

From "La Isla del Encanto" to the Mountain State, West Virginia

Written by Dr. Adrian Esteban Rodriguez-Negron as a student pharmacist in 2022.

Over the past three years, the number of students from Puerto Rico (PR) matriculating to the University of Charleston School of Pharmacy (UCSOP) has been exponentially increasing. Some might be asking themselves: "Why would someone from an island in the Caribbean come all the way to the mountain state of West Virginia (WV) to study pharmacy?"

Based on my experience, there are a thousand reasons why students from Puerto Rico might end up in WV. However, I wanted to focus on a few of the more relevant responses, incorporating my fellow Puerto Rican pharmacy students' thoughts. I received a wide variety of answers, but before starting that discussion, let me give you a brief historical summary of PR and how pharmacy schools operate in the territory.

In 1493, the Spanish discovered Puerto Rico. In 1898, Spain ceded the island at the end of the Spanish-American War and Puerto Rico became a colony of United States of America. Since then, Puerto Rico has been a territory of the United States, which makes Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens. In this small Caribbean Island, there are only two pharmacy schools. One is a public school, linked to the government, while the other is private. Both schools accept around 40 to 60 students per year, and they receive hundreds of applications annually. After attending pharmacy school orientations in the island and learning about requirements and how competitive it is to get in, competitive students often feel discouraged and overwhelmed.



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The narrow acceptance rate on the island is only one reason why Puerto Rican students chose to matriculate to the UCSOP. Many students from PR prefer UCSOP over the Puerto Rican schools due to the wide cultural diversity, better networking and experiential opportunities, and higher probabilities of getting accepted into the program, thanks to the flexibility provided by the admissions department to each individual student. Approximately 60% of students mentioned that their primary reasons of why they decided to join UCSOP was the outstanding service prior and during admission and how approachable and welcoming the faculty was during the entire process. Pricing was also one of the reasons mentioned. Many students said that UCSOP is less expensive when compared to other top private schools in the nation. The small class size was another attractive factor that drew Puerto Rican students to UCSOP. Small class size has offered a more personalized interaction between students, professors, and faculty advisors. Some students also



mentioned that they wanted a new experience out of the island to improve their English. Others felt that by coming to the U.S., they would have more opportunities such as different residency options and a wide variety of pharmacy fields that are not available or as common in PR. Other reasons mentioned by the students included the opportunity to obtain different certifications offered by the program or simply because of the great feedback received from other students from the island that were already studying at UCSOP. It is interesting how the number of Puerto Rican students has grown in our school over the years.

When I started my first year at UCSOP, we were only two students from Puerto Rico. The number of students per class went from three, to nine, and this year we have twelve students from the island. I believe that UCSOP has been fascinated by our hard work, charisma, and academic performance since we first matriculated in 2018, leading them to increase their recruitment effort on the island. I am thrilled that I have had the opportunity to inspire and help students through their admission process and pharmacy journey. I hope that in the future competent students from the island continue to apply to the UCSOP to represent our school of pharmacy, while acquiring all the necessary skills they need to be outstanding health care providers in the future.

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CURRENT PUERTO RICAN STUDENTS

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