

University of Puerto Rico
Mayaguez Campus
Dean's Office or Unit Name

Annual Report 2023-2024
Department of Humanities

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Directora

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I. General Information of the Dean's Office and Associated Units

a. Mission and Vision

i. Mission and Vision of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Provide an excellent service to Puerto Rico and the world: Training knowledgeable, well-educated, critically thinking, and professionally prepared citizens in the fields of agricultural sciences, engineering, arts, sciences, and business administration so that they can contribute to educational, cultural, social, technological, and economic development. Carrying out creative, research and service work that meets the needs of society and disseminating the results of these activities so that they are accessible to all. We provide our students with the necessary skills and sensibility to effectively solve the problems we face and be an example of the values and attitudes that must prevail in a democratic society that values and respects diversity.

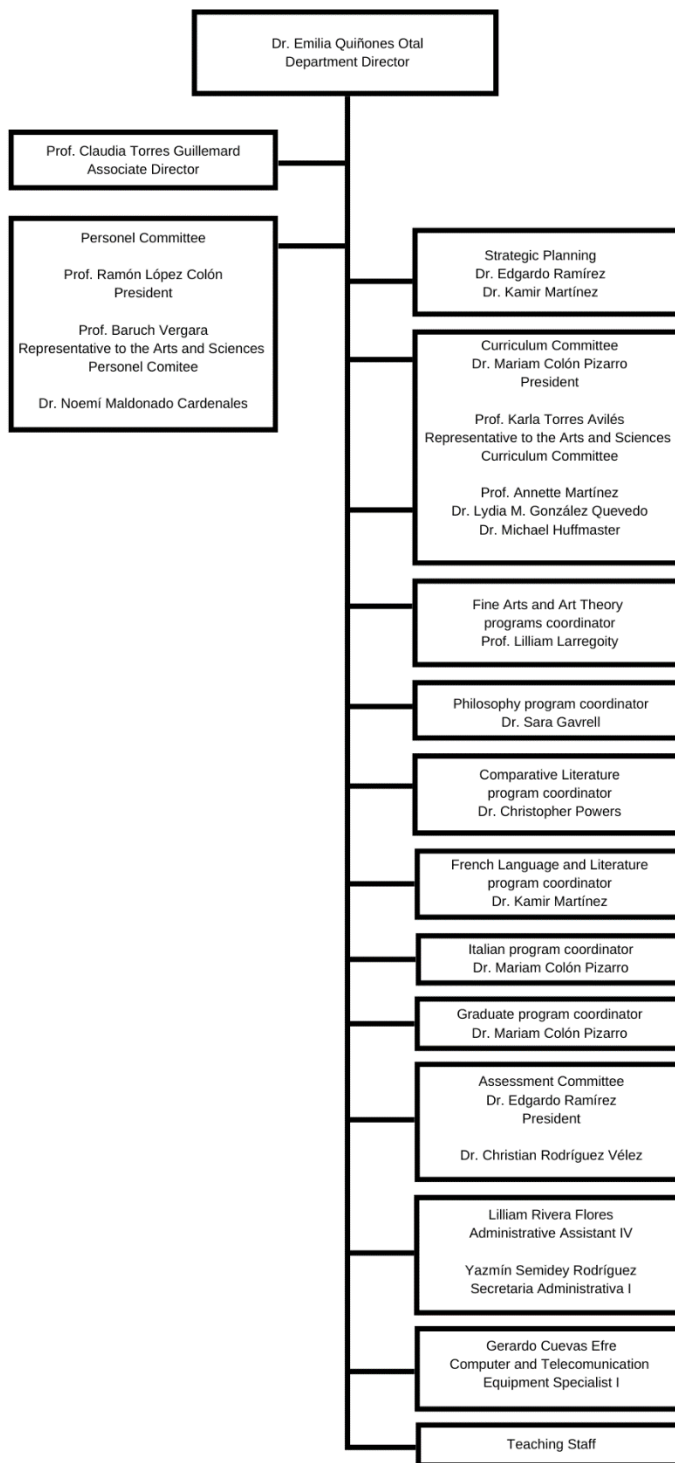
ii. Mission and Vision of the Department of Humanities

The mission of the Department of Humanities is to cultivate an appreciation of the diversity of human culture by examining and analyzing the artistic and intellectual achievements of humanity. The department is entrusted with fostering in its students the development of critical and interdisciplinary thinking in order to stimulate the development of artistic and intellectual curiosity, promote the ability to form intellectual judgments and sound ethical values, and encourage creativity and innovation. The faculty of the Department of Humanities emphasizes the study of different cultural expressions, especially those that open up new research paths, and how they relate to the cultural reality of Puerto Rico. The integration of a liberal arts program with professional learning provides the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to be a responsible, successful, and creative citizen. The Department of Humanities provides educational programs, cultural events, and community services that improve the quality of life of the people of Puerto Rico.

b. Organizational Structure

i. Organizational Chart of the Dean's Office

ii. Organizational Chart of the Department of Humanities



II. Report on Initiatives, Activities, and Achievements in Accordance with the Strategic Plan

a. Executive Summary

The Department of Humanities at the Mayagüez Campus has made significant cultural and academic contributions throughout the academic year 2023-2024, showcasing a diverse array of events and initiatives. A highlight was *Sendas: Cultural Calendar*, a cornerstone of the second semester featuring multiple concerts, collaborations with universities and government entities, and prominent cultural events such as the *Guitar World Festival*. This cultural calendar not only celebrated music but also included guided tours of art exhibitions and theatrical performances like *Los Soles Truncos*. The department's commitment to broadening cultural horizons was further demonstrated through initiatives like the *Asia-Africa Fest*, spearheaded by Dr. Jerry Torres, which introduced non-Western cultures through lectures, workshops on Asian calligraphy and manga, and the screening of African films.

Additionally, the Department of Humanities organized numerous academic forums, including lectures and panels focused on Ethics under the Philosophy Program's coordination. The interdisciplinary project From STEM to STEAM brought together faculty and graduate students to explore intersections between humanities and sciences, culminating in student essay submissions and a competitive event. Supported by funding from the Teagle Foundation, this initiative underscored the department's commitment to integrating diverse academic disciplines.

Furthermore, the department enriched scholarly discourse with the New Horizons in Cultural and Humanistic Studies project, funded by the Mellon Foundation, hosting lectures by renowned scholars like Marta Aponte Alsina. This project not only strengthened the graduate program in Cultural and Humanistic Studies but also fostered intellectual engagement with subjects ranging from literature to historiography. The department's dedication to promoting arts and culture was evident in the four exhibitions hosted at the Art Gallery, including the impactful solo exhibition *Resonancia Ancestral* by artist Bárbara Pérez, financed by the Tiznando el País project. These initiatives collectively underscore the Department of Humanities' pivotal role in advancing cultural awareness and academic excellence within the Mayagüez Campus community.

- b. Objective 1: To institutionalize a culture of strategic planning and assessment
- In the academic year 2023-2024, the Department of Humanities made significant strides in academic assessment and strategic planning with the establishment of an Assessment Committee, a pivotal development aimed at enhancing student experience and program effectiveness. Spearheaded by Dr. Edgardo Ramírez, a temporary hire with expertise in academic assessment, the committee began its foundational work by designing comprehensive questionnaires to gauge student needs upon entry into and exit from the programs. This initial phase focused on refining survey methodologies to ensure robust data collection and meaningful insights. Looking ahead, the department plans to implement these questionnaires starting with freshmen orientation on August 1st, 2024, and culminating in a dedicated event for graduating students at the end of the 2024-2025 academic year. Moreover, each program within the department conducts its own assessments biennially, seeking student feedback on course offerings and other pertinent aspects, thereby fostering continuous improvement and alignment with student expectations. These initiatives underscore the department's commitment to proactive assessment practices and strategic planning to optimize academic experiences and outcomes for its student community.

Additionally, the Department of Humanities has undertaken a thorough review of its programs, particularly in response to shifting enrollment trends observed in Fine Arts, Philosophy, French Language and Literature, and Comparative Literature. Recognizing the need to adapt to changing student interests and market demands, faculty members within these programs have proactively initiated curriculum adjustments. For instance, the Fine Arts program, historically broad in scope, recently introduced a series of minors aimed at specialization, responding directly to student demand and industry requirements. Notably, the Art Theory program has experienced a notable increase in new admissions, signaling a growing interest in its offerings. In response, the program is undergoing substantial curriculum revisions to enhance relevance and focus. Proposals for new minors in Latin American and Caribbean Art History, as well as Museum Studies with concentrations in theoretical and restoration aspects, have been submitted, aiming to better prepare students for careers in museums while expanding research opportunities within the program's academic framework. These strategic adjustments reflect the department's proactive approach to ensuring program vitality and alignment with both student aspirations and emerging academic and professional landscapes.

- c. Objective 2: To lead higher education throughout Puerto Rico while guaranteeing the best education for our students

While the Río Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico is widely recognized as a leader in humanities disciplines, the Department of Humanities at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM) distinguishes itself with unique and unparalleled programs in the country. For instance, the bachelor's degree in Philosophy at UPRM offers a diverse range of courses and is increasingly focusing on specialization in Ethics, addressing a critical area of study in Puerto Rico. Graduates of the Philosophy program are well-equipped to contribute to various sectors such as law firms, government agencies, and healthcare institutions, where expertise in ethics is essential. Furthermore, the Art Theory program at UPRM stands alone in Puerto Rico, complementing existing undergraduate programs in Art History by emphasizing theoretical perspectives. The faculty at UPRM's Department of Humanities is nationally recognized for their leadership in research, particularly in Puerto Rican and Latin American Art. Notably, Drs. Melissa Ramos Borges and Emilia Quiñones Otal have curated exhibitions at major museums in San Juan, reviewed in prestigious art magazines in the United States, such as *Art Review* (Santiago Cortés, "How Regina José Galindo Unearths the Colonising Gaze", 14 June 2024). Their scholarly contributions have also been instrumental in shaping courses and academic dissertations at universities across the United States, underscoring the department's influence beyond Puerto Rico. Quiñones Otal was invited by University of Nebraska in February 2024 to teach a course where her research and publications had been key to the curriculum and a lecture on her current investigations. Dr. Melissa Ramos was invited by Cornell University to present her exhibition *Suzi Ferrer*, opening in January, 2025. Similarly, the program in French Language and Literature at UPRM fills a unique niche in the Caribbean context, focusing on French-derived languages spoken throughout the archipelago. Dr. Frances Santiago, a leading scholar within the program, has made significant contributions to the study of Caribbean French-derived literature, reflected in her lectures and influential research. Recently, her work influenced an exhibition at The Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth (titled *Surrealism and Us: Caribbean and African Diasporic Artists since 1940*), highlighting the program's regional and international relevance. Dr. Stephane Pillet's research has also been recognized in the US and he was recently invited for a lecture at John Hopkins University.

In February 2024, the Department initiated a partnership with the Department of Humanities at UPR Ponce to develop articulated

transfer programs, enabling students to commence their bachelor's degrees in Philosophy or Art Theory at UPR Ponce and seamlessly complete them at UPRM. This collaboration aims to enhance educational opportunities and facilitate academic pathways between the two campuses. Also, the Graduate Program in Cultural and Humanistic Studies is unique in Puerto Rico, and it is an attractive option for people in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean who are interested in pursuing graduate theoretical and research studies. These distinctive programs and scholarly achievements reinforce UPRM's Department of Humanities as a pivotal hub of academic excellence and innovation in Puerto Rico and beyond.

- d. **Objective 3: To increase and diversify the Institution's sources of revenue**
Despite receiving substantial funding totaling over \$1,123,000 from esteemed foundations like Mellon, Teagle, Tiznado el País, and Fundación Puertorriqueña para las Humanidades, the Department of Humanities at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez remains proactive in diversifying its funding sources under the leadership of its new director. In addition to existing funding, efforts have been initiated to cultivate relationships with residents of Rincón, many of whom are from the United States and are eager to support local cultural institutions through donations. Furthermore, a collaborative project with MUSA is underway, aiming to secure funds for artwork restoration via a private event. Looking ahead, the department intends to continue applying for grants from foundations and federal entities to sustain and expand its initiatives.
- e. **Objective 4: To implement efficient and expedient administrative procedures**
The Department of Humanities faces significant challenges due to the lack of streamlined administrative procedures and inconsistent document formats. These issues persistently hinder efficiency and promptness in executing administrative tasks. Frequent changes in document formats often result in documents being submitted and approved, only to be returned later due to format discrepancies that occurred during the processing period. For example, the recent revision of the chronogram chart for semester course offerings necessitated departments to resubmit documents in the new format a year after their initial submission. Additionally, bureaucratic delays caused by excessive signing logs further impede timely task completion. The department has advocated for institutional changes to address these issues, proposing the creation of standardized forms encompassing all required documents and signing logs for processes involving multiple offices. However, implementing such reforms requires collaborative effort beyond the department's scope, underscoring the ongoing challenges in navigating administrative procedures effectively.

f. Objective 5: To strengthen research and competitive creative endeavors

The Department of Humanities has embarked on numerous initiatives aimed at fostering research and creative endeavors, emphasizing its role as a dynamic, multidisciplinary hub. Recognizing the importance of creative output, particularly within the Fine Arts program, the department has cultivated an environment where faculty members actively showcase their artistic contributions in various esteemed venues. In January 2024, Professor Baruch Vergara unveiled his solo exhibition *Lo Múltiple en Uno*—with funding by the Mellon Foundation—at the Gallery of the Liga de Arte de San Juan (<https://www.primerahora.com/entretenimiento/cultura-teatro/notas/liga-de-arte-de-san-juan-presenta-exhibicion-de-baruch-vergara/>). In February 2024, Professor Ramón López Colón presented his solo show *Memento Bori* at the Art Gallery UPRM, further enriching cultural discourse within the university community (<https://www.uprm.edu/portada/2024/01/26/galeria-de-arte-inaugura-con-memento-bori-del-artista-ramon-lopez-colon/>). Additionally, Professor Claudia Torres Guillemard's artwork is currently on display at the Museum of Art Francisco Oller in Bayamón, highlighting the department's commitment to both producing and disseminating scholarly and artistic innovations. These exhibitions underscore the department's dedication to nurturing a vibrant creative environment where faculty members actively contribute to the cultural landscape of Puerto Rico and beyond.

Through generous funding from the Mellon Foundation, the Department of Humanities has significantly bolstered its research endeavors, enabling faculty to undertake ambitious projects and engage in scholarly pursuits that enrich both academic discourse and cultural understanding. Graduate research assistants supported by this grant have produced a series of insightful podcasts and interviews featuring prominent authors from Puerto Rico and the diaspora, including Aurora Levins Morales, Marta Aponte Alsina, Dr. Rocío Zambrana, and Dr. Carmen Haydee Rivera. Meanwhile, Dr. Mariam Colón Pizarro has advanced her research on the depiction of Puerto Rico in tourism pamphlets from the 1940s and 1950s, leveraging Mellon Foundation funding to deepen historical insights. Looking forward, the same grant will facilitate continued research and creative initiatives in the upcoming academic year, with plans to assign research assistants to faculty members across disciplines. Recently, a dedicated research group was formed, spearheaded by Drs. Melissa Ramos Borges, Elsarís

Núñez, Emilia Quiñones Otal, and Prof. Sabrina Ramos Rubén, aimed at securing additional grants for a collaborative multi-volume book project on the Art History of Puerto Rico. In October 2023, Dr. Emilia Quiñones Otal's book *Turned Into Sterile Land*, supported by the Fundación Puertorriqueña de las Humanidades, was presented at the UPRM and it is now being adapted into an audiobook version. Drs. Mariam Colón Pizarro, Melissa Ramos Borges and Emilia Quiñones Otal obtained the position of Scholar-In-residence at New York University to conduct research on Puerto Rican Art History and Visual Culture for the month of June 2024.

Moreover, the Art Gallery, overseen by the Department of Humanities, serves not only as a showcase for artistic expression but also as a vibrant research hub where creativity and investigation converge. Each exhibition is meticulously curated, with curators delving into the works of multiple artists to explore thematic connections and narratives. Collaborations with artists for solo shows are common, allowing curators to guide the creation of compelling narratives that are subsequently presented in scholarly essays published in accompanying pamphlets. One notable exhibition, *Resonancia Ancestral*, debuted in October 2023, featuring artworks by Bárbara Pérez and curated by Janía Martínez. This exhibition marked a significant milestone for Martínez, as it represented her first post-graduate research experience and inspired her to pursue further academic advancement, culminating in her application to the Master's Degree program in Cultural and Humanistic Studies starting in January.

g. Objective 6: To impact our Puerto Rican society

Students and graduates of the Department of Humanities are deeply committed to serving their community, a cornerstone of our educational mission. While bachelor's degrees from our department are sometimes undervalued in terms of immediate economic utility in today's capitalist neoliberal framework, they play a crucial role in shaping societal perspectives and fostering critical thinking. Our graduates make significant contributions by challenging conventional norms, exploring human relationships, questioning identities and existence, interpreting art, and investigating history.

Our faculty has developed relationships with multiple organizations to impact our Puerto Rican society during this academic year. In March 2024, Drs. Carlo Sabariz and Sara Gavrell initiated a collaboration with the Colegio de Ingenieros in Mayagüez to

introduce Ethics courses and seminars tailored for engineers in western Puerto Rico.

- h. Objective 7: To strengthen school spirit, pride, and identity
During the academic year 2023-2024, the Department of Humanities at UPRM engaged in a diverse array of activities aimed at enhancing student engagement and honoring faculty achievements. Key initiatives included a comprehensive orientation panel for incoming students, where each program provided valuable insights into academic pathways and effective time management strategies. The department also celebrated the academic achievements of honor students from the year 2022-2023 with a commemorative event held at Salón Tarzán in April 2024. Additionally, faculty members organized a heartfelt farewell event in May 2024 to bid farewell to two retiring colleagues, underscoring their invaluable contributions to the department. Looking ahead, plans are underway to host dedicated events for graduating students, ensuring continued support and recognition within the academic community.