



March 20, 2025

Dear Selection Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I write this letter to recommend Dr. Edwin J. Barea Rodriguez for the position of President of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR). I have worked closely with Dr. Barea Rodriguez since our selection as Partnership for Life Sciences Education (PULSE) Leadership Fellows in 2012. Along with other PULSE Fellows, we created the Ambassador Program and eventually founded PULSE as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 2015 serving the higher education community. I have first-hand experience of his leadership style, interpersonal skills and conflict management, financial management mindset, engagement in student affairs, and his commitment to Puerto Rico through my work in PULSE for the last 13 years. In this letter, I provide examples from Dr. Barea Rodriguez's credentials and my own experiences to make the case for why he is an excellent and ideal candidate.

Academic and Administrative Leadership

Dr. Barea Rodriguez's distinguished career at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) demonstrates exceptional commitment to academic excellence and transformative leadership. Having served as Department of Biology Chair, 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 and continuing his engagement in teaching and research as a Professor of Neuroscience. This diverse administrative experience aligns perfectly with the responsibilities of a university president, including mastery of institutional systems, accreditation processes, and policy development.

His visionary, systemic approach to higher education is evident in his successful development of cross-departmental collaborations at UTSA. By fostering partnerships between the Colleges of Sciences, Education, and Business, Dr. Barea Rodriguez has demonstrated remarkable ability to promote institutional integration—a key qualification for university leadership. His experience at a public institution in Texas has provided valuable insight into maintaining the delicate balance between university operations and state governance relationships.

My direct experience with Dr. Barea Rodriguez comes through our collaborative work as PULSE Fellows, where his selection as one of only 40 chosen from over 250 applicants highlights his dedication to transforming STEM education through evidence-based practices. His contributions

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to PULSE exemplify his commitment to innovative approaches in teaching and learning. Dr. Barea Rodriguez brings a wealth of practical leadership experience into our collective work, consistently enriching our initiatives with insights from his institutional leadership roles.

Together, we co-developed the Ambassador Campus Workshop (ACW) and Ambassador Training Program (ATP), co-leading several successful implementations, including two programs in Puerto Rico. Through this collaboration, I've observed his exceptional leadership style firsthand. When developing new programs—a process inherently involving creative tension—Dr. Barea Rodriguez provides valuable input while engaging in productive dialogue to reach effective resolutions. He creates space for others to contribute while adding his own innovative ideas, embodying the collaborative leadership that modern academic institutions require.

His ability to create welcoming, productive environments consistently results in his facilitated sessions receiving the highest participant ratings. His work both in the Ambassador program and at UTSA demonstrates his talent for inspiring communities toward transformative processes. His team-building capabilities and genuine concern for every aspect of the academic enterprise would make him a powerful advocate for the entire university community.

As President of PULSE from 2022-24, I witnessed how Dr. Barea Rodriguez's insights from his institutional leadership roles generated ideas that benefited our entire organization. Throughout our interactions, his comprehensive awareness of higher education trends, developments, and debates has been evident. Based on his contributions to PULSE and his demonstrated commitment to academic values and university autonomy, I am confident that Dr. Barea Rodriguez possesses the collaborative vision, innovative thinking, and leadership excellence needed to excel as a University President.

Interpersonal Skills and Conflict Management

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 success in managing such a diverse academic community demonstrates his ability to develop effective communication channels and promote a culture of respect and collaboration—directly addressing the need for a leader who can generate harmony among diverse stakeholders.

Throughout our work together in ACWs and ATPs, I've observed Dr. Barea Rodriguez's remarkable ability to convene diverse groups and facilitate productive dialogue. His approach to project management consistently emphasizes inclusivity, ensuring all voices are heard while maintaining focus on strategic objectives. Even when faced with conflicting viewpoints, he demonstrates exceptional skill in fostering an environment where dissenting positions are respected and ultimately channeled toward constructive solutions. He also makes every effort to help participants experience a sense of joy while they work.

Dr. Barea Rodriguez's communication style is both accessible and authoritative. He articulates complex ideas clearly while remaining receptive to feedback, exemplifying the effective

communication skills essential for university leadership. His active listening approach creates a climate where community members feel genuinely heard and valued—a critical element for building trust across university constituencies. He consistently demonstrates the rare ability to stand firm on principles while remaining open to innovative approaches and partnerships that serve the university's mission. When conflicts arise, I've witnessed Dr. Barea Rodriguez employ his problem-solving methodology which identifies common ground among competing interests while acknowledging the legitimacy of diverse perspectives. This balanced approach has repeatedly transformed potentially divisive situations into opportunities for collaborative advancement.

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. These experiences highlight his skill in navigating complex relationships between academic institutions and external organizations—both public and private. His positive energy and advocacy in these contexts have catalyzed meaningful partnerships that advance important public interests while maintaining institutional autonomy and academic values.

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 demonstrates his capacity to maximize opportunities that generate greater income—a critical qualification for UPR's next president.

Through our collaborative work in PULSE, I've witnessed Dr. Barea Rodriguez's exceptional financial stewardship firsthand. When managing funds for organizing ACWs and ATPs, he demonstrated sound judgment in expenditure decisions, balancing fiscal responsibility with programmatic needs. He identified cost-effective approaches without compromising program quality, ensuring maximum impact from available resources.

Dr. Barea Rodriguez also brings innovative thinking to resource development. During PULSE strategic planning sessions, he proposed several creative fundraising initiatives that expanded our conventional thinking about potential funding sources. His ability to identify untapped opportunities and develop compelling cases for support reflects the entrepreneurial mindset

essential for modern university leadership. He recognizes that financial sustainability requires diversified revenue streams and demonstrates the vision to pursue them effectively.

Dr. Barea Rodriguez's experience with philanthropic development also positions him well to strengthen UPR's Endowment Fund and explore additional funding opportunities through alumni and stakeholder engagement—a priority identified in the UPR President Profile. His proven ability to communicate institutional value to external constituencies creates an enabling environment for increased private support, complementing his success in securing government funding.

Student Success and Inclusive Excellence

Dr. Barea Rodriguez's dedication to student success is extraordinary. His designation as a 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 profound impact on student development across diverse populations.

Dr. Barea Rodriguez fully understands the public responsibility of the university as an institution serving the country. As Associate Dean of Student Success, he implemented comprehensive student support strategies specifically designed to guarantee access to high-quality education for all students, particularly those with limited economic resources. His development of intrusive advising, peer mentoring, research initiatives for freshmen, and course transformation demonstrates his commitment to removing barriers that might otherwise prevent capable students from succeeding. His leadership in establishing the Student Success Center with the vision of "Completion with a Purpose" reflects his holistic approach that supports students before, during, and after their academic careers. His advocacy for improved campus facilities, student housing, and study spaces reflects his understanding that quality environments are essential for the teaching and learning function.

Throughout our professional interactions, I've observed Dr. Barea Rodriguez's unwavering commitment to ensuring the best conditions for all members of the university community. In our PULSE collaborations, Dr. Barea Rodriguez consistently reminds our team about our end goal of increasing student enrollment, retention, and success through our programs. The hands-on time he spends with students in various contexts is evident from the nuanced insights he contributes to our discussions, demonstrating his deep understanding of student needs and aspirations throughout their entire academic journey.

Dr. Barea Rodriguez's student-centered leadership philosophy is further evidenced by his incorporation of undergraduate and graduate students into his research program, where he mentors them through meaningful scientific inquiry. This commitment to providing authentic research experiences, particularly for underrepresented students, has created pathways to advanced STEM degrees for numerous individuals who might otherwise have lacked such opportunities—demonstrating his dedication to student success that extends from recruitment through career advancement.

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. Dr. Barea Rodriguez possesses a clear vision and sense of mission for the University of Puerto Rico as an institution committed to the preservation, production, and dissemination of knowledge. His ongoing involvement with Puerto Rico's higher education community—including workshops at UPR Humacao, collaborations with Inter Barranquitas y San German, and La Católica in Ponce—demonstrates his commitment to the island's educational advancement and cultural heritage.

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 as a center of research and creative works. He understands the vital importance of UPR not only as an educational institution but as a cultural cornerstone of Puerto Rican identity and progress.

In PULSE, Dr. Barea Rodriguez has consistently emphasized the importance of expanding our programs to Puerto Rico, recognizing the unique needs and strengths of the island's higher education system. He implemented concrete strategies to make this vision a reality—recruiting participants from UPR to the Ambassador program, nominating a UPR faculty member as a PULSE Fellow, leading two Ambassador Campus Workshops in Puerto Rico, and organizing an Ambassador Training Program on the island for capacity building of local Ambassadors. These initiatives demonstrate his commitment to creating sustainable partnerships that serve Puerto Rican institutions through collaboration rather than imposition. His approach reflects a deep respect for Puerto Rico's educational traditions while bringing innovative practices that can strengthen its academic institutions.

I am personally enriched and transformed by participating in these experiences alongside Dr. Barea Rodriguez. My understanding of Puerto Rico's educational landscape, cultural context, and unique challenges has been profoundly deepened through his insights and leadership. What began as professional collaboration has evolved into a meaningful journey of cultural understanding, demonstrating Dr. Barea Rodriguez's exceptional ability to bridge diverse perspectives and build genuine connections across institutional and cultural boundaries.

Conclusion

Dr. Barea Rodriguez embodies the exceptional leadership qualities required for the President of the University of Puerto Rico system. His distinguished administrative leadership at UTSA, remarkable interpersonal skills for building consensus among diverse stakeholders, proven success in securing over \$30 million in external funding, and unwavering dedication to student success and inclusive excellence—particularly among underrepresented populations—demonstrate his readiness for this critical role.

His deep connection to Puerto Rico combined with his broad experience in American higher education creates a unique perspective that will serve UPR exceptionally well. Based on my extensive professional collaboration with Dr. Barea Rodriguez through PULSE and my observations of his transformative leadership approach, I am confident that he possesses the vision, experience, and character to lead the University of Puerto Rico to new heights of excellence and impact. His appointment would represent not just a homecoming for a distinguished native son, but a significant step forward for an institution poised to thrive under his leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Nitya P. Jacob". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nitya" being more prominent and the last name "Jacob" written in a smaller, more compact script.

Nitya P. Jacob, PhD
Professor of Biology

