

Puerto Rican Colleges and Universities Respond to Hurricane Fiona

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- **Hurricane Fiona** hit Puerto Rico on September 18, 2022
- When Hurricane Fiona hit Puerto Rico, **most colleges and universities instated an academic recess**, and some are holding donations for disaster relief
- Puerto Rico faces a long recovery, and many people on the island are still without power

Background

Situated between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is well-acquainted with tropical storms and hurricanes. Hurricane Fiona hit the island of Puerto Rico on Sunday, September 18, 2022. President Biden has since declared a state of emergency on the island and ordered federal assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Guard.

Despite only being classified as a Category 1 hurricane at the time it hit Puerto Rico, Hurricane Fiona brought winds that reached 115 MPH and upwards of 20 inches of rainfall. The entire island of Puerto Rico was impacted in some capacity by the storm, but the southern portion of the island,

especially near the coast, experienced the brunt. Hurricane Fiona is not the first hurricane to devastate Puerto Rico in recent years. The island remains particularly vulnerable to storms like Hurricane Fiona because its infrastructure and economy are still recovering from past disasters. In 2017, Hurricane Irma, a Category 5 hurricane, hit Puerto Rico. Almost immediately after Irma, the Island was hit directly by a Category 4 hurricane, Hurricane Maria. Hurricane Fiona reached the island only two days short of the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Maria. The estimated several billion dollars' worth of damage caused by Hurricane Fiona, in conjunction with the ongoing relief efforts from Hurricanes Irma and Maria, means that Puerto Rico has a long journey toward rebuilding and recovery.

Higher Education Institutions Respond

When Hurricane Fiona hit Puerto Rico, most colleges and universities instated an academic recess. The cancelations began as early as September 16th, 2022 for institutions such as the **Conservatory of Music of Puerto Rico** and **Universidad and Central de Bayamon**. Most universities canceled classes and closed campuses between September 17th and the 20th, and many remained closed until at least September 22nd. Some institutions transferred classes to an online format until campuses reopened, while others such as **EDP University of Puerto Rico Inc-**

San Juan left the format of instruction up to individual professors. **Albizu University** and **Caribbean University- Bayamon** allowed essential personnel and administration to return to work early, while classes continued to stay on hold. Institutions like **University of Puerto Rico at Humacao**, **Universidad Politécnica**, and **Universidad del Sagrado Corazón** are organizing donation efforts for students that were impacted by the hurricane or for external disaster relief organizations.

While many of the institutions of higher education in Puerto Rico may play an important role in the larger-scale recovery from Fiona, it is important to note that many Puerto Ricans are still dealing with the immediate consequences of the storm. At the moment, schools are likely more focused on ensuring the well-being of their students, faculty, and facilities before moving on to larger recovery projects.

Finally, as we are writing this report much of Florida is dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Ian. It will be important in the weeks to come that the people of Puerto Rico are not forgotten. Fiona was a devastating hurricane that left much devastation in her wake, and many are still left without power, clean water, and access to basic services.

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*Institutional responses were found by reading through college and university websites.