Report on Inter American University—Metropolitan Campus Participation in the ACE Internationalization Laboratory By the American Council on Education Peer Review Visit Team November 7-9, 2010

I. Introduction

This report is based on a visit to Inter American University—Metropolitan Campus by an American Council on Education (ACE) peer review team on November 7-9, 2010. This report also draws upon several documents, which the university provided to the peer review team: the ACE Internationalization Laboratory Report, September 2010; the Strategic Plan for Internationalization, October 28, 2010; and the power point, Institutional Profile.

The visit included meetings with Chancellor Marilina Wayland; the International Commission Steering Committee and the International Commission itself; the academic deans; administrative personnel; students who participated in study abroad; the personnel of the International Relations Office; and interested faculty.

The visit is part of the ACE Internationalization Laboratory, a project that builds upon the learning from several earlier ACE multi-campus initiatives, including Promising Practices in International Education and Global Learning for All. In addition to Inter American University—Metropolitan Campus, other institutions participating in the 2009–2010 Laboratory are Systema CETYS Universidad (MX), Drake University (IA), Long Island University (NY), Marshall University (WV), Universidad del Este (PR), and the University of Tulsa (OK).

This is a confidential report to Inter American University—Metropolitan Campus, designed to assist the institution with its internationalization efforts. We encourage wide internal distribution of the report so that it can assist the university community in these tasks. The contents will not be published or made public unless the institution chooses to do so or gives ACE permission to do so.
II. Peer Review Team

Dr. Susan Carvalho, Associate Provost for International Programs, University of Kentucky.

Dr. Barbara Hill, Senior Associate for Internationalization and Director of the Internationalization Laboratory, Center for Effective Leadership, American Council on Education, Washington, DC (team leader).

Dr. Lilian Uribe, Professor and Chair, Modern Language Department, Central Connecticut State University.

III. Overall Strengths

Inter American University—Metropolitan Campus is at a propitious moment in time to broaden and deepen its internationalization efforts. Internationalization has received strong support from the current chancellor and senior administrators—a fact widely acknowledged and appreciated on campus. This support is critical to the task of implementing the global vision embedded in the university’s strategic plan, and the senior leadership was actively involved in the Lab process.

The institution has consistently prepared the terrain for the Internationalization Laboratory experience over the last few years. The strategic plan of 5 years ago included internationalization as a focus. The English track has been established, and a pilot study conducted earlier suggested that the campus was ready to benefit from the Lab. Residence hall planning has been completed, with construction to begin soon, giving the institution a competitive advantage in the recruitment of international students, including those from the U.S. mainland. The formation of the School of Modern Languages is also an important building block. All this suggests the clear and consistent leadership that the institution has had.

The campus-wide International Commission was designed with a diversity of membership to ensure broad faculty and administrative buy-in, and the Commission has produced an excellent report. The team organized itself well to deal with the various topics of the report, gathering information and covering bases very efficiently. The report has clear focused goals, leading easily to a strong strategic plan for internationalization. The Commission followed its timeline extremely well. The report itself has a clear, rigorous, consistent methodology. It is clearly value-driven, as is the institution itself, but it is strongly grounded in quantitative information.

Inter American—Metro is fortunate to have assembled a strong faculty in all the schools, who are interested and engaged in international research and teaching already and who want to do more. They are will to identify elements of internationalization in their courses, disciplines, and programs, though they are clear-eyed about the challenges. Among the strengths that help make the institution distinguished and distinctive are programs, like the Ph.D. in the history of the Americas that use interdisciplinary inquiry effectively. An additional strength is the close
linkage between international research and regional engagement (for example, in the areas of water safety or offshore industry); also commendable is the use of textbooks published in Europe and Latin America as a tangible sign of global knowledge exchange. As one faculty member put it, students and scholars continuously learn to ask “Where are you standing in relation to the world?” Achieving the vision of the strategic plan will be possible because the university has the pieces necessary. Internationalization will be a transformative and fundamental change in how the university does its business, but it is starting from a good position.

We saw that students are a priority at the institution. This was borne out by the students, both undergraduate and graduate, with whom we conversed, without us asking leading questions. While the students were a select group, those who had studied abroad, we saw that they were, for the most part, proficient in languages and confident. They were grateful to the institution for the study abroad opportunities, the funding of their experiences, the service they received, and the credit they earned. Clearly, the advising of the students about the value of study abroad has been effective and exemplary. In addition, we noted, with pleasure, that the extra-curriculum, in terms of activities like debate and the student newsletter, is also seen as contributing to the internationalization of the institution. This suggests that efforts to further internationalize the institution as a whole will be welcomed by the student body. Given the institution’s mission of contributing to student leadership development, the new directions in internationalization will make that even stronger.

Finally, the International Relations Office, only a year old, has been an effective means of making connections throughout the institution, a tribute to the effective leadership of the director.

During the peer review visit, the scheduled meetings involved a wide spectrum of the campus community, including high-level academic officers and representatives of important administrative offices. The conversations we had during the visit suggested that internationalization can shape everything the university does, and clearly a committed core of faculty and staff are willing to work to achieve that vision. In general, we observed that many administrators, faculty, and staff are embracing the paradigmatic shift of internationalization with enthusiasm.

IV. Observations and Recommendations

International Students

It was not clear to the team how the institution defines an “international student.” Most campuses use IIE’s definitions, so if Inter American—Metro wants to use a different one, it should explain it clearly so constituencies have an accurate picture of what is meant. International student recruitment strategies tend to be data driven, so this is an important observation. If the current international students are at the institution by serendipity, Inter American—Metro should delve into this more deeply in order to have a recruitment strategy that is based on sound analysis.
Study Abroad

The experiences we heard from the students who studied abroad are compelling, and we think they could be used in the already good newsletter, and then added to the web page and released to local media. The institution should think about how to reintegrate returning students as well. We noted that there seemed to be an unconscious Western bias (Europe and the U.S.) in how faculty members think about study abroad. The institution should consider how and when it might be able to extend student opportunities to Asia and Africa.

Students had suggestions for improving their student abroad experiences. They were informed about opportunities from talking to some professors, campus posters and media. But they were aware that some faculty members try to deter students from studying abroad by emphasizing safety issues and worrying that students will transfer to the institutions abroad. Obviously, faculty need to understand that study abroad is an investment in the student’s future and resist such negative attitudes. Students also noted that some faculty members were simply unaware of the range of opportunities, or unsure about how to guide students towards study abroad options; it is hoped that ongoing communication will ameliorate this situation. Students also think that an orientation would help them take better advantage of their studies abroad. While the students seemed willing to take out loans for the study abroad experience, they were concerned about the price of the credits earned.

Demographic Shifts and Student Backgrounds

The institution experienced a radical change in the proportion of enrolling students coming from public and private high schools this last year. While one year’s results do not constitute a trend, this should be monitored in the coming years. If the change was not intentional and it continues, what does this portend for internationalization? Do the experiences of the two different populations have any possible or potential effect on the strategies of study abroad and English acquisition?
We recommend that the institution consider administering an entry-level survey of students to get more detailed information about their educational intentions regarding international experiences.

Faculty Engagement

We recommend that the university leadership undertake efforts to replicate the successful faculty engagement strategies already in place in some other institutions. In particular, mini-grants in support of international education activities are fairly low-cost incentives, which can successfully bolster faculty creativity in designing new courses or enhancing existing ones, encourage research and collaborations, and engender greater faculty engagement in the internationalization process.

Institutions frequently measure the internationalization of faculty efforts by using research citation indexes. But even though Inter American—Metro is primarily a teaching institution, it can encourage faculty to broaden how they think of research. Ernie Boyer’s classic
discussion of the various forms of research (discovery, pedagogy, application, and integration) might be a good way to encourage faculty to write about international topics.

Another technique to boost faculty involvement in international education efforts is to put technology to greater use. At a much lower cost than faculty travel, technology offers faculty and their students the opportunity to engage with colleagues overseas. Co-teaching courses with faculty from abroad using video/Internet technology, for example, can help fill gaps in international expertise at an institution and enhance the internationalization of the curriculum. This will require having technical capacities in areas of the campus that are convenient for faculty and students.

Full-time faculty seemed uncertain about the level of buy-in on the part of part-time faculty in terms of this broader campus mission. Engaging this group of instructors should be discussed as a possible goal within the communication plan.

In addition, the senior administration should devise a communication plan to inform the university community of faculty achievements in international activity. A bi-annual e-bulletin might be helpful, as well as inclusion in any regular convocations or faculty orientations. The institution should also ensure that part-time faculty are also engaged in campus internationalization.

**Staff Development**

We recommend that advisors and staff below the level of administration also have some development activities to help them deal comfortably with the anticipated increase in international students. The University of Iowa has a good series of workshops on “Building Our Global Community” that could serve as a model. The current strategy that we heard was to designate a bilingual staff person for certain key contact points of student services to deal with international students; but this approach can stand in the way of broader staff internationalization.

**Professional Development for the Office of International Relations**

Because the Office of International Relations is so new, we recommend that the institution offer opportunities for the staff to build their professionalism and give them visibility and access to best practices. We recommend participation in NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA), and the Forum on Study Abroad. Each of these associations has a particular focus and utility, and we would be happy to talk with you further about this.

**Curricular Focus**

The strategic plan for internationalization covers three years, and it is a good start. However, we notice that it focuses primarily on Central and Latin America and Europe. To be truly global, the next strategic plan should include some non-Western content.
V. Conclusion: Building Leaders for Puerto Rico and the World

Inter American University—Metropolitan Campus is clearly fortunate to have strong support for internationalization from many faculty and administrators. Of course, conversations about internationalization must continue, in order to widen this base of support so that the university can effectively achieve its vision and mission in terms of internationalization and to prepare its students to be leaders in a global world.

The institution is well positioned to continue its work in internationalization because it has all the key ingredients: leadership, energy, and a clear sense of direction. Internationalization is a long-term project that requires commitment from the top administrators who regularly provide reasons why the campus and its programs (like all of higher education) must become more fully internationalized. This requires adequate resources, accountability, and regular evaluation and assessment. By developing and continuing an intentional process, Inter American—Metro will make its internationalization goals part of its everyday operations, continuing to reinforce its status as a distinguished and distinctive institution.

Submitted December 16, 2010