

Responses to the Requests of ACCJC Action Letter

A. Eligibility Requirement #5 Administrative Capacity: The institution has sufficient staff, with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support its mission and purpose.

The Northern Marianas College (the College) has made substantial progress in addressing this eligibility requirement since the issue was first raised as a material concern of the Commission in its October 16, 2006 letter to then Acting President Danny Wyatt.

The first challenge the College faced in addressing this concern was the identification and securing of the financial resources necessary to fill the positions the institution deemed necessary to fully address its need for adequate administrative capacity. It accomplished this, as detailed in the March 30, 2007 Progress Report, by realigning its organization structure to ensure greater efficiency and accountability in light of reduced resources and by seeking supplemental funding from the CNMI government (NMC Online Resource 1).

The second challenge the College has faced in addressing this concern is the difficulty it has in garnering the interest of qualified candidates to apply for vacancies at the institution.

Another challenge the College has had to overcome is the hiring freezes implemented by the CNMI government. The College was able to work with Governor Benigno R. Fitial and the 15th CNMI Legislature to exempt a number of positions deemed critical to the operations of the College.

The College takes this requirement seriously and has implemented measures to ensure that positions are filled in a timely manner. For example, positions are announced immediately upon notification that the post will be vacated so that there is a smooth transition and no gap in service. When positions vacate abruptly, we ensure that the productivity of the office continues in the interim via shared duties or hiring of limited term employees.

The College's progress toward compliance with Eligibility Requirement #5 is detailed below.

Dean of Academic Programs and Services

Mr. Danny Wyatt, Dean of Academic Programs and Services and the Accreditation Liaison Officer, was appointed Acting President on the departure of former President Antonio V. Deleon Guerrero. Subsequently, Dr. Debra Cabrera was appointed in October 2006 as Acting Dean of Academic Programs and Services and Acting Accreditation Liaison Officer. Mr. Wyatt vacated the Acting President position and returned to his position as Dean of Academic Programs and Services effective the date that President Fernandez commenced her term on May 7, 2007.

Accreditation Liaison Officer

Recognizing the importance and magnitude of issues the College faced in addressing various concerns relative to its accreditation and the level of effort such required, President Fernandez, in consultation with Dean Danny Wyatt and Dr. Debra Cabrera, relieved the Dean of Academic Programs and Services of the responsibility of also being the College's Accreditation Liaison Officer and appointed Dr. Debra T. Cabrera as the College's Accreditation Liaison Officer for the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) and the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (ACSCU) effective May 21, 2007. Dr. Cabrera was the chairperson of the College's Self Study Steering Committee and had been serving as the College's Acting Accreditation Liaison Officer during Mr. Wyatt's tenure as the Acting President.

Chief Accountant

The position was announced (VA-07-021) on January 26, 2007 and closed on February 9, 2007. Interviews were conducted during the week of March 12, 2007. Ms. Solita Barnes was selected as the College's Chief Accountant and assumed the related duties and responsibilities on April 2, 2007.

Human Resources Manager

The position was announced (VA-07-020) on January 26, 2007 and closed on February 9, 2007. Interviews were conducted during the week of April 2, 2007. Ms. Michele Joab was selected as the College's Human Resources Manager and assumed the related duties and responsibilities on June 20, 2007.

Director of Information and Learning Technology (Director of Information Technology)

Recruiting qualified candidates for technical positions such as this has proven to be a major challenge for the institution. This position was announced immediately on the departure of the former Director (VA-06-020) on January 5, 2006. It was revised on January 3, 2007 and again on February 21, 2007 to allow for a greater pool of candidates to apply for the position. Interviews of three candidates took place during the week of May 7, 2007. Mr. Adrian Atalig was selected as Director of Information Technology and assumed the post on July 23, 2007.

Director of Library Programs and Services

This position was announced immediately upon the departure of the former Director (VA-07-004) on October 27, 2006. The vacancy announcement was revised on January 3, 2007 and re-announced in an effort to attract more candidates. One candidate was certified as qualified for the position and an interview was conducted with the certified candidate during the week of January 8, 2007. The candidate did not accept the job offer and the position was re-announced on July 3, 2007 and recruitment is ongoing. The interview committee decided to recommend a previous applicant for the position. As of October 5, 2007, Human Resources has attempted to contact the applicant. The applicant has not yet responded.

Director of Admissions and Records

The College Planning, Budget and Evaluation Council (PBEC) reviewed the need for both an Admissions and Records Director and a Registrar in light of its current financial circumstances and organizational structure. PBEC ultimately recommended that both positions are critical and approved the recruitment of a Director of Admissions and Records. The position was announced (VA-07-029) on May 11, 2007 and was then re-announced on June 28, 2007. Interviews were conducted in early October. Ms. Cynthia Deleon Guerrero was selected and will assume the post on October 29, 2007.

Dean of Community Programs and Services

The position was opened on November 30, 2005 and closed on December 14, 2005 (VA-06-015). The position was frozen in FY 2006. President Fernandez requested at a PBEC meeting in July that the position be unfrozen. PBEC voted to approve this request. The College Council also voted to unfreeze the position. The position was filled by Ms. Felicitas Abraham on July 30, 2007.

Maintenance Manager

Human Resources received the recruitment request approved by the President and the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer (CFAO). The position will be announced in mid-October 2007.

Update on Other Critical Positions:

As documented in previous reports to WASC, the College has historically experienced a high rate of employee turnover. This was amplified over the last few years by changes in the CNMI Retirement System and the current economic difficulties in the CNMI. As a result of these and other factors, the following positions were vacated. A status report is provided below:

Academic Librarian

The position was vacated in October 2006 and was announced (VA-07-011) on November 27, 2006. Interviews for the position were conducted during the week of March 2, 2007. Mr. Van Rider was selected as the Academic Librarian and assumed the post on June 7, 2007.

Librarian (Curriculum Resources Center)

The position was vacated on December 7, 2006 and the recruitment process began (VA-07-007) on November 6, 2006. Interviews were conducted during the week of May 14, 2007. The interview committee recommended a candidate for the position and an offer was made. The candidate rejected the offer and the position was re-announced on July 7, 2007. Recruitment is ongoing.

Director of Counseling Programs and Services

The position was vacated on April 23, 2007. The position was immediately opened on April 26, 2007 (VA-07-025). The vacancy announcement was closed for application screening and interviews were conducted during the week of May 28, 2007. Mr. Leo Pangelinan assumed the position on July 30, 2007.

Registrar

The College's Registrar resigned on June 10, 2007. The College immediately began the recruitment process on May 17, 2007 (VA-07-030) which closed on May 31, 2007. We expected the position to be filled in June 2007 with the candidate that was recommended for the position. The Human Resources staff made several attempts to contact the individual but to no avail. It was decided that the position be re-announced August 6, 2007. Ms. Rosaline Cepeda was selected and will assume her duties on October 29, 2007.

Director of Institutional Effectiveness

Mr. Robert Churney resigned from the position effective July 27, 2007. The position was announced and advertised on June 29, 2007 (VA-07-038). Human Resources has received two applications, which are currently under review.

Program Coordinator, Rota

Mr. Adrian Atalig vacated this position to assume his duties and responsibilities as Director of Information Technology. Mr. Martin Mendiola now holds the position on a limited term basis.

B. Commission Recommendation 1: Northern Marianas College must take appropriate steps to insure that the delivery system used to provide instruction to Tinian and Rota is completely reliable and works at all times, or discontinue offering classes via telecommunications. The College must also detail how it intends to provide education services, including instruction and support services, that ensure the education obtained on the Tinian and Rota sites is equivalent of that obtained on the main campus and meets all accreditation requirements.

Suspension of Instruction for Academic Degree (B.S./A.A./A.S./A.A.S.) and Certificate (C.C./C.A.) Programs at Sites

The Northern Marianas College is committed to demonstrating that all instructional programs, regardless of location or means of delivery, address and meet the mission of the institution and uphold its integrity. The College, with the leadership of the new President, Dr. Fernandez, is committed to providing *equivalent* education throughout the CNMI that meets all accreditation standards. If equivalent programs and services do not exist at all locations and cannot be realized at this time because of existing financial constraints and other factors, then the College must take action to ensure that accreditation standards are met on the main campus and that the College does not offer academic programs and services at sites that fall below the standards established by WASC.

After careful and extensive dialogue on the meaning of "equivalent" and an analysis of data, the College has determined that it has not been providing education at the two sites that is equivalent to the Saipan campus, thus not meeting accreditation standards. In response, the College decided to suspend all instruction for academic degree and certificate programs at the Tinian and Rota sites beginning spring semester 2008. This decision impacts all academic degree and certificate course offerings delivered via distance education or on-site.

Decision Making Process on Action

Since ACCJC acted to place the College on probation in January 2007, the College has been working to address Commission Recommendation 1, as well as the identified team recommendations from ACCJC and ACSCU. The institutional governance bodies and other committees (Management Team/Deans and Directors, College Council, Academic Council, Staff Senate, and Faculty Senate) have met extensively to discuss what necessary actions the College must take to respond to the recommendation.

The President assigned members of the Management Team and other College personnel to focus on addressing Commission Recommendation 1. This group is referred to as the Tinian and Rota Instructional Sites Work Group, and is made up of the Management Team (President, Dean of Academic Programs and Services, Dean of Student Services, Dean of Community Programs and Services, Chief Financial and Administrative Officer, Director of Information Technology, Director of Institutional Advancement/Special

Assistant to the Board, Rota Program Coordinator, and Tinian Program Coordinator), Accreditation Liaison Officer, ASNMC President, Faculty Senate President, and Staff Senate President.

During lengthy discussions concerning the definition of "equivalent" and "equitable" programs and services, the Work Group reaffirmed the importance of meeting all accreditation standards at each site - Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. The College recognizes, as outlined in the 2006 Visiting Team's Evaluation Report, that for operations to continue, students at the instructional sites on Tinian and Rota must have timely and equitable access to both academic programs and student support services.

The College acknowledged in its self study report and during the team visit that instructional and student support services at both Tinian and Rota instructional sites are not equivalent to the Saipan campus. The College has since acted to continue to collect and analyze data on the quality and availability of programs and services at the sites. The President requested information and recommendations from Counseling Programs and Services, Library Programs and Services, Faculty Senate, Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and Associated Students of NMC, and each site Program Coordinator to identify which student support services are available on the Saipan campus but not available or are limited in scope at the two instructional sites. Recommended solutions were submitted as to how NMC may provide these "unavailable" or "limited in scope" student learning support services on an "equivalent" basis at the two instructional sites on Tinian and Rota, but the Work Group was not convinced that these recommended solutions would bring about equivalent programs and services at the two instructional sites within the current budgetary constraints.

The Work Group recognized that the overriding factor that limits the College in providing the same services to Rota and Tinian instructional sites is funding. Given its limited budget, the College remains uncertain about its fiscal and organizational ability to sustain both of these sites. Suggestions to provide "equivalent" services would place additional strain on an already overextended College budget and would affect the quality of education on not only the two instructional sites, but also on the Saipan campus. Unless there is an improvement in the CNMI economic condition, there is no indication that NMC will see an increase in its funding from its primary source, the CNMI government.

The Work Group also reviewed and analyzed data on the two instructional sites. The information included:

- Current and projected financial costs,
- Number of student graduates,
- Individual student academic profiles (credits completed, credits remaining),
- Student enrollment by major,
- Number of years the student has been enrolled in the program,
- Student satisfaction surveys, and
- Estimated time of completion.

The Work Group also reviewed enrollment trends (using headcount) for academic years 2000-2008 at the two instructional sites. The data confirmed that the enrollment trend has been decreasing and that the general decline began in AY 2003.

NMC-Tinian and NMC- Rota Enrollment by Term 2000-01 to 2007-08

Term	FALL		SPRING		SUMMER	
	Tinian Headcount	Rota Headcount	Tinian Headcount	Rota Headcount	Tinian Headcount	Rota Headcount
2000-2001	82					
2001-2002	68			61	17	
2002-2003	87			64	0	
2003-2004	72			93	0	
2004-2005	70			74	19	
2005-2006	48			59	0	
2006-2007	21			45	0	
2007-2008	38			21	0	
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Enrollment figures taken from Annual Reports and Enrollment Reports.

On September 25 and 26, 2007, President Fernandez and the Management Team attended a boardsmanship and leadership training led by Dr. E. Jan Kehoe, ACCJC Commission Chair, and Dr. Barbara Beno, ACCJC President. During this training, Drs. Beno and Kehoe clarified the definition of "equivalent" instructional programs and student support services as required by Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services. This clarification reaffirmed the Work Group's earlier discussions of equitable academic programs and student support services.

The College recognizes that to provide "equivalent" programs and services, the Tinian and Rota instructional sites must also have available all the programs and services that exist at the Saipan campus, and that all three sites must meet all accreditation standards. Even if the sites were to have limited academic program offerings, the student support services must be equivalent.

Following the WASC training, the President reconvened the Work Group to discuss the seriousness of the situation that NMC will face if it chooses to continue its academic course offerings at the sites. The College does not have the financial and human resources to provide equivalent educational opportunities at all three locations.

Concerns Raised by the Decision to Suspend

NMC's response to Commission Recommendation 1 has generated lengthy discussions on how to address numerous concerns raised by the decision to suspend. The greatest concern is centered on the needs of students who are currently enrolled at the two sites. The College must take the necessary steps to assist students who want to relocate to the Saipan campus to further their education. In addressing their needs, the College must also take into account the concerns raised by the families of students affected by this decision.

Another concern is the lack of a systematic study of Tinian and Rota's community needs, which are unique to each island. Further institutional planning necessitates a serious examination of their needs. Although the decision is to suspend academic degree and certificate programs and services, the College intends to continue offering other educational and community service opportunities to the islands through its Community Programs and Services division. The College intends to ensure that any services provided to Tinian and Rota will fully meet all accreditation requirements. A needs assessment study will enable the College, as mandated by our mission, to provide *quality* and *meaningful* educational opportunities to the people of Tinian and Rota as human and financial resources allow.

The College has already begun to address these major concerns with the following actions:

- A public information and public relations presentation was developed to inform the students, community leaders and the community as a whole of the College's decision to suspend academic degree and certificate programs beginning in Spring 2008.
- President Fernandez met with the Senators of Rota and Tinian on October 11, 2007. Although the officials were concerned regarding the suspension, they all agreed that we must maintain accreditation and work towards an educational strategic master plan that will evaluate and incorporate the future of Rota and Tinian sites. They also offered financial support to assist in the students' transition to the Saipan campus.
- President Fernandez, ASNMC President Ivan Mereb, and Counseling Programs and Services Director Leo Pangelinan traveled to Tinian on October 12-14, 2007 to discuss the decision with the Tinian students and families, NMC site faculty and staff, community leaders, and the community as a whole. The President has reported that the meetings went well. Many of the students present expressed an interest in transitioning to the Saipan campus. A working meeting with the students also took place.
- The Rota site meetings will be held on October 18-19, 2007.
- Arrangements have been made to discuss this decision with the Saipan community.

Continued Improvements in Telecommunication Services

Northern Marianas College Distance Education delivery system to provide instruction to Tinian and Rota instructional sites has included video-conferencing (VTC), Elluminate Live (an internet-based courseware), NMC Online (an online course management system) and Internet communications.

After the filing of the May 31, 2007 report, an update to the March 30, 2007 Progress Report, the following chronology of activities details what was completed by NMC to address the *first* part of Commission Recommendation 1:

- (1) The vacant Director of Information Technology position has been filled.
- (2) NMC VTC broadband capacity has been increased after the local telecommunications service provider, PTI, completed the cable upgrade.
- (3) The reliability of connectivity has been addressed after the damage to the underwater cable that links Saipan and Rota was repaired by PTI.
- (4) DE classroom technology at both instructional sites has been upgraded and both rooms are each equipped with a fax machine and a 3-way phone system for emergencies.
- (5) The Saipan campus has upgraded its fiber optic cable connections between all buildings and Building N, the server facility.

The actions detailed above have significantly improved the College's distance education delivery system. Connectivity is more reliable and the picture quality has improved in the distance education classrooms at all instructional sites. The College has recently begun to closely monitor the delivery system, and will continue to gather data from maintenance logs to assess reliability of connectivity.

In order to ensure consistency in course and program offerings, NMC has been in negotiations with the CNMI Public School System (PSS) to ensure that the College is meeting community needs. In addition, NMC offered the NU 108 Nursing Assistant Course over the summer. Eleven students from Rota completed the program through the assistance of the Rota Mayor's Office, which paid for the travel, housing and tuition costs to complete the course on Saipan. In addition, NMC is currently offering, in conjunction with the Public School System (PSS), a Related Services Technician (RST) certificate program utilizing multiple modes of delivery. Currently, RST courses are employing Elluminate Live, VTC instruction, NMC Online, as well as on-site instruction. This program will be completed in November 2007.

Due to the nature of the College's operations, the annual institutional budget is developed in two phases: the appropriations budget and the operations budget.

The appropriations budget addresses funding the College receives from the CNMI government which is provided primarily for personnel. This budget (College's appropriations request) is included in the Governor's budget submission for the CNMI government to the legislature, the timing of which coincides with the budget call from the CNMI Office of Management and Budget and usually occurs around December/January of each year.

The operations budget addresses funding that the College generates internally from tuition and fees, donations, indirect cost revenues and other sources, and which is used primarily for operations. The operations budget process usually begins immediately after the spring semester and is completed during the summer months.

Upon completion of the two budget phases noted above and the funding levels from the two sources are finalized, a consolidated budget document is compiled detailing the overall budget for the institution. The summary of the process followed for the development of the budget is provided below:

1. An Ad Hoc Committee comprised of college community members independent of PBEC is formed to review various documents such as the latest self study report, WASC correspondence, institutional strategic plan, presidential initiatives, etc. and develop a set of priorities which drive the budget for the ensuing financial year (NMC Online Resource 2)
2. A Budget Call memo is sent out from the President's Office along with a timeline for the development of the budget and a schedule of training (NMC Online Resource 3).
3. Budget documents are distributed to the college community, including the Tinian and Rota sites, and posted on the network for electronic access.
4. Training on the preparation of the budget, coordinated through the Finance and Budget office, is provided to the college community.
5. Budgets are submitted to divisional deans or the CFAO as per the timeline.
6. Departments and divisions devise their respective budgets and transmit their submissions to their respective dean for review.
7. The deans, on review and consultation with departmental heads/expenditure authorities, transmit the respective departmental budgets to the CFAO and the Budget Office.
8. The departmental budgets are then summarized and reformatted for consistency and presented to PBEC for review.

C. Commission Recommendation 2: The governing board of Northern Marianas College must undergo sufficient training in accreditation requirements of the ACCJC.

NMC's Board of Regents underwent further training in ACCJC accreditation requirements in September 2007. ACCJC President Dr. Barbara Beno and ACCJC Commission Chair Dr. E. Jan Kehoe conducted an accreditation and trusteeship workshop for the NMC Board of Regents on September 25, 2007. Six out of the seven members of the Board participated in the workshop. The Chair of the Board was not able to attend due to medical treatment she has been receiving in Hawaii. Honorary Board members, the Faculty Senate President and Associated Students of NMC (ASNMC) President, and the Management Team also attended this workshop with Board members. The workshop focused on three topics:

- 1) An introduction to accreditation and ACCJC,
- 2) The role of trustees in assuring quality and educational effectiveness, and
- 3) The role of the president in assuring quality and educational effectiveness.

The Management Team, ASNMC officers, and the Accreditation Liaison Officer also participated in a leadership workshop, "Communication and Leadership for Student Success," conducted by Drs. Beno and Kehoe on September 26, 2007. After this workshop, discussions focused on the requirements for evidence and data in the self-study, program review, and distance learning programs and quality assurance.