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Holberton School plants a flag in Puerto Rico and bets on a new educational model

The academy specializing in software has already opened its online call to promote the new generation of technologists and Puerto Rican startups

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From the left: Holberton's co-founder, Sylvain Kalache; the director of the academy in Puerto Rico, Veronica Colón; and one of its main investors, Adam Beguelin. (Vanessa Serra Díaz)

Betting on a new model of education that frees students from the immediate payment of their tuition, the **Silicon Valley**

(https://www.elnuevodia.com/topicos/siliconvalley/)software development academy, **Holberton School**, plants a flag in Puerto Rico and seeks 150 students for its first generation of Puerto Rican technologists.

Focused on developing students in the area of low abstraction algorithms, augmented reality, machine learning or full-stack development, the new academy seeks to close the gap between the talent sought by technology companies and that offered by traditional universities on the island.

"I used to do many interviews when I worked in Silicon Valley and I realized that the candidates spent much of their lives studying, accumulating thousands of dollars in debt and really did not have the skills required to do the work," said software development and operation expert Sylvain Kalache.

After working almost a decade for companies like LinkedIn and SlideShare, he founded Holberton's first campus in San Francisco, California, in 2016.

By 2019, Holberton already had venues in New Haven, Connecticut and Tulsa, Oklahoma; in addition to Cali, Medellín, Bogotá and Baranquilla in Colombia; Tunisia, capital of the African country of the same name; and Beirut, in Lebanon.

This rapid expansion globally, Kalache said, is mainly due to the combination of high-demand skills, the two short years of the program and its innovative business model attract both recent high school graduates and adults who want to change careers or learn more about any of these technologies.

In fact, students in Holberton would not have to pay a penny to enter the academy.

Instead, through an Income Share Agreement, prospects commit to pay 17% of their monthly salary, only if it exceeds $2,500, for 42 months once they get a job.

In other words, when he graduates from Holberton, the student who gets a job in which he earns at least $30,000 a year, would end up paying just under $18,000 for his education after the required three and a half years. That number increases according to their salary, to reach a ceiling of $85,000.

To questions from Business about the economic sustainability of this model, investor

Adam Beguelin said that "we take this risk because we know that there are many companies on the island that need professionals with these skills."

"Rock Solid needs between 20 and 40 software developers. Charles (Fischer) of SAIFE (a company based in Tempe, Arizona) needs to hire seven artificial intelligence developers in Puerto Rico," emphasized Beguelin, who taught computer science at the renowned Carnegie Mellon University in Pennsylvania before founding several technology companies in the United States and moving to Puerto Rico in 2016.

That was echoed by Ángel Pérez, president of Rock Solid Technologies, one of the pioneers in software development on the island, when he said in writing that "it is increasingly difficult to get resources every day. The arrival of Holberton will cover a crucial need for our company."

No salons, no problems

In her first year and starting in June, then in September and January, the director of Holberton Puerto Rico, Veronica Colón, expects to receive up to 150 students in her new facilities in Santurce.

However, the 10,000-square-foot space in full remodeling lacks living rooms and desks. In fact, when it's ready in the summer, the academy will look more like a business accelerator like Parallel18, Business experienced through a virtual reality tour.

A huge room with comfortable seats and whiteboards that go from wall to wall will be exclusively for collaborative work. The cafeteria will be the meeting point for students of different classes, while the "Cube" will be a room to rest from the intensive academic curriculum.

In this collaborative model, the mentees help each other to meet the expectations of the program, without the need for teachers. However, students can connect with more than 130 mentors who are part of Holberton's network and work for technology giants such as Google, Uber and Apple.

"This program is for anyone who wants to develop their technology skills quickly. It doesn't matter how old they are or what their academic or professional background is," said Colón, who managed entrepreneurship

programs for Grupo Guayacán before taking over the reins of the software academy.

In total, Beguelin and his partner Ciryl Meduña, president of the firm Advent-Morro, have invested nearly $3 million to equate the San Juan campus with its counterparts around the world and serve as a hotbed of talent who could work in the startups that now grow in **Parallel18 (https://www.elnuevodia.com/topicos/parallel18/)**.

"This is one of the few industries where we can use Puerto Rican great talent to create companies with impact and global reach. That's why we now partner with Holberton School to establish a school that will provide a globally competitive programming curriculum," Meduña said in written expressions.