of the planning process.

Student learning assessment is another aspect of the process. In addition to using rubrics to document and measure student learning, other strategies need to be developed in the future to provide feedback on student learning, particularly with the Seminar on the Knowledge Acquisition (Capstone). As part of this process, providing workshops for students to improve both written and oral communication skills need to be explored.

Results of student evaluations of professors are regularly followed up in order to bring about improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. The faculty evaluation instrument will be revised and simplified in light of the new [Certification #38 \(2012-2013\) that regulates all graduate programs on campus](#). As the School defines a renewed faculty development process the faculty evaluation process will be in total compliance with the new Certification and will represent a step forward to strengthen the quality of teaching at the School.

GSIST will increase its efforts on the systematic evaluation of student learning addressing critical indicators established by the institution as well as those within the School; on identifying areas in which students need to gain knowledge and skills in order to function effectively as competent library and information professionals in today's changing global and technologically oriented society. Changes in the profile of the School's graduates will be identified, explored and addressed as the School continues to update its curriculum, and new competencies will need to be developed.

This process will strive to connect the competencies and the elements of the graduate profile with the content of specific courses in the curriculum. The future direction of the School in the field of distance education will continue forward as it already submitted a proposal to institutional authorities. Work will continue including establishing guidelines and quality standards for online education.

Decisions will be made about the role and responsibility of the School in the area of continuing education and professional development, and efforts will focus the development and provision of programs, events and initiatives to serve the broader library and information science community.

A revised and updated faculty development plan will identify areas that need to be emphasized in training faculty to effectively meet the needs and demands of the field, particularly in terms

of distance education and continuing education.

Faculty lines of research will be more clearly identified and used to guide and strengthen the School's efforts. The School's research center, OERI, will play an important role in this direction.

The kinds of community and institutional collaboration projects that the School should become involved must be explored within the context of strategic planning. Future research efforts and activities of the School (particularly research projects and the Seminar on the Knowledge Acquisition –Capstone) must be considered within this context, as well as future recruitment and hiring of new faculty to replace those retiring. Areas of interest, expertise, skills and knowledge needed to effectively carry out the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the Program will be carefully explored and determined. How to increase the quality of all aspects of the Program with a renewed commitment to excellence on the part of faculty, students, administration and staff working together collaboratively will be the focus of future planning activities.

#### **E. Closing Remarks: Reflection on the Self-study Process**

Undertaking an ALA accreditation process, working together to evaluate all aspects of the School's program, and to produce a self-study document, the Program Presentation, is a daunting experience. It presents challenges and difficulties, as well as gains and benefits. It has both positive and negative aspects. On reflection, it is clear that the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones. We value the process.