NIBS ACCREDITATION VISIT:
INTER-AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO,
METROPOLITAN CAMPUS,
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

22-23 April 2010
Present:

(NIBS Accreditation Panel):
- Ian Charles (Associate Dean, International Business Academy, Denmark)
- Dr Memo Diriker (Director, BEACON, Salisbury University, USA)
- Professor Lissa McRae (Williams School of Business, Bishop’s University, Canada)

(Representing the University at Wed 22 April session):
- Chancellor, Marilina L. Wayland
- Dean of Academic Studies, Migdalia Texidor
- Dean of Planning and Institutional Research, Déborah Hernández
- Dean of Economics & Administrative Science Faculty, Fredrick Vega
- Director of International Relations Office, Ramón Ayala-Díaz.
- Director Economics School, Myrna Reyes
- Director Management School, Mildred Soto
- Assistant Director Management School, Gerardo Gonzalez
- Professor Rosa Cora
- Professor Elba Rivera de Márquez
- Professor Héctor Luis Acevedo
- Professor Jorge Freyre

(Representing Faculty):
- Nélida Gómez- BBA-Accounting
- Rosa Cora- BBA-Management
- Magdalena Ortiz-MA Labor Relations
- Felix Cué- MIB International Business
- Edmundo Garza- MBA Finance
- Víctor Castillo – MIB International Business
- Juan Karman- BBA Information Systems
- Armand Piqué- BBA Managerial Economy
- Angel Ruiz- Phd –MIB International Business
- Mario Dávila- MIB International Business
- Belma Borrás- BBA & MBA Accounting
- Enrique Martínez- Phd- MIB International Business
- Ahmad Jumah- Phd-International Business & MBA
- Monserrat Vilagrán- BBA International Business
(Representing International Relations Office):

- Ramon Ayala-Diaz (Director)
- Professor Rosa Cora

(Representing School Directors)

- Director Economics School, Myrna Reyes
- Director Management School, Mildred Soto
- Assistant Director Management School, Gerardo Gonzalez
- Sandro Murtas - Director International Business Unit at Small Business Development Technological Centers
- Richard Vázquez - Director Entrepreneurial Center – Microsoft Innovation-Incubator Center

(Representing Students):

- A number of domestic and international students at undergraduate and post-graduate level
Summary of findings:

In accordance with NIBS accreditation procedure, the University had previously completed and submitted the accreditation questionnaire. The results of this self-assessment produced a score of 52; just above the 50% minimum pass mark required for the accreditation process to be completed. An initial review of the questionnaire indicated the University had probably underscored, and in the course of the accreditation review this proved to be the case.

The University was founded in 1912 and with 44,000 students is the largest university in Puerto Rico; indeed for some years it was the largest university in the USA. Typically for the region, its origins were Christian although unusually in this case, Presbyterian rather than Catholic. Today it regards itself as Ecumenical. The University belongs to 70 different consortia in 18 countries.

The Metropolitan Campus, in San Juan – the subject of this accreditation – has around 10,700 students. International students come from other islands in the Caribbean, the rest of the USA and elsewhere in the world – especially other Latin countries. Domestic students come from all over the island of Puerto Rico because it is the only place where an entire undergraduate degree can be completed in English as well as Spanish.

In recognition that Puerto Rico might not be familiar to “outsiders”, an orientation session was arranged for the Panel specifically to provide some background to the island and this included very informative and entertaining lectures from Professors Acevedo and Freyre from the University on the history, politics and economy of Puerto Rico that put into context the role of the University both domestically and regionally.

The campus itself, while physically unexceptional, provides the full range of learning, teaching, social, recreational and support facilities to a level that any international student should find very acceptable.

The Panel was given a presentation by the Director of the International Relations Office, which was started in August 2009. It is designed to bring together and rationalise the already-existing international activities but as importantly, to create the environment for more substantial future international activity and development. This is codified in what the University has called “Comprehensive Internationalisation” – with the specific goal of internationalising the institution in a wide range of areas.

The University uses the expression “appreciation of cultural diversity” with the use of the word “appreciation” designed to recognise that simply acknowledging and even claiming to understand cultural differences is not a sufficient condition for true internationalisation. This is a rather ambitious claim, and therefore the Panel was pleased to see it appears to be fulfilled very effectively in practice, as demonstrated during the meetings with faculty and students.

The University is one of only 40 in the USA to be part of the ACE International Laboratory.

With a very scattered and low income population both on the island and in the region, the University endeavours to support students through outreach activities including the provision of on-line programmes, enabling students from outlying areas to study at home and in some cases
at least have the opportunity to send short summer periods on campus. It should also be noted that the regional locations, while often sharing some cultural characteristics with Puerto Rico, are not always similar and indeed some are not Spanish speaking which means the University is providing a unique and important service to other nationalities of the Caribbean. This is one of the ways in which the University can be said – in terms of its self-assessment through the questionnaire response – be more “international” than it gives itself credit for.

The meeting with students was very lively, with the University on the whole receiving substantial and almost unconditional praise for its international activities. Where it falls down by typical standards of NIBS schools, most notably with regard to longer study exchanges of a semester or more, this must be seen to an extent as an inevitable consequence of the economic and social circumstances of the domestic and regional student population. Nevertheless, the Panel felt this was an area in which there was probably more demand than supply, and this was something the new International Relations Office could usefully address. International students, especially of course those who were Anglophone, were keen to remind the Panel that the University represented their only opportunity for an international education in the region.

The meeting with staff similarly reflected a sense of enthusiasm and common purpose. Indeed, the session took on a life of its own with almost every one of the 20-plus who attended wanting to give the Panel an account of their international experiences and the ways in which they delivered an international learning and teaching diet to all of their students at every level. Panel members have seldom if ever attended a faculty meeting that engendered such a strong atmosphere of enthusiasm, energy and consensus in terms of outlook and goals.
Conclusion

The Panel found the University to have achieved a very commendable level of internationalisation, underpinned by support from faculty and motivation from students for its international aims and vision. This achievement is all the more impressive given the relatively modest economic, and socially deprived, environment in which the University operates.

After reflection and deliberation, the Panel unanimously agreed to recommend to the NIBS Board of Directors the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico, Metropolitan Campus shall be unconditionally awarded NIBS International Accreditation (effective 17 May 2010)

The Panel believe the University delivers international study programmes in a truly inclusive and comprehensive way that genuinely celebrates and values diversity.

In presenting this decision the Panel singled out areas for special mention (strengths) and some that might usefully be addressed in order to improve even further the University’s commendable international profile.

Strengths

(a) The extent to which the University’s internationalisation strategy addresses the needs of all its students, not simply those fortunate enough to be able to undertake study-abroad or other practical international activities

(b) The strong recognition of the value to the institution of a diverse student community

(c) Not missing an opportunity, whenever one arises, to translate strategic goals into tangible activities throughout every dimension of internationalisation

(d) An exceptional level of engagement, commitment and enthusiasm shown by staff and students that is reflected by commensurate support from the University administration

Areas for consideration

(a) Strengthen the International Business offerings in two ways: first, by the addition of a course in International Business as a required component of the core course requirements; second, by introducing an International Business major in English at undergraduate level

(b) Research the demand amongst undergraduate students for a master level programme in English

(c) Provide the opportunity and support to enable students to undertake longer periods of study abroad - semester or longer – and to work through its institutional partners to enable more incoming students on a similar basis

(d) Offer more intensive language support in Spanish to enable international students to leave the University with a valuable additional skill