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Submitted for presentation

Title: Rethinking the legal education in Puerto Rico

Abstract:

For years, the primary goal of legal education focused on guaranteeing access to law schools to minority and disadvantaged students. This goal evolved and now aims to promote the successful graduation of these students, even when they face precarious situations they do not control. That is the case of Puerto Rico, which, in the last five years, faced two category five hurricanes², several earthquakes³, the bankruptcy of the State government⁴, and the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. In light of this devastating scenario, we must rethink traditional teaching methods, such as the Socratic method and face-to-face meetings. As part of the aftermath of our natural disasters, many lost essential services for extended periods, such as electric power⁵, drinking water⁶, and even telephone or cellular communications. Many had to migrate to the continental United States to access medical services⁷ or escape the devastation in their hometowns. These distressing experiences forced professors to rethink our university education and the need to adopt appropriate mechanisms allowing equitable access to legal education. Through technology, it has been possible to use tools that adapt to both the needs of students with disabilities and the specific needs of students facing the new reality and consequences of post-disaster recovery. We can mention multiple strategies and methods that can be seen as an advantage, such as the access to educational materials integrating the needs of blind students and the pre-recorded class sessions allowing those who cannot physically attend the university campus to pursue and continue their legal education. However, using technology depends on individual monitoring of students by professors to ensure that the learning process is adjusted to their physical, emotional, and intellectual needs. Also is imperative to introduce new methods that integrate the study of applied cases, where students will have to develop their own learning materials,

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² See Hurricanes Irma and Maria: Impact and Aftermath <https://www.rand.org/hsrd/hsoac/projects/puerto-rico-recovery/hurricanes-irma-and-maria.html> (Last visit Aug. 28, 2022).

³ See <https://www.usgs.gov/news/featured-story/magnitude-64-earthquake-puerto-rico> January 29, 2020. (Last visit Aug. 28, 2022).

⁴ “The largest bankruptcy case in the history of the American public bond market”. <https://theintercept.com/2017/05/09/puerto-ricos-123-billion-bankruptcy-is-the-cost-of-u-s-colonialism/> (Revised on April 24, 2019).

⁵ See Puerto Rico Spent 11 Months Turning the Power Back On. The New York Times <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/14/us/puerto-rico-electricity-power.html> Aug. 14, 2018 (Last visit Aug. 28, 2022).

⁶ See Finding Water in Puerto Rico: An Endless Game of Cat and Mouse. The New York Times, Oct. 12, 2017 (Last visit Aug. 28, 2022).

⁷ See How Hurricane Maria Worsened Puerto Rico’s Health Care Crisis <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/other-publication/2017/dec/how-hurricane-maria-worsened-puerto-ricos-health-care> December 18, 2017. (Last visit Aug. 28, 2022).

share them with others, and be exposed to critique and be graded by their peers⁸. This presentation explores my strategies to promote my students' successful graduation in the widest variety of situations we have faced in recent years.

⁸ See <https://youtu.be/XNokG1idE5I> for a Spanish summary of my course's materials. If the presentation is selected, the materials will be translated into English.