

DEC 11 2007

## PROGRESS VISIT REPORT

Northern Marianas College  
P.O. Box 501250  
Saipan, MP 96950

A Confidential Report Prepared for the Accrediting Commission  
For Community and Junior Colleges

This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited  
Northern Marianas College November 7-9, 2007

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# LAKE TAHOE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

## Office of the Superintendent/President

DATE: December 11, 2007

TO: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

FROM: Guy F. Lease, Ed.D., Team Chair

SUBJECT: Report of Interim Visit, Northern Marianas College, November 7-9, 2007

### Introduction:

At its meeting of January 10-12, 2007, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges acted to place Northern Marianas College on Probation and to require the college submit a Progress Report by March 30, 2007 and a second Progress Report by October 15, 2007. The latter report was to be followed by a visit of Commission representatives. On June 29, 2007 the ACCJC informed Northern Marianas College (NMC) that it had reviewed and accepted the March 30, 2007 Progress Report and decided to continue the College on Probation. A visit was conducted November 7-9, 2007 by an interim team of Guy Lease, Ed.D.; James Albanese, Ed.D.; Karen Graham, Ph.D.; and Steve Maradian, Ed.D. The purpose of the team visit was to validate the accuracy and responsiveness of the Progress Report prepared by the college dated October 15, 2007 and to determine if there has been improvement in the areas previously identified by the Commission, including evidence that the institution meets the eligibility requirements and standards of accreditation.

In general, the team found the Progress Report very responsive to the concerns of the Accrediting Commission and was able to validate the significant progress the College has made since the visiting team was on campus in October 2006. The college had prepared well for the visit by arranging for meetings with the individuals and groups agreed upon earlier with the team chair and by assembling appropriate documents in the meeting room used by the team. Over the course of the visit, team members met with the new president of the college, faculty and staff members, members of the Board of Regents, members of the legislature of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and the CNMI Governor. In every instance the team noted a new spirit of hope and optimism for the College. The new president began in May 2007 and in the past six months has used her boundless energy and direction from the Board of Regents to lead a college-wide effort for a successful reaffirmation of accreditation. She has worked with the college community to address the many vacancies that were cause for the concern that the College might not meet Eligibility Requirement 5 for adequate administrative capability. She arranged for additional training by Commission representatives for the Board of Regents in the area of accreditation and quality assurance. The Vice Speaker of the House of Representatives of the CNMI, the college management team, officers of the Associated Students

of Northern Marianas College and the Accreditation Liaison Officer also participated in this training. This training was followed by a leadership workshop for the Management Team, ASNMC officers and the Accreditation Liaison Officer. During the College's Annual Professional Development Days the College hosted a workshop on program and course assessment that has provided the College with a model on which to begin establishing and measuring Student Learning Outcomes for institutional effectiveness and improvement. Finally, under her leadership, the College has addressed the concern over the equivalency of the instruction and support services provided on the neighboring islands of Tinian and Rota by suspending credit courses on those islands pending a review of the feasibility of meeting accreditation standards at those sites.

The Progress Report and visit were expected to document improvement in the following areas:

- 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.
- B. Commission Recommendation 1: Northern Marianas College must take appropriate steps to ensure 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.
- C. Commission Recommendation 2: The governing board of Northern Marianas College must undergo sufficient training in accreditation requirements of the ACCJC.
- D. Recommendations of the 2006 Visiting Team
  - 1. The college should review existing planning processes in order to establish and implement a shared vision for the future of the college with agreed upon priorities that:
    - a. Develops and implements budgeting and resource allocations guided by institutional needs for human resources and services.
    - b. Includes the two centers on Tinian and Rota in the planning.
    - c. Integrates all aspects of planning, evaluation, and resources allocation
    - d. Is driven by college mission and goals
    - e. Relies on faculty and staff participation
    - f. Is well documented and widely distributed  
(Standards I.B.2., I.B.3., I.B.4., I.B.5., I.B.6., II.A.1., II.A.2., II.B.4., II.C., III.A., III.B., III.C., III.D., IV.A., IV.B., including various subsections)

2. The team recommends again that the college institutionalize a coordinated, systematic process for evaluating program effectiveness. This process should include definitions of learning outcomes for all programs, a determination of program relationships to labor markets, and objective measures of student performance, which can inform and guide decisions to improve programs. (Standards I.B.1., I.B.3., I.B.4, I.B.5, I.B.6, I.B.7., II.A.1., II.A.2., II.B.4., II.C., III.A., III.B., III.C., III.D., IV.A., IV.B.2.a., IV.B.2.b.)
3. The college should provide quality assurance for instructional programs at distant sites and instruction through distance modalities. If alternative means of delivering equitable access to quality instruction is not available when technology fails, the college should suspend distance education at remote centers until new connectivity is established. (Standards II.A.1.b., II.A.2., II.A.2.d., II.C.1., II.C.1.a., II.C.1.b.)
4. The team recommends the college complete the cycle of developing, measuring, analyzing, and discussing student learning outcomes, and acting on the findings, as part of a continuous effort of improvement. (Standards I.B.1., II.A.1.a., II.A.1.b., II.A.2., II.A.3., II.A.5., II.A.6., III.A.6., III.B.2.b., III.C.2., III.D.3., IV.A.5., IV.B.2.b.)
5. The team recommends the college implement the employee evaluation processes that are in place in a timely and formal manner in order to assure the effectiveness of its human resources and encourage improvement. (Standards II.A.2.a., III.A.1., III.D., IV.A.1., IV.A.4, IV.A.4., IV.B.)
6. The college should pursue funding to renovate or replace aging buildings with facilities that are appropriate to meet the current and future needs of the college. Standards III.B.1., III.B.1.a., III.B.1.b., III.B.2., III.B.2.a., III.B.2.b., III.D.1.a., III.D.1.b., III.D.1.c)



## COLLEGE RESPONSES TO THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENT

**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.

**Observations:** The visiting team met with the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer and the Human Resources Manager to review financial and personnel documents to determine the progress the College has made in filling vacant administrative positions since the 2006 Self Study. For the past several years the College has had to make significant cutbacks as a result of deep reductions in financial support from the CNMI Government. The 2006 visiting team and the Commission expressed concern that the institution did not have sufficient staff to provide the administrative services necessary to support the College's mission and purpose. As a result of Commission action expressed in a letter to the College President in January 2007, the College was able to secure additional funding to replace many of these critical positions. Thus by the fall of 2007, most positions once left vacant in order to balance expenditures to meet reduced funding levels have been filled or are currently in recruitment. Additionally, since the College submitted the October 15, 2007 Progress Report the Director of Library Programs and Services was filled.

The team was concerned about the financial ability of the College to sustain the newly filled positions. In an interview with the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer it was found the College has a commendable surplus of revenue over expenditures for the Fiscal Year ending September 30, 2007 (unaudited). In addition, the relocation of three off-campus leased facilities to the Saipan campus has resulted in significant annual savings to the College. The decision to suspend credit programs and services on the islands of Rota and Tinian will result in additional savings that will be used to ensure the College has the ability to sustain its current staffing in order to support its mission and purpose.

**Conclusion:** The College has made significant progress in increasing the sufficiency of staff with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support its mission and purposes and there is strong evidence that show the College will have sufficient ongoing financial resources to fund its increased staffing levels.

## COLLEGE RESPONSES TO THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

**Commission Recommendation 1:** Northern Marianas College must take appropriate steps to ensure 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.

**Observations:** The Board of Regents, acting on the recommendation of the president, has determined that educational and student support services at the Tinian and Rota sites are not equal to that on the Saipan campus and took action on October 8, 2007 to suspend offering credit courses at those sites, effective spring 2008 semester. This step was the result of the management team's understanding of Commission standards regarding off campus sites as well as an evaluation of services provided, the needs of the two sites, and the resources available to Northern Marianas College to ensure compliance. The College plans to evaluate the future of the two off-campus island sites as part of its overall strategic planning effort to begin later this year.

The management team met frequently throughout spring and summer 2007 to dialogue and understand issues of equivalency of both instruction and support services. The President assigned members of the Management Team and other College personnel to a Work Group to address Commission Recommendation 1. The Work Group reviewed and analyzed data on the two instructional sites including current and projected financial costs, the number of graduates, student enrollment by major and the recent decline in enrollment and concurrent out-migration of Tinian and Rota residents. The team determined that resources were lacking and that there is little confidence that new resources would become available to achieve equity in the range and scope of credit programs offered. This awareness was reinforced through participation in a Commission workshop in September 2007.

During interviews with management team members and in review of documents, it was learned that the College will continue to provide services to the smaller islands; however, no credit courses will be offered on Tinian and Rota. The College intends to continue to offer non-credit programs as needs arise.

**Conclusion:** The College, with this action, is in compliance with Commission standards and will integrate Tinian and Rota site needs within a comprehensive strategic planning process. That process will determine future activities at those sites mindful that the College must maintain compliance with Commission standards. Minutes of the Work Group meetings provide evidence that the Work Group recognizes that future efforts to provide "equivalent" services on the two island sites would place an additional strain on an already overextended College budget and would compromise the quality of the educational program on the College as a whole. At this time the College President and the Board of Regents appear to understand that there will be continuing political pressure to provide instructional and support services on Tinian and Rota; however, they also appear to understand that it will not be possible to meet accreditation

standards at all three locations given their budget constraints and the low numbers of students who are available to participate in College programs and services at the two smaller island sites.

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

**Observations:** In 2006 five new members of the Board of Regents were appointed by the Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. In July of that year an orientation for new members was scheduled though only two of the five new members were able to attend. In March 2007 a training session on Boardsmanship was presented by the Pacific Post-Secondary Education Council in Hawaii and two of the three members who missed the earlier training session attended. On September 25, 2007 the President of ACCJC, Dr. Barbara Beno, and the Commission Chair, Dr. E. Jan Kehoe conducted an accreditation and trusteeship workshop for the Northern Marianas College Board of Regents. Six of seven members of the Board participated in the workshop. The workshop focused on three topics:

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

**Conclusion:** The Board of Regents has responded to the recommendation of the ACCJC to undergo training in accreditation requirements. In particular the workshop presented by Drs. Beno and Kehoe was effective in clarifying the role of the Board of Regents in accreditation and assuring quality in college academic programs and services.



## COLLEGE RESPONSES TO THE TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The college should review existing planning processes in order to establish and implement a shared vision for the future of the college with agreed upon priorities that:
  - a. Develops and implements budgeting and resource allocations guided by institutional needs for human resources and services.
  - b. Includes the two centers on Tinian and Rota in the planning.
  - c. Integrates all aspects of planning, evaluation, and resources allocation
  - d. Is driven by college mission and goals
  - e. Relies on faculty and staff participation
  - f. Is well documented and widely distributed(Standards I.B.2., I.B.3., I.B.4., I.B.5., I.B.6., II.A.1., II.A.2., II.B.4., II.C., III.A., III.B., III.C., III.D., IV.A., IV.B., including various subsections)

**Observations:** The visiting team met with the College President and the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer and reviewed planning documents and meeting records. The College's budget process is extensive and appears to be driven by institutional priorities. The budgeting and planning processes are accomplished through the Planning, Budgeting and Evaluation Council (PBEC) which includes a wide representation of the College community. The decision to suspend credit instruction on Tinian and Rota certainly confirms that the planning and budgeting processes includes participation and consideration of the two centers. This process as well as the PBEC includes participation by members of the Tinian and Rota staffs. Planning has been difficult for the College due to financial uncertainties within the Commonwealth and the resulting vagaries of year-to-year support. Through it all the mission of the College which is detailed in the Commonwealth's Constitution remains central to planning and decision-making. There is evidence of faculty and staff participation as well as the distribution of information to the College community.

**Conclusion:** The evidence found and reviewed supported and validated the College's October 15, 2007 Progress Report response to Team Recommendation 1. The College has made significant progress in meeting the referenced accreditation standards of Team Recommendation 1.

2. The team recommends again that the college institutionalize a coordinated, systematic process for evaluating program effectiveness. This process should include definitions of learning outcomes for all programs, a determination of program relationships to labor markets, and objective measures of student performance, which can inform and guide decisions to improve programs.  
(Standards I.B.1., I.B.3., I.B.4., I.B.5., I.B.6., I.B.7., II.A.1., II.A.2., II.B.4., II.C., III.A., III.B., III.C., III.D., IV.A., IV.B.2.a., IV.B.2.b.)

**Observations:** Since the previous team's visit, Northern Marianas College has employed a permanent President who takes program review, institutional effectiveness, and student learning outcomes seriously and places high priority on institutionalizing a systematic approach which



will help guide decision-makers to improve the institution. The President arranged for a consultant from Guam Community College to present a workshop this summer on Program and Course Assessment. This workshop and the President's emphasis on the need for the College to respond to the Commission's requirement for Program Review led to the creation of the Program Review and Outcomes Assessment Committee (PROAC) to assure broad participation and develop the model by which (1) program review is implemented and (2) student learning outcomes are identified for program and course levels. PROAC was formed in the summer 2007 and has developed a model, which has as its foundation, the College's mission and the basis for meeting accreditation standards with respect to student learning. The College has determined to combine the long-standing requirement for program review with its model for the more recent requirement for student learning assessment.

Each program is responsible for student learning outcomes, assessment measures, data collection, and data analysis for the purpose of program effectiveness. During the visit, it was validated that approximately 80 percent of all programs and courses have completed the first phase of the model which the College identifies as "Memo 1." Memo 1 includes the mission, student learning outcomes, and means of assessment and success criteria. This provides three of the eventual five columns that will constitute the College's efforts in the area of Student Learning Outcomes. Through departmental dialogue Memo 1 is completed and submitted to the PROAC for review, evaluation, and feedback to the initiating department.

A review of documents, which includes meeting minutes and Memo 1 forms, indicated that student learning outcomes are somewhat limited in scope and depth and would benefit from greater clarity and definition at both the program and course levels. This is expected by the College to occur as the model is implemented and data assessed. At that point gaps in the identification of learning outcomes will emerge and be addressed through routine departmental discussions. The next column on the memo form will include the results of data collection. Finally, the fifth column will include data analysis and subsequent modifications. These columns will be completed by instructional and student service departments over the next two years.

It was also determined that the College includes Student Learning Outcomes and Program Review within the PROAC model; however, the College is relying on Student Learning Outcome data as Program Review. As part of the model, Form 2 is to include program review elements (enrollment, equipment, resources, viability): these remain in the concept stage. Form 2 data must inform decision makers within an integrated strategic planning process. At the time of the visit, Student Learning Outcome data are collected within the School of Education only; however, a schedule of implementation is posted throughout the campus as a reminder to the larger college community of this activity and its priority within the institution.

Program Review and effectiveness has been assigned a taxonomy based on the program's nature. Group A includes general education and degree programs. Group B includes certificate programs. Group C focuses on student and administrative services and Group D includes specially-funded programs and services. Progress regarding Student Learning Outcomes is evident in each group. One unintended benefit of the process is the College's ability to identify programs and courses which have not been offered for several years. It was stated that had the

College been engaged in program review and institutional effectiveness throughout the past decade, these would have been addressed already.

**Conclusion:** With the establishment of the Program Review and Outcomes Assessment Committee (PROAC) and the subsequent development of the Student Learning Outcomes Comprehensive Implementation Program (SLOCIP) the College has institutionalized assessment that is intended to focus and to sustain ongoing Program Review. To maintain this assessment momentum the College includes assessment responsibilities in all its job announcements and contracts. In addition, the College intends to provide ongoing training and support as part of the efforts to institutionalize the cycle of assessment. The visiting team was unable to document the success of this effort as the processes have just begun; however the team was encouraged by the enthusiasm, understanding and commitment of the new President, PROAC, faculty, staff and students to the process of ongoing assessment and Program Review. The decision to combine Program Review with Student Learning Outcomes poses some problems for future implementation as an ongoing Program Review process should be expected to consider a multitude of issues beyond those involved with the establishment, measurement and discussion of Student Learning Outcomes. It will take some time before the processes that have been developed this year culminate in documented Program Reviews and evolve into a comprehensive system of assessment and institutional improvement.

3. **The college should provide quality assurance for instructional programs at distant sites and instruction through distance modalities. If alternative means of delivering equitable access to quality instruction is not available when technology fails, the college should suspend distance education at remote centers until new connectivity is established. (Standards II.A.1.b., II.A.2., II.A.2.d., II.C.1., II.C.1.a., II.C.1.b.)**

Although the College has taken extensive steps to provide for a more reliable means of delivering educational and student support services from a distance, the decision to suspend credit instruction at Tinian and Rota appears to have rendered this recommendation moot. Please see the discussion of this issue in the portion of the report addressing Commission Recommendation #1.

4. **The team recommends the college complete the cycle of developing, measuring, analyzing, and discussing student learning outcomes, and acting on the findings, as part of a continuous effort of improvement. (Standards I.B.1., II.A.1.a., II.A.1.b., II.A.2., II.A.3., II.A.5., II.A.6., III.A.6., III.B.2.b., III.C.2., III.D.3., IV.A.5., IV.B.2.b.)**

The College has determined to combine the requirements for Program Review with its efforts to develop, measure, analyze and discuss Student Learning Outcomes as part of a continuous effort of improvement. The description of the findings of the visiting team are discussed in detail under Team Recommendation 2.



5. **The team recommends the college implement the employee evaluation processes that are in place in a timely and formal manner in order to assure the effectiveness of its human resources and encourage improvement. (Standards II.A.2.a., III.A.1., III.D., IV.A.1., IV.A.4, IV.A.4., IV.B.)**

**Observations:** The visiting team met with the Human Resources Manager and reviewed evaluation procedures and evaluation documents. As of the date of the October 15, 2007 Progress Report the number of employees whose evaluations had been completed and filed was 57 of 113 (113 is the number of positions that require an annual evaluation.) The College is continuing to implement its new evaluation model and as of the time the team visited the campus 83 of the 113 evaluations had been completed and were filed in the Human Resources department.

**Conclusion:** The College is on track with its new evaluation process and has made significant progress since the 2006 Self Study and visiting team report.

6. **The college should pursue funding to renovate or replace aging buildings with facilities that are appropriate to meet the current and future needs of the college. Standards III.B.1., III.B.1.a., III.B.1.b., III.B.2., III.B.2.a., III.B.2.b., III.D.1.a., III.D.1.b., III.D.1.c)**

**Observations:** At the time of the 2006 team visit, the team noted a campus with facilities that had been neglected for many years. The reasons were varied from severe financial limitations to a decision by the CNMI Government to require the College to purchase a largely vacated shopping center that was to become the new campus to dreams for a new campus that made the expenditure of precious financial resources on the old campus less of a priority. On this visit the team found a campus undergoing extensive renovation and construction. Members of the visiting team met with the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer and the acting Maintenance Manager, reviewed construction and maintenance documents and toured construction and renovation locations. The College has begun taking a systematic approach to renovating dilapidated and unused buildings through a series of varied financing methods:

- Working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other federal agencies to find funds to assist with renovation costs
- Establishing and improving the College's credit rating by reducing accounts receivable and improving cash flows to provide local funding sources
- Managing investments in a more productive manner
- Partnering with the CNMI Government agency for Public Works to pave campus roadways

In a meeting with the Governor of the CNMI, the Governor presented a long-range plan for the funding and construction of a new campus. The plan involves the sale of the current CNMI government facilities to an international developer, the relocation of the CNMI government facilities to the existing college site, and the subsequent construction of a new campus for the Northern Marianas College. The Governor expects the plan to become a reality within the next two to three years. In the meantime, the College is proceeding with needed facility renovation

and upgrading. The Public Works Department of the island has committed to paving the roadways on the campus that are not already paved. Finally, these renovation efforts have already enabled the College to relocate all of its programs from nearby leased space to the campus saving the College significant dollars in lease expenses.

**Conclusions:** The documents and visual evidence the College provided to the visiting team demonstrated the College's commitment to improving the look and utility of the existing buildings and signaled significant progress in response to Team Recommendation 5.