

Letter of Recommendation for Dr. Edwin J. Barea Rodriguez

For the Position of President, University of Puerto Rico

March 22, 2025

Search Committee University of Puerto Rico San Juan, Puerto Rico

Dear Distinguished Members of the Search Committee:

It is with great enthusiasm that I write this letter of recommendation for Dr. Edwin J. Barea Rodriguez for the position of President of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR). Having thoroughly reviewed Dr. Barea Rodriguez's credentials and professional achievements, I am convinced he embodies the leadership qualities, administrative experience, and academic excellence that UPR seeks in its next president.

Brief Background as This Letter Writer

I will give a little background about me so that you can see from where I am writing this letter of recommendation. I hold an Endowed Chair position at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) where I am in my second year as a Full Professor with a primary appointment in the Department of Mathematics and a secondary appointment, where I conduct wet lab experiments, in the Department of Neuroscience, Developmental and Regenerative Biology. Previously I was at Arizona State University (ASU) from 2007-2023 with a year at MIT as the 2013-2014 MLK Scholar in the Department of Mathematics. As a faculty member, I was PI or co-PI on external grants totaling over \$4 million. For three years, I served at the NSF (2019-2022) as a Program Lead of the HSI program, in charge of a budget of \$45 million, and became acutely aware of the challenges and opportunities of the UPR system. I also served as Program Officer in ADVANCE and the Racial Equity in STEM Program Description, where I was awarded a Director's Award for my contributions in the latter. I was a Fulbright Scholar (2022-2023) at the Institut de l'Vision in Paris and conducted wet lab and computational work. I have an extensive mentoring and teaching track record, including the 2019 AAAS Mentor Award and the 2014 PAESMEM (Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring, awarded in 2018) and numerous other national and regional awards. My efforts in diversifying the mathematical sciences and inclusion in STEM have been impactful. I have closely guided and mentored through research more than 100 students, including students from Puerto Rico who participated in one of the two summer programs I co-directed. From these students, more than 90% have successfully gone on to graduate school and many of them have already graduated and are now faculty at various universities in the country, government laboratories, and researchers in industry (e.g., NIH, Los Alamos National Lab, NSA, Intel,

American Express, Mayo Clinic, and others). The influence I have had in the success of many of my mentees has led to many honors outside and within the mathematics community and academia. I have guided student research programs throughout the year and during summer research experience for undergraduates (REU) at various universities, including at MIT, Loyola Marymount, Cornell University, Cal Poly Pomona, Hope College, and ASU. It is from this wealth of experience in academia as a research scientist, dedicated mentor, contributor to large-scale programs with multiple moving parts, and with recognition for all these efforts, that I write this letter.

Academic and Administrative Leadership

Dr. Barea Rodriguez's career demonstrates an exceptional commitment to academic excellence and transformative leadership. As a Professor of Neuroscience at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) and through his various leadership roles—chair of the Department of Biology, Vice-Provost for Resource Management for Instructional Innovation, Associate Dean of Student Success, and Executive Director for Student Inclusive Initiatives—he has consistently promoted institutional growth while maintaining academic integrity.

His selection as a PULSE (Partnership for Undergraduate Life Science Education) fellow—one of only 40 chosen from over 250 applicants—highlights his dedication to transforming STEM education through evidence-based teaching practices. This experience aligns with UPR's need for a president who is aware of global developments in post-secondary education and can implement innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Dr. Barea Rodriguez's systemic vision of higher education is evident in his successful development of cross-departmental collaborations at UTSA. By fostering partnerships between departments within the Colleges of Sciences, Education, and Business, he has demonstrated the ability to promote the integration of institutional components—a key qualification outlined in the UPR President Profile.

Financial Management and Resource Development

Dr. Barea Rodriguez brings impressive financial management experience that will be invaluable to UPR. As Vice Provost for Resource Management, he skillfully managed the provost's budget, ensuring the strategic allocation of funds for faculty hiring and startup initiatives. His approach to transparent budget allocation and his commitment to maintaining fiscal balance are precisely the skills needed to navigate UPR's complex financial landscape.

Most significantly, Dr. Barea Rodriguez has secured over \$30 million in external grant funding for UTSA through his leadership of several National Institute of General Medical Sciences-

funded programs, including the Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (RISE), Maximizing Access to Research Careers (MARC) U-STAR, and the Initiative in Maximizing Student Development (IMSD) programs. This proven ability to attract external funding will be crucial for UPR's continued growth and development.

His experience with philanthropic development also positions him well to strengthen UPR's Endowment Fund and explore additional funding opportunities through alum and stakeholder engagement—a priority identified in the UPR President Profile.

Student Success and Inclusive Excellence

Dr. Barea Rodriguez's dedication to student success is extraordinary. His twice-recipient of UTSA's Richard Howe "Excellence in Service to Undergraduates" Award (2006 and 2017) and inclusion among America's 100 inspiring Hispanic/Latinx scientists in 2020 testify to his impact on student development.

As Associate Dean of Student Success, he implemented comprehensive student support strategies, including intrusive advising, peer mentoring, research initiatives for freshmen, and course transformation. His leadership in establishing the Student Success Center with the vision of "Completion with a Purpose" reflects his commitment to holistic student development.

His work with the STEM Transfer Center, which specifically supported community college transfer students from underrepresented backgrounds, demonstrates his commitment to expanding access to higher education. This directly aligns with UPR's mission to serve students with limited economic resources.

Connection to Puerto Rico and Cultural Understanding

As a Puerto Rican and first-generation PhD recipient, Dr. Barea Rodriguez brings a profound understanding of UPR's cultural significance and the challenges faced by its student population. His statement, "I left Puerto Rico many years ago, but Puerto Rico never left me," reflects his deep connection to the island and its educational community.

His ongoing involvement with Puerto Rico's higher education community—including workshops at UPR Humacao, collaborations with Inter Barranquitas y San German, and La Catolica in Ponce—demonstrates his commitment to the island's educational advancement. His role in preparing faculty from multiple UPR campuses to become facilitators and his participation in the NSF HSI STEM Hub proposal preparation further illustrate his dedication to UPR's development.

Interpersonal Skills and Collaborative Leadership

Dr. Barea Rodriguez's leadership of a complex department with over 48 tenured/tenure-track faculty, 25 adjunct faculty, 2,800 undergraduate majors, and 145 graduate students illustrates his exceptional organizational and interpersonal skills. His ability to develop effective communication channels and promote a culture of respect and collaboration directly addresses UPR's need for a leader who can generate harmony among diverse stakeholders.

His involvement in broader community initiatives, such as My Brother's Keeper in San Antonio and his service on the NIH Advisory Committee to the Director Working Group on Diversity, demonstrates his ability to convene different stakeholders around vital public interests—a critical qualification for UPR's next president.

Conclusion

Dr. Edwin J. Barea Rodriguez possesses the academic credentials, administrative experience, financial management skills, commitment to student success, and deep connection to Puerto Rico, making him exceptionally qualified to serve as the next President of the University of Puerto Rico. His vision for higher education aligns perfectly with UPR's mission to serve as a foundation of hope for Puerto Ricans and a cornerstone for Puerto Rico's development and prosperity.

His career trajectory demonstrates a steadfast commitment to academic excellence, inclusive leadership, and transformative education—precisely the qualities needed to guide UPR through its current challenges and toward a prosperous future. I give Dr. Barea Rodriguez my highest recommendation and am confident he would serve UPR with distinction and dedication.

Dr. Barea Rodriguez was one of the reasons I came to UTSA and his qualities as a leader, mentor, and colleague are not understated. While I would be sad to see him go, he is a tremendous asset and will serve the UPR system well as its next president. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



Erika Tatiana Camacho, Ph.D.

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