

**FOLLOW-UP AND SPECIAL VISIT REPORT
NORTHER MARIANAS COLLEGE
P.O. BOX 501250
Saipan, MP 96950**

**A confidential report prepared for
The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
Western Association of Schools and Colleges**

**This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that
Visited Northern Marianas College on
November 7-9, 2011**

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Northern Marianas College

Follow-up and Visit Report

Monday, November 7-Wednesday, November 9, 2011

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TEAM REPORT

November 7-9, 2011

Introduction and Overview:

Saipan, the northernmost major island of the Marianas archipelago is located approximately 130 miles north of Guam and 3200 miles west of Hawai'i in the western Pacific Ocean. Since the mid-1970's the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, of which Saipan is the capital, has maintained its relationship in political union with the United States of America. The covenant establishing this relationship was entered into as an agreement between two separate sovereign entities. However, qualified residents of the Northern Mariana Islands hold some U.S. citizenship rights. Contract labor particularly in the garment industry has been notable and problematic in the Commonwealth, and Commonwealth immigration laws have been superseded by the U.S. Congress since 2009 under provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act of the United States.

Saipan is the site of the main campus of the Northern Marianas College (NMC) (small outreach sites are maintained on Tinian and on Rota islands) which was founded in 1981 originally under the oversight of the Board of Education. In March 1985 NMC was re-established by law as a public corporation under the oversight of its own Board of Regents stipulating the mission and the designation of the college to serve as the land-grant college within the Commonwealth. The College received its initial accreditation from ACCJC in June 1985. In November 1985 the 2nd Constitutional Convention for CNMI adopted a constitutional amendment providing for the establishment of Northern Marianas College under an autonomous Board of Regents guaranteed annual funding and providing a mission statement that is explicit in the Constitution.

Northern Marianas College has experienced a convoluted accreditation history from January 2007 until the present. Developments in that time period include:

- January 2007, the Commission placed NMC on Probation status requiring a Progress Report by March 2007;
- June 2007, the Commission required NMC to submit a second Progress Report including a visit in October 2007;

Northern Marianas College Follow Up and Special Visit Report

- January 2008, the Commission placed NMC on Show Cause status and required the College to submit a Special Report by March 2008;
- June 2008 the Commission accepted the Special Report and continued the College on Show Cause status requiring another Special Report as of October 2008 to address the resolution of audit findings;
- January 2009 the Commission accepted the Special Report and continued the College on Show Cause status requiring another Show Cause Report due in April 2009 to be accompanied by a visit;
- June 2009 the Commission accepted the Show Cause report, removed NMC from Show Cause and reaffirmed the College's accreditation;
- October 2009 Northern Marianas College submitted a Mid-Term report that was accepted by the Commission in January 2010, however the College was informed that a Special Visit was scheduled for April 2010 to check on compliance with several Eligibility Requirements (#3, 4, 5, 21) as well as compliance with Standard I.A., III.A., IV.A., IV.B.
- January 12, 2010 the College placed its President on suspension and appointed an Interim President;
- April 12, 2010 the College dismissed the President one day prior to the scheduled visitation by Commission representatives;
- June 2010 the Commission placed the College on Show Cause status requiring a Show Cause Report due in October 2010 with a visit;
- January 2011 the Commission continued NMC on Show Cause and required a Show Cause report followed by a visit in March 2011.

On June 30, 2011 the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, at its June 8-10, 2011 meeting reviewed the Show Cause Report submitted by Northern Marianas College; the Special Visit report of the evaluation team which visited the college from April 13-14, 2011; the College Supplemental Report; and the College's testimony provided at the Commission meeting. The Accrediting Commission removed the College from Show Cause, imposed Probation, and required Northern Marianas College to submit a Follow-Up report by October 15, 2011 to be followed by a visit of Commission representatives.

The Commission's notification letter to the College dated June 30, 2011 described Probation as a status connoting "...that an institution deviates significantly from the Commission's eligibility criteria, Standards or policies..." and proceeded to describe the deficiencies. The College was directed to demonstrate its satisfaction of Eligibility Requirements 3,4,5,17 and 21 addressing issues of institutional autonomy, integrity of financial management and institutional governance and accountability. The foregoing Eligibility Requirements were subsumed by nine (9) separate recommendations and two Commission concerns that will be addressed in the remainder of this Team report. A key qualification drawn from the Commission letter is the requirement that the College effectively demonstrate that it "...has sustainably resolved the deficiencies" identified in the Recommendations and Concerns.

The Visiting Team included three members representing ACCJC and one member representing the Senior Commission (WASC) who was primarily responsible for visiting the School of Education which houses four Bachelor of Science programs. The Team interacted well together and all four members readily discussed all aspects of the NMC report and visit. The College assigned a Team Room that was very well stocked with most documents that were required by the Team. Additionally a staff member was assigned to the Team and he was very responsive to Team requests and needs. Moreover, the ALO provided expedited access to documents and school officials/faculty upon request. The Team felt welcomed and comfortable in the atmosphere that existed on this campus. The morale of faculty and staff were upbeat and hopeful of better times to come, as if a corner had been turned.

Results of the Special Visit:

Recommendation #1: To meet the Eligibility Requirement and Standards the governing board should exercise its authority to govern the college and protect the college from undue influence by the Commonwealth government including the government's ability to line-item dictate the college budget. The governing board should act autonomously to govern the college free from indirect interference by Commonwealth governor or members of the legislature; this will defend the college from the vagaries of changes in political power. (ER 3, Standard IV.B.1.a, IV.B.1.c)

Observations and Evidence:

The College has taken actions to ensure that it has autonomy from the Commonwealth government. As noted in the report and verified by the visit, the Board enacted a resolution affirming its autonomy (BOR Resolution 2011-03). Since the arrival of the new President, Dr. Sharon Hart, the College has met regularly with members of the legislature and their staff. These meetings have been focused on acquiring necessary support for federal grants and to assure the autonomy of the College. The current Commonwealth budget acknowledged the President as the authority for College expenditures. Although the Commonwealth retains authority regarding the overall appropriation to the College, it does not have line item or staffing control. In regard to budget reductions, the College retains control of implementation. The visiting team has reviewed the documentation that the faculty/staff positions that had been identified as having been line-item vetoed were in fact filled. On a local basis, the College has established a Legislative Activity Task Force to monitor legislative activity that could have an impact on the College.

Among the changes in Board practices the Team has noticed there is a renewed focus on the policy and oversight role of the Board. This is reflected in both Board Policy and observed

actions by the Board. All Board members have received formal orientation. Additionally the Board has secured additional consulting assistance as discussed in Recommendation #4. The Board also passed a new policy (BOR-Policy 906) that emphasized integrity and ethics. Finally, the frequency of Board meetings has increased to monthly as the Board has embarked on a thorough revision of its policies in tandem with the new President to clearly define the boundaries between Board oversight and administrative operational responsibilities.

Conclusion:

The College and its Board of Regents meets the concerns addressed in the recommendation.

Recommendation #2: To meet the Eligibility Requirement, the team recommends that the college ensure that Commission policies are followed at all times and that the institution respond to Commission requests truthfully and accurately. (ER 21)

Observations and Evidence:

The College has taken steps to comply with ER21. This is reflected in several actions by the College. The Board of Regents took action to sanction the prior interim President. She was required to send letters of apology to the College Community, the Board of Regents, and the Commission. The team was able to secure copies of the first two apologies, but was unable to acquire the apology to the Commission. In her inaugural address, the President focused on the need for more effective communication. It clarified the role of the Board, Shared Governance, and Accreditation. The Board has identified its administrative regulations as an issue to be developed.

During the visit, it was evident that the College has a significantly increased sensitivity to the importance of Accreditation and ER21. As an example, the Board President was very cautious in media interviews related to the team's visit. Although there was a community awareness of the team's presence on the island, the team had minimal media contact; and that occurred during the BOR meeting on the last day of the visit.

Conclusion:

The College has met the recommendation.

Recommendation #3: To meet the Eligibility Requirement and Standard, the team recommends that the college integrate financial planning with institutional planning and ensure that fiscal resources are adequate to support student learning programs and institutional effectiveness so that financial stability is maintained. (ER 17, Standard III.D.1.a)

Observations and Evidence:

The College has made increased efforts to integrate financial planning with institutional planning. However, the results to date have yielded mixed results. Although the College initiated a new Strategic Planning Process prior to the arrival of the new President, it has been integrated into her initiatives. The new President developed a “White Paper” (*Critical Budget Decisions for FY 2012 and Beyond*) that emphasized the response to be used in Budget Development particularly in times of austerity. It focused on College goals as defined in the strategic plan. Moreover, the President outlined a five-step process emphasizing assets and resource development by encouraging inquisitive challenges to established paradigms. In the process she has signaled her campus to consider new approaches to developing assets and resources by promoting entrepreneurialism, outsourcing of needed services, upgrade and digitization of the student information system, and the appropriate ratio of administrative posts in combination with the mix of part-time to full time faculty/staff positions.

The College has also developed a new planning process (PROAC – Planning, Program Review, Outcomes, and Assessment Committee) and new procedures (FORM 3) to better inform the

budgeting and resource allocation decisions. In conjunction with this process, a technique identified as IMD (Improve/Maintain/Decrease) was adopted so that resource requests could be ranked. The PROAC worked in conjunction with the Budget and Finance Committee (BAFC). The BAFC was advisory to the President and the Management Team with specific responsibilities to advise on all financial issues including the budget and allocations to the departments. The BAFC developed a process to quantify the IMD process so that recommended allocations could be made in the budget. In the report submitted to the Commission, the BAFC was identified as an integral component to the budget planning process.

During the visit the President indicated that the role and function of the BAFC would be changing. In recent history, this committee has played a significant and direct role in resource allocation decisions. Interviews with the BAFC committee identified that the *Austerity Friday* (furlough day) decision was made by the committee (resulting in an effective 10% salary cut). The effective impact of the *Austerity Friday* decision was on non-faculty employees as classes do not meet on Fridays. Faculty will have a reduced load in the Spring (12 units rather than the normal 15) although they will have access to overload assignments. The President had identified an interest in increasing the decision making role of managers in the budgeting process. As such it was anticipated that the role of the BAFC would be modified. However in the exit interview with the President, she stated that she had dissolved the BAFC that morning. It did appear that the BAFC had an inordinate level of authority in budget decisions and that an adjustment of the charge of the BAFC would be appropriate. Moreover BAFC's role in the decision to implement across the board cuts in a time of apparent fiscal constraint was out of step with the President's principles for seeking targeted cuts in lieu of the easy across the board cuts such as *Austerity Fridays*. However with the removal of the Committee, it would appear that there is a gap in the governance process of the College.

The President advised the team that the entire governance structure of the College was under review by a Government Review Task Force (GRTF) that had been organized and mandated among other tasks to reconsider the role of the BAFC. The BAFC did express a concern that the changes contemplated would shift it out of the budget sequence and limit participation in the budget process by a broad spectrum of the College community. The committee indicated a concern that all decisions would be made by a Management Team which admittedly does include representation by faculty, staff and student leaders. These committee concerns were validated by the President's action to dissolve the committee. It was unclear whether there had been any review by the GRTF related to this action. The President also advised the team that the dissolution was a specific action to increase the control over the budget process by the Management Team.

Conclusion:

The College partially meets the recommendation insofar as the new President's White Paper on budget decisions provides clear principles for budgeting decisions while invoking a participatory process, the financial stability of the College is unclear. Moreover the program review and budget planning nexus has become uncertain with the dissolution of the BAFC.

Recommendation #4: To meet the Eligibility Requirement and Standards, the team recommends that the college assure the financial integrity and responsible use of its financial resources and ensure that the financial management system has appropriate control mechanisms and widely disseminates dependable and timely information for sound financial decision-making. The College must also correct noted audit findings. (ER 18, Standard III.D.2, III.D.2.a, III.D.2.d, III.D.2.e)

Observations and Evidence:

The College has implemented changes to its financial information system. It uses the FASGOV system for management control and inventories. Although there have been some historical issues with financial reporting, new procedures have been implemented and the financial information system is functioning. From the perspective of financial reporting, the College has an acceptable system. The most recent audits support this conclusion as the College has had an unqualified audit with no material weaknesses.

However there are issues with internal financial control. The two most recent audits of internal control and compliance have resulted in qualified findings with material weaknesses and

significant deficiencies. The College has taken corrective action on these findings. Unfortunately internal control deficiencies continue to occur. Many of these deficiencies occur within the College's various grant programs.

Additionally the Team ascertained during the visit that approximately \$1.5 million of funds had been identified that had been previously unknown. If these funds had been identified earlier, the *Austerity Friday* could have been unnecessary. At this point, these funds will be utilized to compensate for potential future reductions in CNMI funding.

The internal control issue and the discovery of unknown funds point to a weakness in the financial management system that limit the College's ability to make sound financial decisions. Information from the system is neither dependable nor timely. The audits attest to the accuracy of the financial information system. However it appears that there are more systemic issues with financial management. One issue is an apparent disconnect between the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer and members of the financial staff. The Team determined that the CFAO is engaged under a limited term appointment and a search for a permanent replacement is currently underway. However the operations and budget components of the financial services unit do not appear to interact thus explaining the previously mentioned discovery of the \$1.5 million of available funds that could have been available to either avert or modulate the ostensible fiscal crisis. Additionally, the manager for the Cooperative Research Extension and Education Services (CREES- the special land grant program of the College), has a high degree of autonomy, both in the approval and disbursement of funds. This level of autonomy on one hand and insufficient oversight by the financial management unit on the other hand seems to be at the root of the internal control deficiencies. It is clear that a better organization is necessary for financial services at the College.

The College has increased its oversight of financial management. It was noted and verified that the College Utilizes a Budget Progress Report to assure that expenditures are in line with appropriations. Prior to the visit, the BAFC monitored the Budget Progress Reports. This analysis was forwarded to the budget office which then forwarded them to the operational units. The committee had reviewed the reports but did not take specific actions on them. With the dissolution of the BAFC, it is unclear what monitoring activity will occur.

The overall institutional budget remains a challenge for the College. It is faced with a potential reduction of funding from the Commonwealth. The College has initiated actions to anticipate the impact of a reduction, but neither the amount nor timing is certain at this time. The College is currently involved in pre-planning for this shortfall and expects to have developed a College plan in the coming month. The unexpected discovery of \$1.5 million noted earlier has the potential to minimize impact. The President's *White Paper* sets a direction for how reductions may be made. She had resisted a uniform reduction like the *Austerity Friday*, however it had already been implemented before her term in office began. Instead her predilection is to identify resources that can be shifted so that reductions are more targeted.

Conclusion:

The College has partially met this recommendation but it must quickly recruit a Chief Financial and Administrative Officer, moreover it must re-define the nexus between budgeting and operations in the aftermath of the dissolution of BAFC.

The Team makes the following **Supplemental Recommendation #1**:

In order to meet standards the Team recommends that the College expeditiously recruits a permanent Chief Financial and Administrative Officer while it formally reviews and specifies a process to monitor the Budget Progress Reports as part of a collegial system of financial management control mechanisms. (Standard III.D.2.; III. D.2.d.; IV.A.2.a.)

Recommendation # 5

To meet the Eligibility Requirement and Standard, the team recommends that the governing board immediately initiate a search and hire a qualified chief executive officer (CEO) and ensure that the CEO has full-time responsibility to the institution and possesses the requisite authority to administer board policies. (ER 4, Standard IV.B.1.j)

Observations and Evidence:

At its December 17, 2010 Special meeting, the BOR voted to extend the Presidential search process by re-announcing the vacancy for the President's position, forming a new Presidential

Northern Marianas College Follow Up and Special Visit Report

Search committee. The committee was tasked with working with the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) in reviewing and evaluating all applications submitted. The Board recognizes that the President has full-time responsibility to the institution and adopted a revision to BOR policy #1002, 12/23/2010, which limits Board authority by delegating all administrative duties to the NMC President. The committee began their interviews in spring 2011; negotiations ensued with Dr. Sharon Hart in April 2011. An offer was made and accepted in May 2011 and Dr. Hart arrived within the Commonwealth on July 8, 2011. The board has a documented 2-year contract with Dr. Hart covering remuneration, re-location expenses, a housing allowance and provisions for an annual performance evaluation among other provisions. Two-year contracts are the norm for all employees of Northern Marianas College. The Team observed a Board of Regents meeting on November 9, 2011 and noted that the Board had delegated full administrative authority for the college to the president. Dr. Hart does not serve as the chair of the governing board. (ER4, IV.B.1.j)

The Board Chair noted in a separate interview that there is an evaluation appraisal of the performance of the President, based on criteria agreed upon with the President, and that the board would discuss the timeframe at their next monthly board meeting. He provided copies of the last evaluation of the Interim President in July 2011, as well as her self evaluation. (IV.B.1.j)

Additional resolutions that support the hiring process:

- Resolution #2010-03, 12/22/2010, by the BOR Relative to the Hiring of a new President for the Northern Marianas College – adopted procedures to guide the selection process.
- Resolution #2011-03, 6/6/2011, by the BOR A Resolution Affirming the Autonomy of the Northern Marianas College – stating that NMC is a fully autonomous agency under the CNMI constitution.

Dr. Hart has 30 years experience in higher education. She most recently served as the Deputy President of the University College of the Caribbean in Kingston, Jamaica. She also served as President of the North Dakota State College of Science from 2000-2006, and prior to that, President of Middlesex Community College from 1997-2000. Dr. Hart was Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Services from 1996-1997 at Northcentral Technical College and the Administrative Dean at the Madison Area Technical College from 1990-1996.

The team met with the college Management Team and they have indicated she has approached her duties with alacrity, working on several areas at once. Dr. Hart is taking or has taken the following actions:

- Reviewing all board policies and separating procedure from policy and having the board revisit all policies that had been approved. She will be introducing a different peer college report each month (based upon peers identified by the National Council for Higher Education Management) to the Board and her Management team to be able to benchmark where the college needs to be, and to make decisions that are data driven.
- Re-doing the college budget report that was accepted by the Board (from the Interim President) prior to her start date, and will be introducing a new budget for approval in

Northern Marianas College Follow Up and Special Visit Report

- December utilizing the collaborative information gathered from Form 3,
- Working closely with the Director of Institutional Advancement as she has assigned him to be the Legislative Liaison, assigned to monitor the developments in the Legislature related to the college.
 - Collaborated with CNMI Legislators to introduce Senate Resolution No. 17-71 “Supporting the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Island’s (CNMI) application for membership in the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE),”
 - Directing the Board of Regents to work with the House and Senate and has set up quarterly appointments to meet with the Legislature,
 - Working with the Legislature to amend the CNMI Constitution to separate out the purpose of the college from the mission of the college, giving the college control of their mission statement.

From her management team:

The transition has been a joy and a struggle as it is with working with a new leader. Our president has hit the ground running and has moved the college. We are moving beyond and thinking outside of the box. She delegates well and gives us opportunities to exercise our leadership and management abilities. She exercises tremendous tact and is a driving force in moving the college beyond worrying about our accreditation deficiencies.

She has continued to calm our anxiety over our accreditation problems. She has given us a new direction and provides direction. She has talked about bringing the community and legislature in, which is monumental for the college.

Conclusion:

The College meets this recommendation with the hire of a qualified chief executive officer who has full-time responsibility to the college and the requisite authority to lead.

Recommendation # 6

To meet the Eligibility Requirement and Standards, the team recommends that the college ensure that the administrative staff of the college has the appropriate preparation and experience to provide administrative services; this includes the college chief executive. The governing board should delegate the authority to college administration to operate the college and hold the administration accountable for institutional effectiveness and for adhering to adopted policies and governance processes. (ER 5, Standards III.A.3.a, IV.B.1.j, IV.B.2.a, IV.B.2.b, IV.B.2.c, IV.B.2.d, IV.B.2.e)

Observations and Evidence:

NMC has made substantial progress in addressing this Eligibility Requirement. After a period of instability, the college can point to numerous key administrators who have been in their positions for over a year. All permanent Administrative positions are competitive and follow an approved, written, employment process (III.A.3.a). Each administrative staff has a two year contract and an annual evaluation by the President.

The Board of Regents is specifically charged with selecting a President for the college as per Section 2(a) of Article XV of the Commonwealth Constitution, “The president of the college shall be appointed by a representative board of regents.” Board Policy 1002 limits Board authority by delegating all administrative duties to the President. (IV.B.1.j).

In the four months that she has been at the college, Dr. Hart has evaluated the multiple governance bodies of the college and has put forth a *White Paper*, “Critical Budget Decisions for FY 2012 and Beyond” and “Hart Presidential Goals for FY 2012” on how she will develop her organizational structure and delegate responsibilities to her administrators. (IV.B.2.a) The President’s planning efforts are being guided and integrated into the ongoing dialogue about planning and resource allocation. She has observed the participatory governance structure and has chosen to continue the PROAC Program Review procedures that have guided the college for the past 3 cycles. The President ensures the evaluation and planning rely on high quality research through the efforts of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, the department primarily responsible for evaluating and monitoring institutional data. Resource planning is tied to educational planning with the recent completion of Form 3. Form 3 facilitated a process by which planning and program review informed budgeting and resource allocation decisions for FY2012. As a result of this collaborative process, budget decisions were informed and reflected in the funding levels for FY2012. All programs have been directed to complete program-level operational plans using an Operational Plan Template tied to the Hart FY 2012 goals (Improve student success, Optimize financial resources, Enhance information technology, Focus on Commonwealth workforce development needs, Accomplish other distinctive objectives in an environment of continuous quality improvement) that were approved by the president and the BOR. The President will evaluate members of the Management Team against performance goals identified in action plans of programs under their respective supervision. (IV.B.2.b, IV.B.2.c, IV.B.2.d, IV.B.2.e).

Northern Marianas College Follow Up and Special Visit Report

The Team met with the Human Resources Manager to review personnel documents to determine the progress the College has made in recruitment for administrative positions. The following Administrative Staff are filled by regular, full-time administrators:

- President filled effective July 2011.
- Dean, Academic Programs and Services, filled, effective May 2010.
- Dean, Student Services, filled, effective January 2010.
- Director, Office of Institutional Effectiveness, filled July 2009.
- Director, Office of Institutional Advancement , filled effective February 2009
- Manager, Human Resources, filled effective October 2010

The CFAO is filled on a limited term appointment that will expire in May 2012.

- Chief Financial and Administrative Officer filled effective May 2011.

The following positions are filled in an acting capacity and are currently under recruitment:

- Dean, COMPASS – incumbent is Acting Dean, effective September 2010, position is pending recruitment as of 11/3/11.
- Director, School of Education – incumbent is Acting Director; position is pending recruitment as of 11/3/11. Former Director resigned in July 2011.
- Director, Information Technology – position was under recruitment until May 2011 when the position was offered and declined. Acting Director in place since June 2011.

Conclusion:

The permanent staff has the qualifications and the College has received the necessary funding to allow the College to retain the administrative capacity to meet Eligibility Requirement 5. The three positions under recruitment and the CFAO recruitment are proceeding according to the written policies of the college and the commonwealth. The size of the administrative staff is appropriate to meet the needs of the Northern Marianas College with a current student population of 1200. (ER5, IV.B.2.a), NMC has met this recommendation by hiring an experienced and committed President, delegating authority to her, and holding her responsible and accountable with annual evaluations.

Recommendation # 7

To fully meet the Standards, the team recommends that the college restore ongoing, collegial, self-reflecting dialogue about the continuous improvement of institutional processes. The college should provide evidence that planning is broad based and offers opportunities for input by appropriate constituencies. (Standards I.B.4, I.B.6)

Observations and Evidence:

College planning is detailed in the 2008 Institutional Excellence Guide and is implemented through a number of campus-wide governance bodies, standing committees and working groups: Management Team (consists of administrative deans and directors), PROAC (Planning, Program Review Outcomes and Assessment Committee), BAFC* (Budget and Finance Committee) , Academic Council, Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, and ASNMC (Associated Students of Northern Marianas College). Several task force groups were convened in the last year – the Strategic Planning Task Force (college wide) and the ART (Accreditation Reaffirmation Team with 66 members). All meetings are open to any member of the campus community interested in attending.

The team sat in on several meetings. At faculty meetings and committee meetings, discussion was ongoing, collegial and respectful of all points of view, as well as analytical and focused on planning and continuous improvement. The committee structure provides opportunities at various levels for substantive and sustained input from all constituencies, faculty, staff, administrators, and students. In individual meetings with department chairs and faculty members, it was clear that they understood the planning and budget process, the evaluation and assessment processes, such as prioritization of programs and program review, and they were actively engaged in these processes. (I.B.4)

The PROAC has led the discussion on Program Reviews for the last three cycles (starting in 2008) and the college is now on cycle four and is moving forward with its commitment to link planning, program review, and resource allocation. PROAC has documented its progress and the college has adopted a timeline and program review (Form 3) template. Resource planning is tied to educational planning with the recent completion of Form 3. Form 3 facilitated a process by which planning and program review informed budgeting and resource allocation decisions through open dialogue with the Management Team, PROAC, and BAFC. Programs were scored according to rubrics and were separated into Increase – Maintain – Decrease (IMD) categories. As a result of the accountability measures, one program's funding was automatically decreased. IMD recommendations were reviewed and discussed in a meeting open to the college community. Based on the result of this collaborative process, resource allocations are being modified in December for FY 2012. (I.B.6)

The team questioned several Deans and Directors about planning and the institutional process. The team heard firsthand about a recent example of a collaborative process. In July, several International Students and other contract workers who are not CNMI residents brought forward a concern that those with a valid CNMI Umbrella permit would not be able to complete the

semester as the US-imposed changes in the Federal immigration permit would effectively change their status to undocumented effective November 27, 2011. An idea was raised to shorten the semester to allow the fall semester students to register (many had expressed the intent to NOT register and 3 faculty were affected). Discussions were led by the Dean of Student Services and involved the President, Admissions, Records, Financial Aid, Academic Programs and Services, the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer, Human Resources, and Faculty Senate to review contact hours and expand some classes by as much as 25 minutes per meeting session, as well as adjust syllabi to meet the new timeframe. The Dean of Students also met with the USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) office to confer on the best approach before the college shortened the semester by three weeks. Minutes of meetings and updates to the president confirm the collaborative approach utilized. (I.B.4) This was a temporary solution for only this fall semester and the normal semester timeframe will resume for spring 2012. Faculty spoke in support of this one-time-only altered schedule, but understood that the regular semesters resumed for spring.

Conclusion:

The college has a well-established planning process that is broad based and tied to resource allocation. The college openly communicates with all factions and welcomes feedback in all areas. The college continually assesses its cycles of evaluation and has clearly documented and communicated their data and evidence to all constituencies. The president plans to develop a peer comparison analysis, using institutions matched to NMC by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), to contextualize the college's data and benchmark that data against that of comparable peer institutions that will serve to further improve the institution. This recommendation has been met and processes put in place to ensure continuing collegial dialog.

*BAFC has been dissolved effective November 2011 by decision of the President.

Recommendation # 8

To meet the Standard, the team recommends that the college ensure that faculty distinguish between personal conviction and professional views and that information is presented fairly and objectively. (Standard II.A.7.a)

Observations and Evidence:

BOR Policies on academic freedom and responsibility and ethics make clear the institution's commitment to the free pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. In upholding the highest standards of professional faculty discipline, BOR Policy 3001 "Professional Ethics" states, "Faculty shall be guided by a deep conviction of the worth and dignity of the advancement of knowledge. In recognizing a special responsibility to their disciplines to seek the truth and to state it as they see it, they practice intellectual honesty." The policy further states, "When [faculty] speak or act as private persons, they avoid giving any impression that they speak or act for the College."

BOR Policy 3004, "Academic Freedom and Responsibility" has a statement that is also published as part of the College's website:

Instructors at the College are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject. However, they should strive to be sensitive to the prevailing thought and feeling of the community when introducing subjects that may be controversial. Faculty should also take care to distinguish between personal conviction and proven conclusions and to present relevant data fairly and objectively. (II.A.7)

There are 29 Instructional faculty and all are on two year renewable contracts without tenure. Each faculty member is given the statement of Professional Ethics (College Procedure 4069 and Board Policy 3001) and Academic Freedom and Responsibility (Board Policy 3004) at the beginning of each academic year.

Interviews with the Faculty Senate President and the Dean of Academic Programs and Services confirm that there have been faculty professional development sessions in August 2010, February 2011, and August 2011. These sessions were designed to engage the faculty in open discussion and to guide group discussion about appropriate and professional behavior. Faculty report favorably concerning these sessions. In addition, changes were made to the evaluation form starting from spring 2011 to gather data for use for professional growth or discipline as needed.

The most recent Professional Development Days were held August 8-12, 2011. Workshops offered to specifically address this recommendation include a discussion of "Recommendation #8" on Tuesday, August 9 from 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm; a workshop on "101 Teaching Styles" on Thursday, August 11 from 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm. Both sessions were mandatory for faculty, counselors, and administrative managers. The sign in sheet indicate that 27 attended the August 9 session. The group engaged in small groups and then discussed the following:

Northern Marianas College Follow Up and Special Visit Report

- 1) How do you distinguish between personal conviction and professional view?
- 2) In what ways have you been given academic freedom? In what ways have you felt that this freedom has been restricted?
- 3) Identify ways in which you feel that academic freedom has been used? How do you introduce or respond to controversial issues?
- 4) To what extent do you answer students' questions in class in which they ask you to respond to a personal opinion? Explain how you feel relative to the freedom to give your personal opinion in class.
- 5) How does an educator teach moral development and self-esteem without offending people from various cultures and styles of life? How do you present these options?

An additional 3-page sheet was used as a dramatization of a 'worst case' scenario classroom. "College Teaching Behaviors Inventory" presented inappropriate/discretionary/appropriate behaviors according to varying situations and served as a prompt for discussions with the attendees. Professional Development Days will continue twice a semester. (II.A.7.c)

Questions that were added to the student evaluations effective spring 2011 by the Academic Council, after conferring with the Dean of Academic Programs and Services and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness were:

- The instructor presented the information fairly and objectively.
- The instructor spent class time on issues or topics related to the course.
- The instructor promoted thoughtful discussion based on course material and not personal opinion.

These new questions are posed to every student in every course. Data results show 627 students submitted their spring 2011 evaluation. Of those that filled out the evaluation:

The instructor presented the information fairly and objectively.

57 percent (355) strongly agree and 36 percent (225) agree. 1 percent (8) of the respondents strongly disagrees and 2 percent (12) disagree.

The instructor spent class time on issues or topics related to the course.

58 percent (363) strongly agreed with this statement and 35 percent (220) agree. 1 percent (9) of the respondents strongly disagrees and 2 percent (11) disagree.

The instructor promoted thoughtful discussion based on course material and not personal opinion.

55 percent (344) strongly agree with this statement and 36 percent (225) agree. 2 percent (12) of the respondents strongly disagree and 2 percent (12) disagree).

On Oct 7, 2011, an email blast was sent out to all NMC students and is posted on the college website as of 11/8/11. Thirty two questions are listed.

Northern Marianas College Follow Up and Special Visit Report

These are the questions asked in an assessment form at the end of the semester regarding your course and instructor. Please be guided by these questions as you progress in your respective courses/classes. At the end of the semester you will be asked these same questions to critique both the course and instructor.

Results indicate a very high level of agreement that the instructors are presenting information fairly and objectively. Results from the evaluations will be used for discipline and/or for professional development. Should the evaluation process lead to the determination that an instructor has failed to distinguish between personal conviction and professionally accepted views, Administrative Procedure 3033 calls on his/her Dean to work with the instructor to develop a Professional Development plan to improve.

The team observed several classes and met in the classroom with students, without the instructor present. The team found the students focused and well prepared for the class and found no evidence of faculty or anecdotal behavior that would divert a student from learning. (II.A.7, II.A.7.a)

Conclusion:

The College has met this recommendation.

Recommendation # 10: To meet the Standard the team recommends that the governing board engage training on the proper role and conduct of regents, general governing board relations and practice, college policy and Accreditation Standards and Commission Policy and adhere to its role in establishing policy and strategic-level decision-making; in accordance with its own policy. (Standards IV.B.1, IV.B.1.b, IV.B.1.e, IV.B.1.j, IV.B.1.h)

Observations and Evidence:

The Board of Regents has been involved in training. The College secured the services of the College Brain Trust (CBT), a consulting group specializing in Board training. Dr. Cindra Smith and Dr. Walt Packard conducted a workshop attended by all Board members on September 29 and 30. Additionally, there is a contract to provide continuing training and professional development using video-teleconferencing through the end of 2011. The most recent addition to the Board has also participated in training along with Dr. Hart, as well as participating in the CBT workshop. Additionally the Board Chair, Dr. Lizama, had just returned from a week long Board Training workshop in Texas with the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT). The Chair indicated that he is strongly encouraging all members to avail themselves of these types of development activities.

The Board has made progress in adapting itself to its appropriate role. Board leadership recognizes a need to be more focused at the policy level and to eschew micro-management. The President has identified a goal of reviewing all Board Policies over the next two years. Both the Board Chair and the President recognize that current Policies are a mix of both Policy and Operational language. Although the need to revise Policies has been identified, neither a schedule nor process has been clearly developed.

It was evident during the visit that a significant effort has been made to adjust the perspective of the Board. It appears to be willing, under the leadership of the current Chair, to adopt a role focused on the establishment of policy and strategic level decision-making. It has also taken a proactive role in regard to the CNMI government to ensure autonomy for the College. However events were observed that suggest that these changes will require targeted effort by both the Board and College staff. A Board meeting occurred on the last day of the visit. It had been

scheduled for two hours. However it was reported that the meeting continued for over eight hours. Noted events are outlined below:

The Board Agenda included topics, not specific suggested actions. A number of Board Policies were brought forward for approval. One Board member objected and indicated that these policies were coming forward as tabled items from the prior meeting, not a second reading. The discussion related to this was very disjointed. It appeared that one of the policies had been approved at a prior meeting. Additionally, the policies submitted were not in a final format. Rather they included notes from the District Counsel that suggested changes and edits. The specific action requested from the Board was not identified in the agenda. There was an approved motion, but the minutes would need to be reviewed to determine what specific action was approved; it was unclear as an observer.

The College Facilities Master Plan was brought forward for approval. Evidently, this plan has existed for some time, but had never been brought forward for final approval. There was a wide ranging discussion that included a number of ancillary suggestions for other actions that needed to be taken. Just prior to final action, a Board member made a suggestion that the Plan should not be approved since there was a potential that the College would be moved to a new site (The current governor has tentatively suggested the CNMI governmental operations be consolidated on the NMC site and that the College be located to another, undesignated, location). Again, it was unclear as to the final action taken by the Board.

A report on International Students was to be presented to the Board. This was to be an information item. However the presentation made by College staff and the presentation outline included in the Board Agenda were different. During the discussion, a number of suggestions were made, two of which included a reorganization of international student services and the imposition of a new international students fee, effective for the Spring Semester. Neither of these items was on the agenda nor were they proposed by the President, but rather were floor proposals by a College staff member. There was a motion, later rescinded, to impose an additional international student fee.

This sequence of events suggested that College staff members needed additional training in how to relate to the Board. Staff actions seemed to encourage Board micro-management while the College was simultaneously involved in Board Training to stop this level of operational involvement.

Conclusion:

The College partially meets this recommendation. However the College staff will need to learn how to relate to the Board in a different manner. The College needs to develop Board Agendas that are more structured and which more clearly identify Action Items and Information Items and identify the nature of Board Action required.

The Team makes the following ***Supplemental Recommendation#2:***

In order to meet Standards, the team recommends that a schedule and process for the review of all College Policies be developed and implemented. The process should ensure participation by all constituencies and include a clear procedure for the development of Policies and the process for submission for Board Approval. (Standards IV.A.2, IV.B.1.b-e)

Concern #1: The College failed to comply with the Commission directive to maintain the confidentiality of the contents of the Show Cause and Special Visit Team Report until the Commission disclosed its decision in the Action Letter by making the outcome of the Report public in an email from the president's office. The Board of Regents continually uses the press to raise sensitive college matters, including naming short-listed applicants in the presidential search process. The College failed to bring to the evaluation team's attention pending legislation that could impact the College's autonomy. The College failed to submit its Annual Report and Annual Fiscal Report in a timely fashion.

Observations and Evidence:

The College has taken action to improve its confidentiality. In a specific action, the Board of Regents issued a formal reprimand to the former Interim President, Lorraine Cabrera, and required that she formally apologize to the Board, the College, and the Commission for her failure to maintain confidentiality of the Team Reports. The new chair of the Board has also taken a firm stand related to confidentiality and the appropriate role of the Board, both in relation to the College and the media. As an example, the Chair refused to comment on the team visit to the media other than to indicate when the visit would occur. Since the team had very limited media contact during the visit (in conjunction with the Board meeting), it is evident that there is much less behavior of the type described in the Commission Concern.

The Board has undergone training on its appropriate role related to the College. The Chair of the Board did indicate that there has been less politicizing of the Board than in the past. He felt that the new President brought a professionalization to the position. In both the training and in the Chair's actions, there is an effort to change the perspective of the Board. The Board is amenable to granting more autonomy to the President. Although the frequency of Board meetings has increased, the Chair identified this as a way to support the new President and ensure that agenda items are of significance. The Board is making an effort to make meetings more regular and frequent; a schedule is being developed with an identification of items to be discussed. The Chair indicated that the Board is also active with the CNMI government in a more proactive manner to assure College autonomy and funding sufficiency. Legislation has proposed a change in the qualifications of the Board. The Board is resisting this change because it could have a negative impact on Board composition. At the same time, the Board is developing a better understanding on how to deal proactively with the media. The College has also taken actions to ensure that its Annual Reports are submitted to the Commission in a timely manner. The College requested an extension of their submission date and was able to forward the required reports by the revised date in keeping with the timeline for its annual audit.

Conclusion:

The College meets the concerns expressed in this item.

Commission Concern #2

The Commission also noted that the Team Show Cause and Special Visit Report mentions distance education offerings and services at Tinian and Rota. The quality of the delivery systems used to provide education at Tinian and Rota has previously been questioned by the Commission Action Letter of January 31, 2007 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 educational services, including instruction and support services, that ensure the education obtained on the Tinian and Rota sites is the equivalent of that obtained on the main campus and meets all accreditation requirements”. The College must include in its Follow-Up Report due October 15, 2011, an overview of actions taken to resolve the deficiencies identified in Commission Recommendation #1 from the Action Letter of January 31, 2007, and the sustainability of the action taken as of October 2011 and explain how it complies with Standards II.A.2 and II.A.2.d.

Observations and Evidence:

The Rota coordinator and Rota Administrative assistant have recently resigned due to health reasons; therefore, they were not available for interviews. The Tinian coordinator confirmed that all academic programs on both islands were suspended in 2007. There are no concrete plans to start up credit classes. There are only non-degree classes being offered for Adult Basic Education, Upward Bound (prepares students for successful completion from high school), TRIO, and Community Development such as computer literacy classes.

Budget reports for 2010 and 2011 indicate there are auxiliary and facilities costs as well as staffing costs for the Coordinator, IT person, Administrative assistant, Upward Bound, and Cooperative Research Extension and Education Services staff (CREES). However, there are no student expenditures for Tinian or Rota.

- 2011 Budget Request, on page 45 in the FY11 Budget.
Under the Tinian Instructional Site – Object Category, 56000-Student Expenses, there is ZERO allocated for the budget.
- 2011 Budget, on page 39
Under the Rota Instructional site, Object Category, 56000 – Student Expenses, there is ZERO allocated for the FY11 Budget.

Conclusion:

Northern Marianas College Follow-up & Special Visit Report

The College has responded to the concerns expressed. Clear evidence was presented to the team showing that all academic course offerings were suspended effective 2007. There continues to be unreliable telecommunications between Tinian, Rota, and Saipan and no concrete plans have been made to provide equivalent academic credit programs and services.