

March 9, 2017

Dr. Carmen Fernandez
President
Northern Marianas College
PO Box 501250
Saipan, MP 96950
Northern Mariana Islands

Dear Dr. Fernandez:

This letter serves as formal notification and official record of action taken concerning Northern Marianas College (NMC) by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) at its meeting February 15-17, 2017. This action was taken after consideration of the report of the review team that conducted the Special Visit to NMC November 30 – December 2, 2016. The Commission also reviewed the institutional report and exhibits submitted by NMC prior to the Special Visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you. Your comments were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations. The date of this action constitutes the effective date of the institution's new status with WSCUC.

Actions

1. Receive the Special Visit team report that focused on: operational integrity and sound business practices; appropriate institutional autonomy; sustainable executive leadership; and independence of the NMC governing board.
2. Schedule a Progress Report to be submitted by November 1, 2017 to address:
 - a. the institutionalization of a system to digitize and provide access to Board of Regents records and the availability of searchable board records on the NMC website;
 - b. the reporting in board meeting minutes of decisions made and actions taken by the board, including their rationale;
 - c. the status of legislation to make the Board of Regents nomination process mandatory;

- d. the Code of Conduct's discussion of issues pertaining to conflicts of commitment;
 - e. the status of goals and objectives mutually agreed to by the board and president;
 - f. the status of the Chief Executive Officer's contract term limits.
3. Continue with the previously scheduled reaffirmation review with the Offsite Review in fall 2019 and the Accreditation Visit in spring 2020.

Commendations

The Commission commends Northern Marianas College in particular for the following:

1. Its immediate and comprehensive response to the issues identified by WSCUC;
2. Candor in explaining the actions taken by the Board of Regents that framed the initial lines of inquiry for the Special Visit and, in response to those issues, revisions to the Board of Regents' record-keeping process;
3. The construction of a complete and evidence-based record of board appointments and the start of a digitization initiative to ensure that all board minutes are readily available to the public;
4. The newly developed Board of Regents nomination process;
5. A transparent process which led to the successful recruitment and hiring of its new president, who seems to have broad campus support;
6. The newly designed performance evaluation process for the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Recommendations:

The Commission identifies the following issues for further development:

1. NMC should pursue a broad institutionalized effort to assure the digitization of and access to records, particularly those reflecting Board of Regents appointments and length of terms, with specific dates of appointment and expiration. Furthermore, in order to facilitate increased ease of access and availability to the public, these digitized records should be in a searchable format on the NMC web site (CFR 1.7).
2. NMC should ensure that the Board of Regents meeting minutes not only memorialize decisions made and actions taken, but include the rationale for all decisions and actions to fully capture this information in the public record (CFR 1.7).
3. To ensure the institution operates with appropriate autonomy, NMC should actively pursue efforts to have the Board of Regents nomination process become an official statutory procedure through legislation passed by the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI) legislature (CFR 1.5).

4. The Board of Regents should consider expanding or supplementing the Code of Conduct (BOR Policy 1014) to address issues of conflict of commitment, i.e. cases in which board members may be perceived to have divided loyalty between the NMC Board of Regents and either other boards or their employment in other parts of the government (CFR 1.5, 3.6).
5. The goals and objectives of the president, as mutually agreed to by the Board of Regents and the president, should be strategic and long-term, as appropriate to the institution's purpose as a higher education institution (CFR 3.6, 3.9, 4.6).
6. The Board of Regents should reconsider the CEO's two-year contract limit beyond the CEO's initial contract, because of the potential effect on performance and implications for recruitment, hiring, and retention (CFR 1.7, 3.6).

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Northern Marianas College's governing board in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be posted in a readily accessible location on the Northern Marianas College website and widely distributed throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in these documents. The team report and the Commission's action letter will also be posted on the WSCUC website. If the institution wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WSCUC will post a link to that response on the WSCUC website.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that Northern Marianas College undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while contributing to public accountability, and we thank you for your continued support of this process. Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Petrisko
President

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Cc: William Ladusaw, Commission Chair
Brady Hammond, Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)
Michael Evangelista, Board Chair
Members of the Special Visit team
Maureen A Maloney, Vice President

