EVALUATION REPORT

NORTHERN MARIANAS COLLEGE

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A Confidential Report Prepared for
The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
Western Association for Schools and Colleges

This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited
Northern Marianas College from October 16-19, 2006

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October 16-19, 2006

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ACCREDITATION EVALUATION REPORT FOR

NORTHERN MARIANAS COLLEGE

Comprehensive Evaluation Visit
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Introduction and Summary

This report represents the findings and recommendations of an accreditation team that visited Northern Marianas College (NMC) from October 16-19, 2006. The visit was conducted for the purposes of reaffirming the accredited status of the college under the standards of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) and under the standards of the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (ACSCU) for a Bachelor of Arts in Education. The team was composed of ten team members, a team assistant and a chair. Eight of the team members were selected by the ACCJC and two were selected by the Senior Commission. The Chair represented both commissions.

The visit was conducted under a Joint Accreditation Program that allows the college to hold simultaneous accreditation from both commissions.

In preparation for its self study, NMC conducted a cross listing of the accreditation standards of both commissions. This cross-listing was available to the visiting team. In organizing its self study, the college used the ACCJC standards and their order as its organizing principle, and added responses to ACSCU standards where they are not covered by ACCJC standards. Thus, the self study, as well as this report, is organized around the four standards of the ACCJC. In addition, this report contains a discussion of the School of Education in the last section of the document, after Standard Four.

The visiting team elected to act as a unit on forming its recommendation to the ACCJC. Thus, all ten team members signed the recommendation form. Adhering to ACSCU policy, only the two team members appointed by the Senior Commission made the recommendation to the ACSCU.

Northern Marianas College last underwent a comprehensive evaluation for accreditation in 2000. As a result of that visit, the recommendations the visit generated, and subsequent events that threatened the college's status the college has had several progress reports and team visits to the main campus in the intervening years. In January and February 2005, respectively, the ACCJC and ACSCU removed the college from warning status and reaffirmed accreditation for NMC. In the fall of 2005 NMC submitted another progress report and a special visit was conducted in November 2005 to validate the progress detailed in the report. Following this visit, the team commended NMC for its
improved commitment to open communication; improvement of its fiscal stability regarding a contingency reserve and payment status with the U.S. Department of Education, Pell Grants program; investment of significant funding for professional development on student learning outcomes; greater emphasis on strategic planning and strategies for assessing and improving institutional effectiveness; and their response to previous recommendations on issues relating to the School of Education.

The College

Northern Marianas College is a comprehensive community college serving the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The college offers 18 associate degree programs and 23 certificate programs. It provides extension services through its Land Grant program, all adult education for the Commonwealth and continuing education programs for professionals. Partnerships with U.S. accredited postsecondary educational institutions provide local residents opportunities to obtain degrees in a number of fields beyond the associate degree level while continuing to reside in the Commonwealth.

The population of the Commonwealth is approximately 70,000. The main campus is on Saipan, the capital of the Commonwealth, which is about 120 miles north of Guam and 6,000 miles from the West Coast of the United States. To the extent feasible, programs and services are extended through NMC facilities and personnel located on the neighboring islands of Tinian and Rota. The college was established in 1981 and given primary responsibility for all higher education in the Commonwealth. Initially housed in the Public School System, the college soon moved to the site of an old hospital and established its own accreditation in 1985. Its accreditation was reaffirmed in 1990, 1996, and 2000. Northern Marianas College was established by Commonwealth law as a nonprofit, public corporation, under the general control and direction of a seven person Board of Regents appointed by the Governor of the Commonwealth with the advice and consent of the CNMI Senate. As the only public postsecondary institution in the CNMI, the U.S. Department of Education designated NMC as the Adult Basic Education (ABE) center for the Commonwealth in 1983. In 1986 the college was designated a land grant institution by the Congress of the United States.

In the fall semester of 2005, the college served 1,126 students (headcount) or 1,097 full-time equivalent students. Enrollments are even lower in fall 2006 partially as a result of dramatic increases in tuition passed by the college's Board of Regents in spring 2006. Most students (54 percent) are indigenous to the Commonwealth and are of Chamorro or Carolinian origin and so grow up in a bilingual environment. About nine percent come from other Pacific Islands and the others are Asian (33 percent) and Caucasian (4 percent). Most students have learned English as a second language. All instruction is in English, and the college has extensive ESL and support services to assist students with English language skills necessary to succeed in college.

During October 16-19, 2006, a 12-member evaluation team visited NMC to conduct a comprehensive evaluation to validate the college's Institutional Self Study for Reaffirmation of Accreditation 2006 and to determine whether the institution meets the
Accreditation Standards and Eligibility Requirements. The team prepared for its visit by attending training provided by the ACCJC and the ACSCU; studying the Commission Handbook for Evaluators, the self study, the reports of the previous accreditation teams, and the current catalogues and schedule of classes as well as, budget documents. The team members prepared written analyses of the self study and prepared a list of questions to serve as a guide to their work once they arrived at the campus. In addition, the team met for about five hours on the day before the campus visit in order to familiarize themselves with the responsibilities of the joint team and to prepare strategies for the evaluation work.

The team found the self study to be extraordinarily candid, well written and very well organized. The self study honestly assessed the college against the standards of both commissions. The self study referenced extensive and appropriate documents, and the team found all documents available in the team room on campus. Overall, the college’s preparation for this accreditation visit was exemplary.

Once on campus, the team members interviewed faculty members, support staff, students, administrators and members of the Board of Regents. The team also met community members and visited the satellite instructional sites on the islands of Tinian and Rota. Team members talked to students and visited classrooms and labs to see the instructional programs in action. The chair and two members of the team met with the members of the Board of Regents and met with legislators, the Lieutenant Governor (Acting Governor at that time) and the Special Advisor to the Governor on Education. The team also reviewed documents prepared by the college and additional written information requested at the time of the visit. The focus of the team was to determine how well the college is achieving its stated purposes or mission by assessing the college as it carries out its activities and to review evidence to demonstrate the level of success the college has achieved in meeting the Accreditation Standards.

Through these efforts we were able to verify the information in the self study and to assure ourselves that it was written with broad-based participation and accurately describes the college. The team found evidence to support both the descriptive claims and meaningful planning agendas in the self study. The self study was well written and addressed all of the standards as required by the Commission. The team was disappointed to find that despite the requirement to conduct substantive Program Reviews that first appeared in the Accreditation Standards over 16 years ago and was a significant recommendation from the visiting team in 2000, the college had still not produced program reviews in any regular, ongoing, institutionalized manner. Once again the self study promises that this will begin in the 2006-2007 Academic Year, but the team expressed its deep disappointment that the college has not made expected progress in this area. In other areas, it is clear NMC has been strongly committed to the accreditation process and to self improvement. In the six years since the last self study and team visit, the college responded completely or partially to the recommendations made by the 2000 visiting team. Before the team arrived on campus, the college had already prepared a plan for addressing many of the issues identified in the self study and integrated that plan with its strategic master plan.
The team’s experience at NMC was very positive. The Accreditation Liaison Officer, the Acting College President, and the Assistant to the Board of Regents went out of their way to welcome the team to Saipan. The staff could not have been more helpful with logistical arrangements and personal assistance. Our team members who visited Tinian and Rota were also warmly welcomed and received gracious treatment during their visits to the island centers. The open forums were well attended and 60 people attended the exit interview. The Acting President and the Accreditation Liaison Officer are to be commended for the quality of the self study, its supporting documentation and the campus-wide knowledge of and enthusiasm for accreditation. The college is proud of its new School of Education and has committed a good deal of resources to supporting its development and operation.

The team was particularly impressed with the spirit and commitment of the faculty, staff, and administration of Northern Marianas College. Despite severe budget reductions and recently imposed furloughs, the employees of the college are dedicated to serving the students of NMC. They assist each other with their added responsibilities and work collaboratively with one another to achieve their tasks.

The evaluation team commends the staff of Northern Marianas College for their efforts to provide a quality learning environment and student support services. While the college still needs to develop a technology plan in order to maintain and upgrade the current level of technology on campus, the college is to be commended for efforts to obtain grant funding for technology. This has enabled the college to bring a substantial number of computers and related equipment to the college to assist its students in conducting research, preparing written assignments, taking online courses, studying information technology, and learning to use various sorts of technology as a lifelong skill.

The team recognizes the progress NMC has made in addressing many of the 2004 audit findings and the efforts made to move closer to attaining greater financial accountability and stability, and for adjusting the financial operations so that the college ended the previous fiscal year with a surplus. In a similar manner, the team acknowledges NMC for its work and timely response in addressing the 2003 concerns of the ACCJC over the College’s financial conditions as expressed in the progress report and focused midterm report and for managing to be removed from the ACCJC warning status in 2005.

The team highly commends NMC for working diligently to regain the confidence of the U.S. Department of Education, Pell Grant program in order to return to “advance” status from the undesirable “reimbursement” status.

Despite the team’s recognition of the achievements in the past few years, the team also recognizes the many areas in which the college must improve to meet the standards of good practice expected of an institution of higher education. The college faces major challenges from financial support to gaps in leadership that must be filled; from unsuitable facilities to processes to assess and improve institutional effectiveness that need to be established, from the difficulties of personnel recruitment to the need to
convince the legislature the college deserves greater support. To assist the college in improving and ensuring continued progress in meeting these challenges, the team identified nine major recommendations. These recommendations are listed below and individually at the end of the most appropriate standard.

**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

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.

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.

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)

7. The college should develop and implement a technology plan that evaluates, supports, and plans for the future of instructional, student services, and administrative functions across the college's sites. (Standards II.C.a., III.C.1., III.C.1.a., III.C.1.b., III.C.1.c., III.C.1.d.)

8. The college should develop and implement a governance process that focuses, integrates, and connects the various planning activities into a coherent institutional effort in which dialogue is open and sustained, that focuses on the institutional mission and student learning outcomes, and by which there is ongoing assessment of that process. (Standards I.B, I.B.2.4., IV.A.1., IV.A.2.a., IV.A.3.)

9. The college is encouraged to establish sustained channels of communication with the legislature in an effort to enhance its operational budget and capital improvement projects. The college should reexamine and align its budget allocation priorities to retain and competitively recruit high quality faculty and staff to ensure the institution's effectiveness. (Standards III.A.1., III.B.1.a., III.B.1.b., III.B.2., III.D., IV.B.1.c., IV.B.2.b., IV.B.2.e.)
ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

1. AUTHORITY
CNMI Constitution (Article XV, Section 2) and CNMI Public Law 4-34 provide the legal authority by which Northern Marianas College functions as an institution of higher and continuing education and awards degrees. The college is accredited by the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

2. MISSION
The CNMI Constitution (Article XV, Section 2) establishes the mission of Northern Marianas College. In March 2006 the Board of Regents re-affirmed the appropriateness of the mission when it adopted the Strategic Plan for 2006-2010.

3. GOVERNING BOARD
The CNMI Constitution provides that Northern Marianas College will be led by a seven-member Board of Regents appointed by the Governor of the Commonwealth. The Constitution provides the Board of Regents with autonomy in the administration of the affairs of the college and the authority to formulate policy relating to the higher education needs of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
The Chief Executive Officer of the College is the president who is appointed by the Board of Regents. Commonwealth law specifies the duties of the president whose primary responsibilities are to the college. The former president resigned in August 2006 and the Board of Regents appointed an acting president who was in this position at the time of the team visit.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY
The executive administration at Northern Marianas College currently consists of an acting president, vice-president (vacant), three deans (two are currently in an acting capacity), and chief officer for financial and administrative services. While the current members of this administrative team are highly dedicated and committed to the college, recent vacancies have placed the college in danger of not meeting this Eligibility Requirement. The acting president and the Board of Regents are aware of this situation and are actively engaged in filling the existing administrative positions with permanent personnel who are fully prepared and experienced for their responsibilities.

6. OPERATING STATUS
The institution is operating with students actively pursuing degrees and certificates on the main campus on Saipan and on the two island centers, Tinian and Rota.
7. **DEGREES**
   A substantial portion of the educational offerings at Northern Marianas College are components of programs that lead to degrees. A significant majority of students are enrolled in such degree programs.

8. **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS**
   The principle degree programs at NMC are congruent with its mission. They are recognized higher education fields of study, are sufficient in length and content, and are conducted at levels of quality and academic rigor appropriate to the degrees offered. The degree programs are generally designed to be of two academic years in length with the exception of the nursing degree which requires students to take a year of prerequisites before entering the two-year program, and the Bachelor's degree program offered in Elementary Education, a four-year program.

9. **ACADEMIC CREDIT**
   NMC awards academic credit in a manner conventional for community colleges and consistent with generally accepted good practice.

10. **STUDENT LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT**
    The team confirmed that the institution defines and published for each program the degree program’s expected student learning and achievement outcomes. Through regular and systematic assessment, it demonstrates that students who complete programs, no matter where or how they are offered, achieve these outcomes. The college has already defined student learning outcomes on the program level and is now in the process of creating student learning outcomes in an integrated fashion for course and degree levels in accordance with the most recent standards.

11. **GENERAL EDUCATION**
    NMC defines and incorporates into all its degree programs a substantial component of general education courses designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and promote intellectual curiosity. Five core courses are required in each two-year program to ensure that students attain competence in reading, writing, oral expression, and computation. Degree credit for general education and core courses is consistent with levels of quality and rigor appropriate to higher education.

12. **ACADEMIC FREEDOM**
    The team confirmed policies and practices that involve the right to research, teach, and communicate in an atmosphere of intellectual openness and integrity without the influence or interference of any individual or group.
13. **FACULTY**
At the time of the team visit NMC had a core of 47 full-time faculty with a responsibility in instruction that is sufficient in size and experience to support all of the institution's educational programs. A clear statement of faculty responsibilities and workload requirements is provided to all faculty upon hire that includes the development and review of curriculum as well as assessment of learning.

14. **STUDENT SERVICES**
The team found an institution that takes great pride in the student support services it provides to its students. The services are as diverse as the student body and clearly strive to meet the needs of all students at all locations. The team found that student support services are not as evenly provided at the two instructional sites as they are on the main campus.

15. **ADMISSIONS**
The team found NMC admission policies in the catalog and other publicly available documents. The Office of Admissions and Records (OAR) reviews all applications for admission to ensure that students have the qualifications and meet the standards for acceptance into particular programs.

16. **INFORMATION AND LEARNING RESOURCES**
NMC operates a full-service library on the main campus, the Borja Memorial Library, which also serves to archive the records of the Commonwealth. The library on Tinian and the planned library on Rota are shared facilities with local governmental agencies. The self study concedes that students and faculty at all sites, "do not have equal access to professional librarians, library instruction sessions, or print and audiovisual materials." Given the size of these centers, these services adequately support current programs.

17. **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**
Northern Marianas College is dependent upon funding from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Legislature and tuition. The team was able to verify that recent college budgetary actions have allowed the college to create and maintain a balanced budget with a reasonable reserve. Securing adequate and dependable funding from the CNMI Legislature continues to pose a challenge to the college. A Board of Regents policy specifies that annual fiscal audits be conducted by an external accounting firm. Recent audits clearly demonstrate the progress the college has made in addressing audit findings and assisting the institution in removing a Commission "warning status" regarding financial resources and controls.
18. **FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY**
Northern Marianas College now undergoes an annual financial audit by a certified public accountant. Although there have been problems with this requirement in the past, this appears to have been corrected.

19. **INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND EVALUATION**
The college has re-established an Office of Institutional Effectiveness that has the responsibility for the creation of a strategic planning process with the goal of improving the institution. The current structure calls for an annual assessment of progress on the strategic plan with reports to the Board of Regents and the college community. The process for establishing, measuring, and dialoguing for the improvement of student learning outcomes is in its initial phases and is the subject for a significant recommendation as a result of the 2006 self-study and the visiting team report.
Standard I
Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

General Observations

The mission statement of Northern Marianas College is contained in the CNMI Constitution (Article XV, Section 2) and provides the college with a governmental and constitutional rationale. Because the mission statement is stated in the CNMI Constitution, the Board of Regents does not have the authority to approve it or revise it; however, the Board of Regents regards this mission statement as appropriate in defining the students the institution seeks to serve and suitable for an institution of higher education. The mission statement is published in each edition of the NMC catalog, other college publications, and is posted in various locations on the campus. In March 2006, the Board re-affirmed the appropriateness of the mission statement when it adopted the strategic plan for 2006-2010. It appears the institution relies on the mission statement for institutional planning and decision-making, but the mission statement does not by itself address student learning.

The college has identified the need for a systematic process to articulate and assess student learning outcomes and the teaching-learning process and then to use the assessment results on student learning for improvement. While it appears that a dialogue has been occurring on a limited basis at the department and program levels, there is no evidence of a college-wide commitment to a cycle of improvement that includes an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation and re-evaluation.

Programs and services generally appear to be aligned with the mission statement, but there is evidence that the focus of the mission statement is not always communicated internally or externally and that it does not address student learning or improvement of institutional processes. The legislature and administration of the Commonwealth have expressed a concern that the college has lost its focus and suffered from a lack of potentially greater financial support because of poor communication and lack of compelling evidence that learning and student achievement is successfully occurring, particularly in vocational programs for which the legislature and administration have expressed a high priority.

The college has adopted a strategic plan for 2006-2010. There is evidence that planning is occurring. There is evidence that the institution is beginning the processes necessary to assess its progress toward the improvement of the institution. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness has created an extensive document detailing the efforts of NMC to respond to the previous strategic plan.
Findings and Evidence

The college has a mission statement that defines the institution's broad educational purposes and its intended student population. There is little evidence that the institution has developed written statements that demonstrate a strong, college-wide commitment to the achievement of student learning, although there are instances where this is occurring in certain instructional and student-service programs. The institution does not use analyses of quantitative and qualitative data or analysis in an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation to verify and improve the effectiveness by which the mission is accomplished. (Standards I.A.3. and I.A.4.)

The college has begun creating student learning outcomes on a program level, but has not yet created them consistently on a course or degree level. The college has not yet developed the means to measure learning and thus, has not yet been able to move into the more meaningful aspect of the planning cycle, which is the dialogue among participants regarding process results and using these results to make changes that will improve student learning. This finding is provided in much greater detail in the team's report on Standard II A. Instructional Programs (Standard I.B.1.).

In many areas, the strategic plans address ideas for improvement of key processes and set goals to improve their effectiveness; however, this is not happening in a manner that provides for an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation and re-evaluation. (Standards I.B.2., I.B.3., I.B.4.).

Without documented assessment results, the institution is unable to effectively provide compelling evidence to the legislature and administration of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands that the college is achieving its mission. The legislature has indicated its strong support of the college but is waiting for greater evidence that the college is achieving its mission, particularly with regard to adult vocational education, before providing additional operational and capital improvement project funding (Standard I.B.5.).

The college has not undertaken processes to systematically review and modify, as appropriate, all parts of the planning and resource allocation processes. The institution has not assessed its evaluation processes to ensure they improve instructional programs, student support services and library and other learning support services (Standards I.B.6. and I.B.7.).

Conclusions

Despite significant efforts to re-establish the Office of Institutional Effectiveness in May 2006, develop a new strategic plan, and begin the process of establishing student learning outcomes, the college has only partially met this standard. In order to achieve progress and improvement of institutional effectiveness, the college needs to move beyond just
creating volumes of strategic plans and make a distinction between short- and long-term goals that are realistic, achievable and measurable. The process needs to be understood by and reflect the thinking of all members of the college community. The budget process does connect resource allocation to the strategic planning process and resource allocation will continue to play a critical and major role in the planning process. Nevertheless, the long and difficult discussions about institutional planning, effectiveness and resource allocation need to include greater collection of outcomes, improved data analysis, a reflective dialogue regarding institutional improvement and broader participation (Standards I.B.3. and I.B.4.).

There is little evidence that the college documents result in any formal and consistent manner of evaluation or implementation of processes. The college should consider eliciting the support of those departments that demonstrate an effective use of documented assessment results toward generating an institutional approach to quality assurance (Standard I.B.5.).

As referenced in previous statements about the college’s lack of response to I.A.1., 3., 4. and I.B.1., 2., 3., 4. and 5., the college needs to immediately address clear and realistic goals toward achieving ongoing planning and resource allocation processes (I.B.6.).

Past promises about institutional performance and evaluation no longer suffice. Instead, the expectation is for the college to establish across the institution the necessary mechanisms for a systematic review of institutional effectiveness in improving instructional programs, student support and library services, and other learning support services. The team reiterates with utmost seriousness the recommendation made in 2000 concerning program evaluation, and calls for the college to make its current plan for program review operational immediately (Standards I.B.7., II.A.1).

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

2. The team recommends 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 the 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.)
Standard II A
Student Learning Programs and Services

General Observations

NMC offers a variety of developmental, basic skills, transfer, and career programs. Student enrollment has declined recently, but not precipitously. Within a similar timeframe student tuition was increased, although there is no specific evidence of correlation. The numbers of certificates and degrees awarded annually is relatively stable and has increased steadily since 2000. The population on Saipan is increasing and is strongly represented in the age groups from 20 to 34 years, albeit significant numbers of the population are non-resident workers that the college does not serve in large numbers.

Developmental learning and basic skills instruction forms a large component of the curriculum. This is in response to the substantial numbers of entering students in need of enhanced preparedness for the collegiate curriculum. Students continue in significant numbers through transfer-level courses. Lesser numbers of students are involved in the career programs. The largest numbers of degree and certificate graduates are in the A.A. in Liberal Arts, B.S. in Education, and A.A.S. in Criminal Justice programs. To a lesser extent, students receive degrees and certificates in Business, Accounting, and Nursing. Very few degrees or certificates are awarded in the more than two dozen career programs also offered by NMC.

Some program offerings primarily serve a mission of direct service to the Commonwealth. These include the Elementary Education program and the Criminal Justice program. The Nursing Program has limited openings for students and accepts greater numbers of non-residents than residents. This program graduates students that do not tend to remain on Saipan or elsewhere in the CNMI.

The array of basic skills, liberal arts, and career programs is the most comprehensive at the main Saipan campus. Course offerings are much fewer and less comprehensive at the two instructional sites on the islands of Tinian and Rota. This is particularly the case at the Rota instructional site that supports an extremely small student population. Communication between the home campus on Saipan and the remote locations is mainly carried out through telecommunications and less frequently through in-person contact.

The quality of the instructional programs is assessed within the organization through several means. The Academic Council oversees the curriculum approval process. Curricular changes are generated by departmental faculty and follow a routine approval process. The Academic Council conducts regular meetings during the primary semesters and records its transactions. The Dean of Academic Programs and Services has signature authority for the recommendations of the Academic Council. An Office of Institutional Effectiveness is charged with the development and implementation of campus-wide program evaluation, student learning outcomes, and systematic assessment of the
instructional program. Department Chairs are charged with the responsibility to annually evaluate full-time and adjunct instructors.

Findings and Evidence

NMC serves a community that is diverse, socially complex, and economically challenged. The college collects anecdotal and student survey evidence in an attempt to ensure the institution meets its students' educational needs in this environment. The college enrolls students who are placed in programs of study, provides instruction, and sees many eventually succeed in earning degrees or certificates. Instructional programs at NMC generally adhere to the institutional mission and efforts have been made to uphold institutional integrity (Standard II.A.1).

The instructional program at the main campus in Saipan offers the broadest array of course offerings and student support to enhance learning opportunities. The Tinian instructional site hosts a student population about an eighth the size of NMC Saipan, but it offers significantly fewer course offerings. The center on the further removed island of Rota hosts an extremely small student population and very few course offerings. The size of the programs at the Rota site calls into question the viability of continuing with this instructional site offering more than limited course offerings particularly at the current level of staffing in light of the serious financial concerns facing NMC. Regardless of the size of these student populations, if the instructional sites on Tinian and Rota continue in operation, it is of utmost importance that these students have timely and equitable access to the courses that allow them to complete programs of study. The college uses two distance learning modalities to provide instruction to both remote sites. NMC has had more experience with interactive videoconferencing and has just initiated online-based course instruction. The quality of the videoconferencing, particularly to the Rota instructional site, is inconsistent and unreliable, causing disruptions to instruction. Online instruction is in its first stages of implementation, so little is known of its impact or success (Standards II.A.1.a., c.; II.B.2.d, e).

NMC acknowledges that student performance at both Tinian and Rota instructional sites is not on par with the Saipan campus. This is attributed in the self study to budget reductions that prohibit travel for the purpose of instructional observation and appraisals. However, the problem suggests complicated underlying concerns that require empirical study. The college is uncertain about its fiscal and organizational ability to sustain one or both of these centers. There are other underlying, complex political and cultural issues that may affect decision-making at this time and in the future (Standard II.A.1).

NMC asserts in the self study, "Quality instruction is taking place, but student-learning outcomes are not being formally measured." The college indicates repeatedly in the self study that it does not satisfactorily use research and data on student achievement as part of ongoing and systematic institutional assessment. The team finds this to be an admission that NMC does not regularly rely on research and analysis to identify student learning needs, nor to assess the progress toward the achievement of learning outcomes (Standard II.A.1.a).
This suggests that dialogue is occurring in many areas of importance. Various components of interrelated processes (in the areas of program review, student achievement, and institutional planning) are being established, but are not yet connected into a systematic whole. The college seems aware of its need for improvement in assessment, planning, and qualitative improvement and what needs to be done vis-à-vis the standards, but has not found the entire means or sustained the commitment for complete accomplishment.

Similarly, the college has not maintained systems or practices to assess the quality of its course offerings or programs. Those faculty and administrators involved in curricular and program planning efforts may not possess the adequate means to discover or demonstrate breadth, depth, rigor, sequencing, time to completion, and the synthesis of learning. Lacking key data and performance indicators, decision-making in critical areas may be impaired. There are isolated cases in which these efforts are occurring, but they appear to be ad hoc and not on the institutional level expected within the standards for instructional programs (Standard II.A.2.a., e).

NMC has made some progress in developing and establishing student learning outcomes and in the support it provides to this institution-wide commitment. NMC's degree programs use established SLOs that are evident in course guides and in the college catalog. Program learning outcomes in the 2006-2008 catalog are very evident and clearly stated for each associate level program. The establishment of course level student learning outcomes is not developed except in a few isolated examples, such as the Nursing Program and Elementary Education Program; for most courses it still amounts to the attainment of passing grades.

Interviews with NMC faculty reveal SLO measurement in the English department and service learning activities that are related to the instructional mission. There is evidence that a few programs are succeeding more than most in the development of student learning outcomes and that these are having a positive effect on instruction. These particular exemplary efforts may not be widely communicated to the college faculty. It seems more broadly held that student learning outcomes have not been embraced by most of the faculty. Opportunities for faculty to share their exemplary efforts have not been formalized nor viewed as beneficial channels for professional development. Even though most faculty members have yet to develop a comprehensive understanding of the student learning outcome cycle, local faculty who have had success with developing student learning outcomes could provide a cost-effective resource to move the institution forward (Standards II.A.1.a., c.; II.A.2.a., b., f., i).

The lack of a coherent, comprehensive program evaluation process at NMC was an important ACCJC recommendation following the team visit in 2000. Despite indications that planning, organization, and orientation training for program review has already occurred, these examples of progress are merely skeletal and offer no concrete evidence that program evaluation is actually being carried out across the institution. Indeed, it is
not and clearly should have been as recommended in 2000, well prior to 2006 (Standard II.A.2.e).

The NMC Academic Council has a large responsibility for the assurance of quality and improvement of the college’s programs and courses. Council members indicate that there is some ambiguity concerning the procedures that govern Council actions due to a lack of documentation. During recent work to review the collection of official curriculum course guides, it was discovered that some course guides are missing entirely. Currently the collection of course guides exists only in hard copy format with no organized database in any other format. More importantly, the Academic Council has not yet adopted a procedure for the formal approval of courses taught in distance learning modes, although a growing number of such courses are being offered to students. This matter had been on the Council agenda in the past but never resolved (Standard II.A.2.a., b., c).

NMC has expanded its capacity in the use of technological delivery systems. Most classrooms have Internet access, data projectors, and computers used for instructional purposes. NMC’s efforts in distance learning are fairly recent. The design of its online courses and the underlying course management system is consistent with standard practices and should be appropriate to the current and future needs of NMC students. In order to meet this standard, the faculty and Academic Council must establish standards to determine the acceptability of online instruction in terms of student/instructor contact, put a system in place for online course evaluation, and factor in the costs to support online instruction within institutional program budgets (Standard II.A.2.d., e).

The NMC catalog and a sampling of course guides show that the college’s awarding of credit is consistent across disciplines and in line with stated policies. There is evidence that degrees and certificates are awarded upon sufficient student achievement, although that achievement is primarily and often solely measured through final course grades determined at the course level, rather than the program level (Standard II.A.2.h., i., 3, 4).

General education patterns and program learning outcomes are explained quite well in the NMC catalog. Degree programs, core course requirements, general education requirements, program requirements, electives and program-specific learning outcomes are clearly listed in the catalog. Articulation and partnership agreements with other institutions and all NMC transfer policies are also listed in the catalog. NMC has indicated that the oversight for course articulation had not been handled effectively in the recent past and more attention is being given to this area. Other sections of the catalog convey student conduct policies concerning academic dishonesty, defining cheating and plagiarism in depth. The catalog devotes an entire page to a thorough description of academic freedom and responsibility as these policies apply to not only faculty, but all members of the academic community at the college. The college produces a number of publications and a website that duplicates much of the information contained in the catalog. The college has intentions to make the catalog and course schedules available online (Standard II.A.3., 4., 6., 7).
Conclusions

The college only partially meets this standard. While there are a few admirable examples of student learning outcomes, the college must make substantial progress in the cycle of developing, analyzing, and dialoguing about student learning outcomes in the immediate future. Of utmost importance is the necessity to institutionalize a coordinated, systematic process for evaluating program effectiveness. The college also needs to provide quality assurance for instructional programs at distant instructional 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 instructional sites until new, better and more reliable connectivity is established. The team reiterates with utmost seriousness the recommendation made in 2000 concerning program evaluation, and calls for the college to make its current plan operational immediately (Standard II.A.1).

Recommendations

3. The team recommends the college 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 act 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)
Standard II B
Student Support Services

General Observations

The self study report for Standard II B on Student Support Services reflects the college’s ability to address a diverse student population through the provision of a variety of services and programs. Programs and services are designed to address student learning needs and to enhance a supportive learning environment in Student Services. Along with the customary services, specialized programs are offered within a number of service areas. Some examples include the Counseling Program and Career Center. Counseling offers six programs: Academic Advising Services Program, Disability Support Services, Early 2+2/Special Admissions Program, Early Intervention Program, Partnership for Academic Success, and General Counseling Services. The Career Center includes the Career Information Center, Cooperative Education, Student Work Training Program, Service Learning Program, and the Testing Program. In addition, the college has several federally-funded TRIO programs that include the Educational Talent Search, and Upward Bound.

The college has been transitioning to PowerCAMPUS, a student data base that will offer extended services to students while providing a considerable amount of data. Progress has been made in this transition, though like any new system, it requires time and resources for full implementation. In the long-term and once it is fully operable, Student Services plans to implement iQWeb for students to access their records and register online.

The college has made progress managing and achieving financial stability since the last accreditation visit; however, a consistent level of funding across the college still remains limited and unstable, and unreliable from year to year. The reduction in funding is very obvious in the area of student support services. It has not been possible to provide the level of services and staff support the college had at one time due to the reduction of student numbers and fiscal reductions in the CNMI. The college will need to adjust to smaller numbers of students and the fiscal realities of the Commonwealth as they pertain to funding sources for the college.

The counseling staff has been reduced from six counselors to two individuals, one of whom is also the director. The Director of Counseling and one full-time counselor are now also responsible for services to students with disabilities, international students, and the 2+2 population. Currently, there are five key positions unfilled or frozen in Student Services. These include the Director of the Office of Admissions and Records, Director of Student Activities and Leadership, Disability Counselor, International Students Counselor, and the Early 2+2/ Special/Admissions Program Counselor. The Dean of Student Services has been assigned responsibility for OAR and Student Activities and Leadership. In addition, the Library Services program has recently been reassigned to the currently vacant Vice President of Student Services.
Findings and Evidence

Student Services and the college have developed a number of strategies in order to address the lack of financial and personnel support. These strategies include (1) the utilization of faculty as advisors; (2) the participation of faculty in the registration process (a contractual obligation); (3) strengthening the role of campus student governance; and (4) collaboration within Student Services. To maintain the quality of counseling services to students, faculty are utilized for advisement. Faculty members provide assistance to those students who have selected a major in their discipline. In addition, faculty assist Student Services during registration and play a very active role in the process. The Student Council also supports Student Services by providing student volunteers during registration and through their participation on college committees (Standard II.B.1).

The catalog provides the necessary information as required. This information can also be found in the Student Handbook, Schedule of Classes, brochures, and in a public folder on the NMC Intranet. Plans are being made to develop an electronic version of the catalog to be placed on the college website (Standard II.B.2).

The staff within Student Services has dealt with continued loss of positions and added responsibilities within the department. These individuals, and the rest of the college personnel, have also received a 10% cut in pay. This pay decrease is a furlough or mandatory reduction in the amount of days worked and pay received as a result of a recently enacted Commonwealth Act. They are hardworking and committed to the college, and have reported coming in on the weekends to complete their assignments. They assist each other with their new added responsibilities and work collaboratively with one another to achieve their tasks. Within the department, there is a great deal of unity and enthusiasm. One staff member commented that the lack of financial support does not take away their “spirit,” and that the financial situation has no effect on their positive attitude and support for students.

Students receive counseling through Counseling Services and Programs (CPS). Counselors provide academic and transfer counseling designed to support students’ educational and career goals. The Counseling Programs and Services office is a warm and comfortable environment that welcomes students into the program. A student on campus remarked that the counselors not only provide support within the office, but also walk around and connect with students on a daily basis. The counselors in CPS offer workshops for faculty on the role of advisement, and the director is a participant on the Academic Council. The director has also been assigned responsibility for supporting students with disabilities and has and is continuing to be trained in her new role (Standard II.B.3.a., c).

Student learning outcomes have been developed for counseling. The SLOs are posted within the office and prominent to all students. The counselors are currently working on developing measures for assessing each outcome (Standard II.B.4).
Program assessment and improvement in Student Services is conducted on a service level basis. Efforts to identify the learning support needs of students have been made through the use of Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Surveys, graduation surveys, and registration surveys. Student Services relies heavily on student input on a qualitative basis coupled with the information obtained through the surveys. The Office of Admissions and Records has utilized the registration survey to improve the registration process. One such example is the use of D-1, the largest classroom, to conduct registration so that OAR, Financial Aid, division chairs, counselors, and student volunteers are all available to serve students, employing a “one stop” concept. Data that drove this decision was obtained from the registration survey and discussed in the Registration Committee as well as with the Associated Students of Northern Marianas College (ASNMC). The Registration Committee is composed of representatives across campus and at the Rota and Tinian instructional sites. It includes both Student Services and instructional faculty and staff. A student representative of the ASNMC stated that because of the survey information, registration has “improved dramatically” (Standard II.B.1; IIB.3).

The population of students enrolled at NMC is extremely diverse. As a result of this diversity, the college actively engages in activities that highlight the diverse cultures of the student population. Cultural differences are celebrated during International Education Week and during other designated times and events. Student clubs are also designed to promote cultural appreciation. In addition, classes offered addressing diversity include “Current Issues in the CNMI,” and “College Life Skills,” and “Multicultural Foundations” in the School of Education. Service Learning is offered, addressing the development of personal and civic responsibility for students enrolled at all three sites. The Social Science Division and Student Services have collaborated to provide a “weekly topics” forum for students. Student Services with faculty are also currently providing a series of health and wellness presentations (Standard II.B.3.b., d).

English and math placement tests are available throughout the academic year. The Languages and Humanities department utilizes the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and an essay for placement. Students are placed into classes according to their score on the tests. Curriculum for courses is aligned with the TOEFL so that the class a student is placed into corresponds to his/her TOEFL score and written placement test score. Once enrolled in the class, further testing occurs, such as reading courses utilizing the California Achievement Test (CAT) for validation (Standard II B.3.e).

The math placement test was designed by the Sciences, Mathematics, Health and Athletics department. The department has aligned math placement testing to the curriculum and student learning outcomes for all math courses. Testing is evaluated yearly by the department statistician who compares success rates per course that are obtained using student scores on an exit test conducted at the end of each course. Of over 200 students who have taken the placement test on an annual basis, only 1% have ever challenged their placement into a course (Standard II.B.3.e).

All current student records are kept secure and confidential. Records are protected in a fireproof-safe filing cabinet. (A new fireproof filing cabinet is expected to be purchased
with the increase of records) Student records are currently being entered into the PowerCAMPUS system, and it is anticipated that the future will include all records within this system. Inactive records are maintained in locked cabinets in a storage room nearby (Standard II.B.3.f).

OAR and Financial Aid reported utilizing the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey for program improvement. Career Services has developed their own student satisfaction tool for some of their services. As well, Service Learning evaluation is conducted by agency ratings on students and measured through student reflection essays. Students are recognized for success based upon the results of the essays at a student recognition event. Career Services has completed the first draft of Student Learning Outcomes.

Conclusion

Despite the admirable work the faculty and staff are doing in Student Services, the college only partially meets this standard. Student Services as a whole needs to develop student learning outcomes across all service areas. The department needs to proceed to implement all aspects of the SLO process, include identification of learning outcomes, measurement, analysis, and program improvement. In addition, while Student Services has been participating in data collection and analysis, the department needs to be integrated into college-wide program review. The self study report stated that the college has recognized a need to improve data driven decision-making in Student Services. This commitment needs to be realized once the college progresses to a systematic, coordinated, program review process (Standard II.B.3.; II.B.4).

The team agrees with the college’s Student Services staff that the college may want to address the financial restrictions affecting the ability of Student Services to meet the demands of students enrolled on Saipan and at the two instructional sites and prioritize the level of support that will be provided in order for Student Services to effectively evaluate, provide, and improve services (Standard II.B.3., B.4).

Recommendations

See Recommendation 2 located in Standard I
See Recommendation 4 located in Standard II.A.
Standard II.C.
Library and Learning Support Programs

General Observations

The self study is candid about the challenges faced by the college and reasonably thorough in covering this standard. The visiting team uncovered no problems that were not already identified in section II.C, and the writers of this section deserve credit for not minimizing those concerns.

A staffing crisis is looming in library and learning resources campus wide. As the self study states, the Acting Director of Library Services is retiring in December 2006 and now the Academic Librarian is leaving in December 2006 as well, prompted by the government-mandated 10% cut that NMC is implementing as a furlough. In addition, the Curriculum Resource Librarian has given notice. On top of this, the librarian at the Tinian site has been hired by Tinian’s public library, leaving, as of December 2006, no librarians at NMC. The college plans to advertise the first three open positions by the end of October, but the college admits they may be difficult to fill in a timely manner.

Inequality persists between the Borja Memorial Library on the main campus and facilities at Tinian and Rota instructional sites. The self study concedes that students and faculty at all sites “do not have equal access to professional librarians, library instruction sessions, or print and audiovisual materials.” Distribution of resources between the various libraries needs to be examined. The library on Tinian is a shared facility with local governmental agencies as will be the library on Rota. A new library is expected to open on Rota in 2007, with an apparent $300,000 commitment from the Rota government for equipment. There is, however, no librarian, so the challenge will be to make services commensurate with facilities.

Librarians and library staff at the Borja Memorial Library are to be commended for their conscientious attention to student needs. For a small college, NMC Saipan has a solid collection of media to support student learning, and a unique repository of national history and culture in the CNMI Archives and Pacific Collection. Students express satisfaction with both the materials and the quality of help available. Similarly, the Curriculum Resource Center provides effective support for the School of Education with adequate collections and qualified staff (Standard II.C.2).

The self study mentions vague plans for “formalizing” research tutoring at the Borja library because students working on assignments and doing research naturally ask for help from available staff. The college should explore whether this would overlap with duties of the Educational Enrichment Center (EEC) and other tutoring entities on campus, and whether this can be coordinated in a complementary fashion, sharing resources.

The college’s library and learning support programs have made progress in identifying student learning outcomes, but that progress is new and must be sustained. The loss of
what appears to be the entire faculty of qualified librarians in the Borja Memorial Library puts this progress in danger. Institutional dialogue on learning outcomes at NMC, and the dissemination of understanding of the concept, seems limited to isolated pockets in the academic disciplines, and the library has been one of those outposts of awareness and competence.

**Findings and Evidence**

The college's library and other learning support services generally appear to meet the standards by providing support for instructional programs through traditional library services, tutoring, learning technology and training, though there may be shortfalls in meeting standards for location and means of delivery. Equipment and materials seem appropriate, but are not always reliable. Faculty possess the necessary expertise, but may not be present in sufficient quantities necessary to serve all students equally. Students are provided with ongoing training in the use of available learning resources. Adequate access may be a problem, however, for students attending Tinian and Rota instructional sites. Security of materials and facilities appears adequate. Formal agreements exist between the NMC facilities and public libraries and governmental institutions. Services are evaluated regularly, though the systems of evaluation have been recently developed and the system may suffer due to the pending loss of all faculty librarians (Standards II.C.; II.C.1.; II.C.1.a., b, c, d, e.; II.C.2).

The self study emphasizes the “Accomplishment of goals is dependent upon the number of staff and professional librarian filled [sic] in the libraries as well as technology stability.” The team’s visit to the college verifies this. It is important for the college to follow through with plans to fill the library positions and address the unreliability of current technology.

Partnerships with public libraries seem an appropriate response to limited resources and small numbers of students, especially on Tinian and Rota, where smaller student populations make full-size library facilities and services unwarranted. However, such partnerships also require the college to sacrifice a degree of control over its own resources. The glaring example is that the college must find a constructive solution for the unreliable online catalog—which resides and is managed by the public library. While the college probably cannot restructure the terms of its Memorandum of Understanding with the Joeten-Kiyu public library, it could work together with that library to make the system more reliable (Standard II.C.1.e).

**Conclusions**

The team found that the college partially meets this standard. It seems clear that the current library faculty have understood and implemented the idea of measurable learning outcomes. The college's library and learning support programs have made progress in identifying student learning outcomes, but that progress is new and must be sustained. Institutional dialogue on learning outcomes at NMC, and the dissemination of understanding of the concept has been limited and the library has been one of those
academic programs of awareness and competence. The team is concerned with the pending loss of so many qualified faculty and staff in Library Services and the effect this may have on the continued efforts to implement student learning outcomes in this program (Standard II.C).

Steps to improve learning resources on Tinian and Rota have been frustrated by financial limitations. The self study concedes that, “The academic librarian’s contract states that she will travel to Tinian and Rota instructional sites to facilitate instruction; however, there are currently no funds to perform that duty.” To compound this problem, web access on Tinian and Rota instructional sites is unreliable. The Management Review Desk Audit of 2005 recommended a dedicated network connection to Tinian and Rota, and the college has plans—and funds—for a dedicated microwave communications link to Tinian and Rota (Standard II.C.1).

Systems of evaluation have been recently developed and the system may suffer implementation due to the pending loss of all faculty librarians and budgeting constraints. The shared libraries on Rota and Tinian are expected to have librarian positions supported by the Mayors’ offices on each island (Standards II.C.; II.C.1.; II.C.1.a., b, c, d, e.; II.C.2).

The college must find a constructive solution for the unreliable online catalog and the unreliability of current technology (Standards II.C.1.; II.C.1.c.; II.C.2).

The 2005 library reorganization, while addressing immediate needs, does not constitute the “coherent plan for the future” that the 2000 report recommended. The strategic plan for 2006-2010 does not mention library services specifically. Institutional entities that might guide library planning have shown little concrete results: The General Education Committee has been disbanded, and the new Liberal Arts Program Committee has not yet met. Program review efforts are only now getting started, and only on paper; the library, as part of Student Services, is not scheduled to be reviewed until 2009 (Standard II.C.2).

Library and learning support programs must have a defined place within new, integrated approaches to program evaluation, the measurement of program effectiveness, and the allocation of resources. The library needs stable leadership and adequate resources. While it does not appear to need a recommendation at the time of the team’s visit, the college is urged to immediately address the issue of the staffing crisis that is looming in the library by recruiting and retaining qualified librarians to lead this valuable service to students. Tinian and Rota instructional sites, because of their distance from qualified staff and their poor Internet connections, remain separate but not equal (Standard II.C.1).

Recommendations

See Recommendation 1 located in Standard I
See Recommendation 2 located in Standard I
See Recommendation 3 located in Standard II.A.
See Recommendation 4 located in Standard II.A.
Standard III A
Human Resources

General Observations

NMC is an institution that is struggling to meet the challenges of higher education in conditions overshadowed by the effects of fiscal austerity, as well as frequent employee attrition. The administration, faculty, and staff have demonstrated resourcefulness in identifying alternative solutions to ongoing staffing problems. In general, the staff is characterized by a willingness to take on extra duties and work beyond their job descriptions, yet in some important instances, willingness has not ensured that critical tasks are accomplished, or that individuals fill roles with authentic professional competency.

The institution has not systematically collected and analyzed enrollment, workload, and productivity data for the purpose of demonstrating staffing requirements, triggering the position request process, or for ranking positions in a hiring prioritization process. Rather, department chairs and deans determine instructional position needs and minimum qualifications, while administrators do this for positions in other units. Faculty, administration, and classified staff are included in search and hiring committees. The self study acknowledges staffing difficulties related to severe budget constraints.

Instructional staff and service providers are learning to use the technological delivery methods now in place. An emerging proportion of the faculty is able to function in distance education modalities — both televised and online — in order to better meet needs of students who have widely diverse educational objectives.

Findings and Evidence

Dialogue, within and among campus constituencies, particularly between the main campus and the centers on separate islands, does not take place on a regular basis. This is evidenced by meeting agendas, minutes, transcripts of electronic communication, and employee interviews. Additionally, faculty and staff at Tinian and Rota instructional sites report that they are not entirely satisfied with their level of inclusion in NMC’s operational, organizational, or pedagogical discussions. Physical distance between the sites is not mitigated by the use of distance technology due to the intermittent nature of the transmission. When the signal is clear, the seating arrangements and communication patterns of the participants at the main site do not encourage those at the distant sites to actively join the discussion.

Economic austerity and resultant budgetary constraints have negatively impacted Human Resources at NMC. Some key positions are unfilled, and a significant number of individuals are working outside of their job descriptions (Standards III.A.1.; III.A.1.a).
Interviews with personnel at the other island instructional sites reveal that their access to professional development offered on Saipan is hampered by scheduling that requires multiple round trips. Faculty on the Saipan campus report having participated in workshops presented by visiting experts, but do not report opportunities to continue development locally through ongoing discussion or other applications of the information. On Tinian, the students report that they would like to participate in cultural events and activities like those routinely occurring on the main campus.

Interviews with Human Resource personnel reveal the institution adheres to a consistent hiring process, yet that process is not made openly accessible to all members of the college community. According to identical descriptions of the recruiting and hiring process provided in independent interviews with management, hiring practices are fair and reflect awareness that employees of diverse backgrounds play an important educational and institutional role. In contrast, the published Board of Regents’ Human Resources Policies and Procedures are outdated and do not reflect current organizational structure and practice. While not rising to the level of a recommendation, the team suggests this be undertaken in a timely manner. During interviews, faculty and staff reveal their perception that responsibility for decision making rests primarily upon department chairs, deans, and higher-level management, and that the decisions these leaders make are guided by their experience and knowledge. There is evidence that faculty members, other than department chairs, play a somewhat peripheral role in the selection of new faculty, perhaps because of their confidence in the abilities and wisdom of the department chairs (Standard III.A.1.a.).

Employee evaluations are not being conducted according to planned schedules and processes. Although the system and processes are now in place, administrators and supervisors have not been conducting evaluations in accordance with the schedules developed by the Human Resources Office (Standards II.A.2.a; III.A.1.b).

The college currently depends upon individual instructional and administrative units to implement the hiring decision of faculty and staff. According to the Faculty Handbook, minimally qualified instructors must hold a B.S. or B.A. degree, but exceptions may be granted by the college president. This makes it impossible to ascertain with full confidence that the institution’s hiring practices guarantee uniformly qualified employees, or that they have been selected using equitable and consistently administered procedures. The same concern applies to situations where employees are given additional duties beyond those for which they were initially hired, or where employees have been transferred by management into positions for which the employees’ qualifications have not been thoroughly documented and scrutinized (Standards III.A.2; III.A.3; III.A.3.a; III.A.4; III.A.4.a., c).

The Board of Regents Human Resources policies include a code of ethics as well as a policy designed to thwart nepotism. Furthermore, NMC clearly takes pride in the diversity of its students and staff and recognizes that this diversity contributes to the richness of the learning environment. Although demographic data is collected and reported to interested committees and organizations, there has yet to be analysis to
determine how well the hiring practices serve the college mission (Standards III.A.1.d; III.A.4.b).

Confidential human resources records are maintained in a relatively secure file room. A policy defining authorization to access confidential files has not been established (Standard III.A.3.b).

The NMC college community takes pride in its policies and practices relative to equitable treatment, fairness, and integrity. The self study asserts that these policies are upheld and contribute positively to the good relationships among the constituents. On-site observation confirms this. Also, college personnel and students collaborate to plan and present cultural events that enhance respect for differences and effectively contextualize the importance of diversity (Standard III.A.4.c).

Conclusions

The college is doing a good job in the area of human resources; however, Commonwealth economic issues, the need for a more integrated institutional planning process that addresses staffing needs, and supervisors that do not evaluate employees in accordance with established processes keeps the college from completely meeting this standard. Current evaluation processes do not include opportunities to examine the degree to which an employee has contributed to successful achievement of the student learning outcomes associated with that individual’s area of responsibility. To meet this standard, employees need to reflect upon the relationship between the work they do and the students’ learning outcomes (Standard III.A.1.c).

The college currently reports staff demographics, but does not assess the degree to which staff diversity is consistent with NMC’s mission and community demographics (Standard III.A.4.b).

Standard III of the self study does not show clear interrelationships between staffing, the college mission, and the results of a strategic planning and budgeting process. There is awareness that this is a critical need as is evidenced by a planning agenda item to address long-range staffing needs and strategies (Standard III.A.6).

When possible, cultural events and activities might be presented at the Tinian site where students report that they would be desirable but do not occur (Standard III.A.4.c).

The process for employee evaluations is well defined in the self study. It is reported in the self study that NMC developed and uses nine comprehensive evaluation instruments for its employees in order to increase institutional effectiveness. This system mirrors the faculty evaluation system. In reality, the college has not been able to meet its charge to coordinate regular and productive evaluations of employees (Standards II.A.2.a; III.A.1.b).
Recommendations

See Recommendation 1 located in Standard I

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.)
Standard III B
Physical Resources

General Observations

Northern Marianas College operates from three distinct campuses: the main campus at Saipan and two instructional sites at Tinian and Rota. The Saipan campus, as the older and original college, is replete with aging, leaky, and out of commission buildings. At Saipan, only a limited number of the buildings are typhoon-resistant. The Tinian and Rota sites are relatively smaller sites, but with recently constructed and typhoon-resistant buildings. The Rota instructional site conducts all its activities and programs in two sizable, typhoon-resistant, single-story buildings and in a smaller Library Annex building.

By special agreement between the local Mayors’ offices and NMC, the land and buildings at Tinian and Rota are provided and owned by the Island Mayor’s office and NMC operates and maintains the sites. On the other hand, the Saipan property and buildings are deeded to the college.

The administration is fully committed and actively engaged to bring back to the main campus several school programs from nearby rented facilities. This will allow the college to house all academic programs on the same campus site and save much needed funds. The college has rented nine units adjacent to the main campus to house the School of Education, Ceramics Program, and the Information and Learning Technology Center. The plan calls for all these programs to be brought on campus by the end of 2006.

The college does a very good job of utilizing all available classrooms to full capacity by scheduling the classes morning through evening without much downtime.

The Operations department has introduced a well functioning electronic work order system known as “Help Desk.” Routine work orders are placed electronically by anyone needing facilities, maintenance, and custodial services. The work orders are electronically acknowledged and a hard copy provided to staff to fulfill the job. This system is working well and is appreciated.

There are several major unmet needs especially when considering the long-term physical resource needs of the college. The two instructional sites and the main campus of the college have varying facilities needs. Old wooden facilities on the Saipan main campus should be razed and replaced.

Maintenance needs of the facilities on all three sites are unmet. Due to budget reductions, much of the required scheduled maintenance activities have been neglected. Given the age and condition of the main campus, these maintenance needs are extensive and ongoing. The Maintenance Manager position remains vacant. The college is encouraged to follow through
with the hiring process for this important position using existing board-approved budget for the position.

There clearly exists an appreciation for the facilities needs of the college both at the college and the legislature. The team applauds the major and broad efforts made toward renovating and adding new buildings over the years, ADA compliance efforts, the completion of the Emergency Preparedness Plan, cost-containment measures on utilities, enhanced multi-media capabilities, parking lot improvements, and the overall campus beautification efforts.

Findings and Evidence

While the buildings on the Saipan campus look quite aged, unattractive, and unsuitable from the outside, they are reasonably functional when viewed from the inside. All classrooms and offices are supplied with working air conditioners, the classrooms are painted, equipped with overhead projectors and are furnished with sufficient and adjustable desks and chairs. It is probable that the residents of the Northern Mariana Islands would see this college in more credible terms and the college would likely attract greater numbers of students if the college had a modern, clean, attractive, safe campus of buildings (Standard III.B.1.a).

At Saipan campus and the two other instructional sites, much of the operations functions are contracted out including the custodial, grounds, and security functions. The maintenance function is critical particularly at the main campus. Even though the work of the maintenance crew is commendable, the college needs to invest in providing a maintenance manager to supervise and coordinate much of the repair work and planned renovation projects. As is common in most financially challenged institutions, maintenance and capital improvement projects have suffered at NMC. Vacant positions remain unfilled for a very long time and services are scant with the workload of existing staff increasingly becoming unreasonable (Standard III.B.1.b).

NMC has prepared an institutional Facilities Master Plan. The plan contains, among other things, capital improvement projects that have yet to be funded. Members of the legislature have shared with team members their openness to supporting the pending capital improvement projects and possibly future campus expansion requirements by purchasing adjacent properties and even rebuilding the entire Saipan campus from the ground up if the college assesses its facilities needs and presents the legislators with a compelling case for building a new campus on Saipan. The college is advised to maintain close contact with the legislators and be prepared to satisfy possible requirements that may be placed by members of the legislature (Standard III.B.2.a., b).

Conclusions

Given the condition of the physical facilities on the Saipan campus, the college does not meet this standard. The need to upgrade, renovate, and possibly rebuild the entire campus is recognized both by the college community and the legislature. The administration should take
the challenge and prepare a well-considered and realistic long-term Facilities Master Plan that supports the educational mission of the institution. The message from legislators was clear that they would support a reasonable and effective facilities master plan. The goodwill expressed by the legislature needs to be cultivated by college administration and the Board of Regents to yield state of the art facilities for the benefit of CNMI residents. To this end, the college administration needs to initiate and develop channels of communication to partner with and gain the continued support of the legislature. The college should not rely on the legislature to take the initiative to push for a new physical plant. It is imperative for the credibility of an institution of higher education and for the future of the college that the college has an appropriate campus (Standard III.b.1).

The college possesses a Facilities Master Plan that outlines capital improvement projects. What is highly needed is the integration of the plan with the educational mission of the institution that is shared by all constituent groups (Standard III.B.1., 2).

**Recommendations**

6. The college should pursue funding to renovate or replace aging 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)

See Recommendation 9 located in Standard IV.B.
General Observations

Technology is favorably viewed on campus and is one of the most promising advancements at the college. Several external grants in 2001 and 2002 supported the acquisition of computer labs, teleconferencing equipment, projection systems, faculty desktops/laptops, training, and other services. Unfortunately, the success enjoyed in this area could be lost if it is not supported by a broader technology plan that considers the total cost of ownership including a long range strategy for replacement and upgrading of equipment and software. The college lacks polices and procedures to monitor computer standards, equipment purchasing, and maintenance cycles. Sufficient technical staff was not established commensurate with the amount and complexity of technology recently acquired.

Video conferencing between the Saipan campus and the two instructional sites is commonly used for both instruction and general communication. Poor transmission to Rota, as experienced during the team’s meeting with the Academic Council, limits its effectiveness. Computers and projection systems are available in the classrooms and participation in web-based instruction is increasing. The learning management system, Moodle, provides an effective framework for delivering online and web-based courses. Two groups, the Technology in Education Committee and Distance Learning Committee, support this effort and are instrumental in bringing technology to faculty and into the classroom. The first fully online courses were launched in fall 2006 and included Educational Psychology, Teaching Linguistically Diverse Students, Health and Wellness, Personal Health, English Composition II, Nutrition and Health, Introduction to Criminal Justice, and Math for Upper Elementary Teachers.

Operational technology has improved. The transition to PowerCAMPUS, a student registration and database, has helped the college collect data for decision making. The system, however, is not used to its fullest potential and data entry from the previous system is incomplete. PowerCAMPUS is not integrated with the learning management system, Moodle, nor is it linked to the college website. Students cannot register online, nor can they view the school catalog and schedule of classes on either the college website or from the learning management system. The servers for PowerCAMPUS and other operational technology lack physical security. The equipment needs to be moved to a lockable room where access and temperature can be more closely monitored.

The college’s learning management system also supports an e-portfolio system that houses college documents such as policy statements, planning documents, accreditation papers, student survey results, and committee meeting minutes. This is an effective and appropriate use of the software application. The learning management system also provides forums that can foster campus and classroom dialogue, although this feature is underutilized.
The NMC website successfully "brands" the college with its ship logo and a red color-theme. Navigation works reasonably well. However, content on the site is inconsistent, incomplete, and inaccurate. Many links are dead and several pages are empty. Content often dates to 2004. Considering that many prospective students today make choices based on Internet research, the website is more of a detriment than an effective recruitment tool.

Findings and Evidence

The student registration and database system, PowerCAMPUS, is effective in collecting college data. However, the data from the old system has not yet been completely transferred and some data fields have ambiguous labels. Full utilization of PowerCAMPUS is hindered by a lack of integration into the learning management system and/or the college’s website (Standard III.C.1).

Moodle, a learning management system, is well suited for NMC's online and web-based instruction. It provides a consistent look and feel to all distant learning courses and more importantly universal navigation system. The campus also uses the management system effectively as a repository of college documents. Like all technology on campus relying on the Internet, this system is sometimes hindered by unreliable access (Standard III.C.1).

The PBX telephone system is outdated and inadequate for the campus communication needs. This results in disconnected calls and dropped faxes. An unresponsive local service provider complicates the problem (Standard III.C.1.a).

Technical training for faculty and staff is available in most cases. An instructional designer teaches technology supporting online and web-based classes, as well as productivity tools. Instruction is provided in small groups and individually. Online training and seminars are also available for staff and faculty. Student training is minimal and sometimes inadequate. This could be remedied with a series of web-readiness tutorials to assess and facilitate students' preparedness for online instruction. Specialized training for computer technicians is difficult due to geographical remoteness; however, other resources have been made available such as Safari, an e-book library that offers a robust technical collection (Standard III.C.1.b).

The college lacks a comprehensive plan to fully utilize, finance, and maintain technology. The absence of a policy on equipment standards results in inconsistencies of platforms, operating systems, and software. Decentralized purchasing also contributes to inconsistencies. This situation causes maintenance issues that are exacerbated by a shortage of computer technicians (Standard III.C.1.c).

The college website is adequately designed and fairly easy to navigate. The consistent menu bar on the left allows universal navigation. However, the content is inconsistent, incomplete, inadequate and often outdated. For example, many pages were last updated in 2004. The task of maintaining an accurate web page is a low priority for the technical
staff, yet this is the window through which the rest of the world views the college. A poorly maintained website has negative ramifications for prospective students, faculty, administrators, and staff (Standard III.C.1.c).

Students have an enthusiasm for technology-based learning. A December 2004 student survey shows that 75 percent of students agree or strongly agree that web-based instruction contributes to their learning. Seventy-three percent of students surveyed would welcome online course offerings and 58 percent felt they would be more likely to finish their degrees. Student also expressed frustration with technological difficulties relating to access. When students were asked if they had any problems using the online system, they responded (slightly paraphrased):

- "Too slow, should freeze and lag less."
- "At times I was unable to log onto the NMC Online because of some technical difficulties."
- "No access to a computer or had to wait a long time."
- "Too hard to access the computer at NMC Online. Sometimes it takes more than one hour."
- "I had problems getting in and my password never worked."
- "There were times when I just couldn't get access."
- "Sometimes when I try to log in it won't let me."

(Standard III. C. 2)

Three external grants allowed the institution to equip the campus with hundreds of computers, printers, projectors, and other technical equipment. Unfortunately, this initial investment is not sustained by an institutional commitment. The total cost of ownership is not factored in the college budget. Funding for technical staff has decreased as the hardware inventory and software complexity increased. A lack of policies regulating equipment purchases, maintenance, and replacement schedules contributes to the problem. Technology is not mentioned in the college's Strategic Goals and Objectives. The college needs to integrate a comprehensive technology plan with the overall institutional and educational planning. The campus's three committees related to technology provide access, training, and services. However, limited funding and personnel shortages have seriously hindered progress. Without institutional planning and support, technology on campus will rapidly become obsolete (Standard III C.1.d; III.C.2).

Conclusions

The college partially meets this standard. It has made improvements in technology that supports student learning, online instruction, teleconferencing equipment, and operational systems campus-wide. The success enjoyed in this area could be lost if it is not supported by a broader technology plan. The college lacks polices and procedures to guide and monitor computer standards, equipment purchasing, and maintenance cycles. There is also a lack of sufficient technical staff to support all these systems (III.C.1; III.C.1.c.; III.C.2).
Poor connectivity and transmission, particularly to the Rota instructional site, needs to be addressed in order to effectively connect to students and deliver courses. There is a lack of integration into the learning management system and/or the college's website. Students are prevented from registering, reviewing transcripts, viewing the college catalog, or the schedule of classes online (Standards III.C.; III.C.1; III.C.1.a, b., c., d).

The college lacks a comprehensive plan to fully utilize, finance, and maintain technology to support the hundreds of computers, printers, projectors, and other technical equipment. There is a lack of policies regulating equipment purchases, maintenance, replacement schedules, and technical support. The college needs a comprehensive technology plan (Standards III.C.; III.C.1.a, b., c., d; III.C.2).

Recommendations

7. The college should develop and implement college-wide planning that includes a technology plan that evaluates, supports, and plans for the future of instructional, student services, and administrative functions across the college's sites. (Standards II.C.a., III.C.1., III.C.1.a., III.C.1.b., III.C.1.c., III.C.1.d.)
Standard III D
Financial Resources

General Observations

Northern Marianas College utilizes a process of creating a five-year Strategic Plan and using the goals established in that plan to direct all financial planning at the institution. The annual budget of the institution incorporates the goals and priority initiatives proposed in the strategic plan. While the institutional planning attempts to reflect a realistic assessment of financial resource availability, the college has recently faced clear challenges for the financial resources sufficient to support student learning programs and services and to improve institutional effectiveness. These challenges have been made more difficult with the history of presidential turn-over throughout the six years since the last self study and team visit. Without the continuity of effective leadership the institution finds itself struggling with severe budget cuts from the Commonwealth Legislature and the lack of institutional planning processes that include adequate means of providing an assessment of outcomes that could be used to make a compelling case for greater financial support.

Northern Marianas College is 25 years old. While it enjoyed steady and stable growth in its early years, the last five years have been quite volatile. This is especially true in the financial areas of the college. In this area the college has made earnest attempts to meet the accreditation standards and has made significant progress in addressing the recommendations of recent visits in the areas of financial management and oversight.

One of the major initiatives of a former president was the Pacific Gateway project, aimed at attracting a far greater number of international students to NMC. In line with the implementation of this project, the college purchased a modern shopping mall, La Fiesta, located in northern Saipan in January 2004 with the intent of transforming it into an appealing modern facility for higher education. The project was ultimately abandoned and in January 2005 the Commonwealth governor agreed to transfer ownership of the mall from the college to the CNMI executive branch. Although the expenses associated with operating the mall were eventually reimbursed, this was a purchase that was not broadly discussed nor supported and created considerable angst with regard to the financial future of the college among the faculty and staff.

In the past two years the college has experienced severe budget reductions as the Commonwealth suffered serious declines in the garment manufacturing and tourism industries. As a direct consequence, for Fiscal Year 2006, Commonwealth Legislature funding of the college was reduced by approximately 19%, equivalent to $1.5 million cut from its regular annual budget of $8 million. Despite the draconian reductions, the financial planning processes were able to produce a balanced budget with adequate reserves for the current fiscal year. In FY 2007 the college experienced further cuts of approximately 10% to the revenues provided by the Commonwealth Legislature and is now required to pay for its utility costs for the first time in the college’s history.
In addition to the continuing cuts the institution sustained, the recently enacted “Fiscal Austerity Holidays” Act required the college to reduce the hours and pay of all employees with the exception of the 10 month faculty by 10% each bi-weekly pay period. The college president, though, has asked for and received waivers from the US Department of Education for the Rehabilitation program personnel, TRIO program personnel, Title III personnel, and for the ABE/GED program personnel.

The college is audited annually by an independent public accounting and auditing firm. Copies of the annual reports are disseminated to members of the Board of Regents, the college Council, the PBEC, and the administration. The Chief Financial and Administrative Officer prepares a summary report of the audits, disseminating it college-wide via email on an annual basis.

Findings and Evidence

There is evidence that the budgeting processes of the institution are directed by the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Planning Steering Committee is charged with the development of the Strategic Plan. The self study indicates the goals embodied in the strategic plan direct all financial planning at the institution. The NMC Planning, Budget and Evaluation Council (PBEC) develops all financial expenditure plans of the institution. Evidence supporting the institution’s efforts in ensuring the budget is driven by the aim of addressing institutional goals and objectives is found in the annual budget and program reports. The college is to be commended for the creation of the PBEC to monitor the effective allocation of available funds for college-wide use. The evidence is clear that the college has created a well composed council that ensures the participation of all shared governance constituencies. The team applauds the implementation of proper protocol ensuring ultimate decision making authority rests with the college president & ultimately the Board of Regents (Standards III.D.1., III.D.1.a., III.D.1.d., III.D.2.b).

NMC has worked hard to address many of the 24 issues included in the FY 2004 audit report in order to ensure the financial management system has appropriate control mechanisms. In 2005, all audit concerns were addressed with the added accomplishment of ending the fiscal year 2006 with a strong surplus. The team recognizes the progress NMC has made in addressing many of the audit findings, questioned costs and also for all the genuine efforts made to move closer to attaining greater financial accountability and stability and for adjusting the financial operations such that the college ended the previous fiscal year with a surplus (Standards III.D.2., III.D.2.a., III.D.2.c).

One major finding related to fixed asset evaluation. The Board of Regents has now identified funding to contract with professional services to have the land and buildings on the Saipan campus appraised. The Tinian and Rota instructional sites are not deeded to NMC (Standard III.D.2.a).

The team highly commends NMC for working diligently to regain the confidence of the US Department of Education, Pell Grant program in order to return to “Advance Status”
from the undesirable "reimbursement" status. In a similar manner, the team acknowledges and congratulates NMC for addressing the 2003 concerns of ACCJC over the college’s financial progress report and focused midterm report and for managing to be removed from the ACCJC warning status in 2005 (Standards III.D.2.c. and III.D.2.e.)

The college states in the self study that it has a systematic assessment process built into its budget development process. From evidence the team determined that this assessment generally focuses on the manner in which available resources are allocated and the provision for challenges, criticism, and evaluation during the budget building process. There is no evidence the institution systematically assesses the effective use of financial resources and uses the results of evaluation as the basis for improvement (Standards III.D.2.g. and III.D.3).

Conclusions

The college is faced with tough financial challenges that keep the institution from fully meeting this standard. The team clearly found that NMC is a vibrant college with dedicated staff, but one attempting to overcome deeply rooted systemic problems. The institution is genuinely challenged with numerous financial issues. Key among them are the deep budget cuts in government appropriations in recent years, continuing turnover of the college president as well in other critical positions at the college, demoralizing furloughs resulting in reduced income for most employees, and major expenditure decisions without adequate dialogue or supporting data or documentation (e.g., La Fiesta Shopping Mall). There has been a great deal of effort and time invested in addressing most of these concerns that has inhibited the ability of the institution to address improving institutional performance and effectiveness (Standard III.D).

Continued budget cuts have not only strained the institution’s ability to sustain staffing and the quality of the programs and services, but have severely impacted the quality of the facilities, the workload of all faculty, staff and administrators to the point of demoralizing the entire workforce (Standard III.D., III.D.1.c).

Fortunately, there seems to exist a way out of this undesirable situation. The college should re-examine its budget allocation priorities such that the college is guided by the need to support its greatest resource, its faculty, staff and administration. The college is presented with a serious challenge and opportunity by the legislature that it should work hard to harness. The legislators have made it abundantly clear that if NMC assesses its realistic needs in light of its mission, and presents them with plans that meet Commonwealth workforce development needs, they stand ready to support the college’s facilities and budgetary needs to the extent the Commonwealth has the resources to do so. The college should not spare any effort to take on this challenge (Standards III.D.1., III.D.1.a., III.D.1.b., III.D.1.d).

Recommendations

See Recommendation 1 located in Standard I.

See Recommendation 6 located in Standard III B.
General Observations

The Northern Marianas College self study notes and the team observed that the institution is organized to ensure appropriate leadership and governance and to ensure the institution meets its mission, serves the educational needs of citizens of the Northern Marianas Islands, and provides ethics and integrity in its operation. Faculty and administrators have a substantive and clearly defined role in institutional governance and exercise a substantial voice in institutional policies, planning, and budgets that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise. Students and staff also have established mechanisms or organizations for providing input into institutional decisions. Various committees exist to address the various needs of the campus. These include the Faculty Senate, the Staff Senate, the Associated Students, and the College Council. Board policies define the various committees and their roles. Each committee meets on a regular basis. The Academic Council functions as a curriculum committee enabling the institution to rely on an appropriate structure for recommendations about student learning programs and services. In addition to the committees governed by board-approved policies, there are a number of institutional committees formed to meet a variety of needs from assessment to college-wide concerns.

Inconsistency in how committees conduct their business was a frequently expressed concern to the team. One condition which facilitates effective governance is institutional stability at all levels of leadership coupled with effective practices for anticipated personnel changes. Since the last visit, institutional leadership changes have made it difficult to sustain an environment of dialogue, empowerment, innovation, and excellence. This instability within institutional leadership has resulted in little progress in developing sustainable governance structures. The self study committee responsible for Standard IV noted this and further calls for the development of such structures.

Financial reports are provided on a regular basis, surveys are conducted utilizing the Internet, and information is available to the campus community. Many indicated that the information provided was sufficient to utilize in planning, evaluation, and decision making though much of this activity is concentrated in the budgeting process. Minutes are kept and readily available of committee meetings.

Findings and Evidence

The team noted that the governance structure is ineffective: there are overlapping committees, committee by-laws are absent, and there is inconsistency in the processes by which recommendations, via the committee structures, are made. Decisions are not always communicated widely. Discussions with legislators, including the Acting Governor of the Commonwealth, noted a lack of confidence in the college’s direction as well as a lack of trust in what the college communicates. This is partly the result of
continuous leadership change at the presidential level and the low morale on campus due to recent reductions in personnel, budgetary allocation decisions, and insufficient administrative capacity. Specifically, the college lacks sufficient staff with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support the mission. Many staff members have multiple assignments. The interim president, at the time of the visit, continued to hold the title and responsibilities of other positions thus limiting his full time and focused attention to the presidency. This was corrected during the team visit but is reflective of the multiple assignments that are common at this institution and limit the ability of the college to implement many good practices expected of an institution of higher education (Standards IV.A.1., IV.A.2., IV.A.3).

The college recognizes that it must evaluate the effectiveness of the college’s work although a process by which this is implemented has yet to be determined. Several comments were proffered concerning the inconsistency by which issues are discussed at the committee level. The college recognizes the need to review the committee structure, the need to formalize every committee’s role, and determine the extent to which committees have overlapping responsibilities. (Standard IV.A.2).

It is clear the many committees and councils have input into organizational governance. The college understands that this is a work in progress and that it must assess, continually, the effectiveness of these various committees and how they interact as a coherent whole to support and advance the college’s primary mission. The hierarchy of the committee structure and to whom the various entities report and how that information is communicated remains a challenge to assure governance works effectively for the entire campus (Standard IV.A.3).

The self study was very candid and accurate in regards to honestly evaluating the institution and its compliance with Accrediting Commission standards, policies and guidelines (Standard IV.A.4).

Committee work and the contributions each make are not evaluated consistently as a means to improve the governance processes of the college. The visiting team recognizes that more work must be done to ensure that planning, evaluation, and continuous improvements are institutionalized and become part of organizational governance. The college is encouraged to continue to explore ways to identify the best approach to this, to communicate it widely, and to implement a viable governance model (Standard IV.A.5).

Conclusions

The college only partially meets this standard. The conditions addressed above that affect governance at NMC can neither excuse nor substitute the need for an institutional governance model which involves the widest number of stakeholders and honest dialogue with the goal of creating a culture of involvement, accountability, and empowerment. There are many talented and committed individuals who desire to make a positive difference. These individuals work tirelessly and behind closed doors to make a difference in students’ lives. Stable and effective leadership – at the highest levels and
throughout the organization coupled with a formal governance structure in which dialogue occurs and recommendations are made may very well liberate the competence and compassion to organize and implement an effective governance system (Standard IV.A.1).

It is convenient to state the obvious within the self study; however, it is time that the college moves from the discussion of this imperative to creating a governance structure which serves the institution. This requires open and honest communication among all constituents (Standard IV.A.3).

The college demonstrates integrity in its publications, reports, and various documents it produces. At the same time, the campus understands that there have been lapses in timely reporting to the external environment. The visiting team concurs with the self study observation that more must be done to systematically address accreditation standards and other external requirements particularly with respect to timely and accurate information to funding agencies. The college must respond, expeditiously, to the Commission’s standards and requirements. To date, it has failed to demonstrate this in an ongoing, consistent and comprehensive manner (Standard IV.A.4).

Governance at the college must be done in a way which benefits the college and serves to strengthen its programs, services, student outcomes, faculty morale, integrity of mission, and the integration of disparate planning activities. Related outcomes include improved communication, the establishment of priorities, and a redoubling of efforts to serve the communities the college was created to serve. This is no small task; however, the college has no choice but to take governance seriously and elevate its importance (Standard IV.A.5).

**Recommendations**

8. The college should develop a governance process that focuses, integrates, and connects the various planning activities into a coherent institutional effort in which dialogue is open and sustained, that focuses on the institutional mission and student learning outcomes, and by which there is on-going assessment of that process. (Standards I.B, I.B.2.4., IV.A.1., IV.A.2.a., IV.A.3.)
Standard IV B
Board and Administrative Organization

General Observations

The college operates under a Board of Regents comprised of seven members. The Regents establish policies per enabling legislation and appoint the college president. Board authority is derived from the Commonwealth's constitution and relevant laws. Members of the board are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate and, serve staggered terms designed to assure continuity.

Several policies are in place, which delineate responsibilities and institutional policies, the applicable by-laws, size, structure, and operating procedures of the Board of Regents. The board's operating procedures are in compliance with accreditation standards and are enumerated in appropriate policies; however, inasmuch as five of the seven members are newly-appointed and that the board did not function when membership was below the requirement for a quorum, the board is not functioning at a capacity demonstrating responsibility for the quality, integrity, and financial stability of the institution to ensure the college's mission is being carried out. Policy manuals, minutes, and other documents are readily available for review. The board meets on a quarterly basis and retains the ability to meet on an as-needed basis. Recently, the board has been meeting several times per month. Periodic evaluation of board policies has been infrequent. An orientation for new members was scheduled though only two of the five new members attended. A second orientation is being discussed and scheduled. Board members appear to understand their policy role and responsibility for selecting and evaluating the chief executive. There is no evidence that the board interferes with college activities. Regents appeared to be informed and involved in the accreditation process as evidenced by their service on self study working groups.

The role and responsibilities of the board are critical to the development of a quality institution, reflective of the needs of the community, and consistent with the published mission. Any lapse in a full board, committed to the institution, has a debilitating effect on the college and sends the wrong message to the constituents who rely on the college. With a full complement of membership, the college is positioned to respond to its community with the public support it deserves.

The board has established policies which address quality, integrity, and student learning outcomes. Other policies address a code of ethics for the board members. These are intended to ensure that the institution responds to community needs and that quality is maintained. While these policies are in place, members of the legislature expressed serious concern that the institution has drifted from its mission and may no longer be serving the needs of the Commonwealth. Improved dialogue within the campus matched by on-going interaction with the legislature is imperative to reestablish trust and confidence that the college is responsive with high quality instructional programs that address the workforce training and other Commonwealth priorities.
The Board of Regents hires, supervises, and evaluates the president. The board is currently engaged in selecting a new chief executive. That process should convey to the candidates the board’s expectations and how the chief executive is to be evaluated.

The current president serves on an acting basis and possesses the authority and responsibility to guide the institution, oversee every facet of its operation including the off-campus sites, and evaluate the effectiveness of each activity. Much of this is delegated to others and is informal at best.

Since February 2004, the college has focused on its fiscal situation as a result of an accreditation warning. Institutional efforts were redirected to respond to ACCJC concerns. New sources of revenue have been acquired, many vacated positions left unfilled, and improved controls implemented. As a result the college has created a balanced budget and more adequate reserves.

Findings and Evidence

From late 2005 to February 2006 the Board of Regents did not have enough members to constitute a quorum and was unable to hold meetings and thus carry out its constitutional responsibilities. This resulted from the election of a new Governor who was unable to make appointments from the time of his election to the time of his appointment. The “lame duck” Governor did not feel it would be appropriate or effective to appoint new members to the Board of Regents during this time period leaving the college without a functioning governing board in violation of the Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation. Although this was corrected by the new Governor in a very timely manner following his inauguration, this process not only left the college without a board for several months but it also resulted in the appointment of five new members of the board in a very short period of time. Despite the quality of the new appointees, this lack of experience for a majority of the board and their relative lack of knowledge of the responsibilities of a member of the Board of Regents as well as the history and background of the institution is not appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education. (IV.B., IV.B.1., IV.B.1.f).

The college has a position of President with the assigned responsibilities consistent with accreditation standards; however, turnover in this critical position has limited the ability of the president to effectively carry out these responsibilities. The position is currently being filled with an acting president who is attempting to manage a college that does not have an experienced, adequately trained board, is missing several critical administrative positions, is declining in enrollment, and has not effectively communicated with the CNMI legislature or administration in the past to obtain the support the institution needs to be successful. The former president was not evaluated in the process of resigning from his position (Standards IV.B.1.j., IV.B.2., IV.B.2.a-e).

The college president has a strong history of effectively controlling budgets and expenditures on a yearly basis. The college has not been successful effectively
communicating the needs of the college for appropriate operational and capital project funding that would provide the stability that is needed for the college to focus on long-term institutional improvement (Standards IV.B.2.d. and IV.B.2.e).

Conclusions

Considering a newly appointed Board of Regents (only two of seven have served for more than 8 months) and the recent resignation of the college president (the current acting president is the fifth to serve in this position since the retirement of the founding president in 2000), the college does not adequately meet this standard. For several months from November 2005 to February 2006 the Board did not have enough appointed members to hold a legal meeting. With the current board members now appointed and confirmed by the CNMI Senate, the Board of Regents with some additional experience and training is positioned to begin functioning in accordance with the standards. The acting president has so many roles on campus that in the short time he will be in this position he will not be able to effectively address the multiple responsibilities of a chief executive officer as defined in these standards. The Board has created a hiring process that seeks to employ a permanent chief executive officer in the very near future. The Board does not have a history of interference in the operation of the college (Standards IV.B.1., IV.B.1.j., IV.B.2).

While some progress has been made by past presidents to improve the teaching and learning environment, the college acknowledges that much more must be done to formalize the planning, evaluation, and continuous improvement process – including the codification and verification of learning outcomes – to strengthen the college. Developing a governance process with clearly defined roles and responsibilities is a prerequisite to this. It is also necessary for relatively inexperienced Board of Regents to fully understand the standards of good practice in an institution of higher education in order to carry out its responsibilities for the quality, integrity, and financial stability of the institution and for ensuring that the institution’s mission is being carried out. It is important that the Board of Regents and the president establish an ongoing system of communication and advocacy with the Commonwealth legislature and administration to effectively provide the information and evidence that the college is meeting its constitutionally established mission and deserves additional financial support (Standards IV.B.1. and IV.B.2).

Recommendations

9. The college is encouraged to establish sustained channels of communication with the legislature in an effort to enhance its operational budget and capital improvement projects. The college should reexamine and align its budget allocation priorities to retain and competitively recruit high quality faculty and staff to ensure the institution’s effectiveness. (Standards III.A.1., III.B.1.a., III.B.1.b., III.B.2., III.D., IV.B.1.c., IV.B.2.b., IV.B.2.e.)
History of the Baccalaureate Program Accreditation

Education programs at NMC were a strong component of the original charter and mission of the college beginning with an AA degree and certificate program for the Public School System’s (PSS) teacher aides in the mid 1980s. As the program developed, NMC partnered with University of Guam to deliver a four-year Bachelor degree program with NMC’s Department of Education providing 300 level courses and University of Guam faculty traveling to Saipan to teach the 400 level courses. Upon initial accreditation of the SOE program from the WASC Senior Commission in 2000, the NMC School of Education assumed full responsibility for the baccalaureate degree and certification in Elementary Education. In the report of the visiting team recommending accreditation for the SOE elementary education program, the program was commended for curricular strength in areas of multicultural education, learning styles applications, instructional methodology sensitive to cultures and needs of the island, active learning, student projects, group work, and the integration of technology in classroom instruction.

A special visit to NMC in April of 2004 resulted in a joint team recommendation from ACCJC and ACSCU to continue the college on warning citing a deep concern about, “the institution’s ongoing capacity and ability to sustain the quality of its academic programs, especially the baccalaureate education program.” The joint team also recommended another special visit in the fall of 2004 to investigate progress in:

1. Evaluation and program review processes are being developed, including clear student learning and institutional outcomes;
2. The program has appropriate and stable leadership structure and that faculty workload is balanced between teaching and administrative duties; and
3. Institutional budgeting and allocation processes have been clarified for the baccalaureate program.

A special team visit to NMC in October 2004 reported the following responses to these three concerns:

1. Ten specific evidences of progress in evaluation and program review of the SOE program were found including identification of learning outcomes, revision of course outlines, development of an outcomes-driven capstone assessment rubric in student teaching, exit interviews, electronic portfolios, Assessment Cycle Schedule, technology competencies aligned with state and local standards,
collaborative evaluation of assessment expectations, adoption of PRAXIS testing in education program requirements. "There is much more to be done, but the team believes the SOE understands its responsibilities, has devised long-term and short-term assessment plans, and is capable of completing them with additional time.

2. Full-time faculty in SOE continue to teach extensive overloads as well as provide in-service training to local teachers in PSS and administer program grants and projects. Faculty have chosen to reduce curriculum offerings offered by adjuncts in order to maintain quality control of the program. Restriction of course offerings to availability of full-time faculty schedules has reduced curriculum offerings to some degree. The College Lab School lost three instructors and four members of the full-time faculty were scheduled for retirement in 2005. There is significant concern regarding sustainability and continuity of the SOE program with these changes in faculty and NMC leadership. With the resolution of the La Fiesta Project financial pressures, faculty and the visiting team are hopeful that faculty compensation and workload issues will be resolved.

3. Confusion exists among SOE faculty about budgeting and allocation processes for the SOE and the College Lab School. In addition, the integrated thematic instruction of the lab school is out of synch with the standards-based curriculum of the PSS. SOE faculty express concern that the lab school is a drain to the college budget and an inadequate representation of cutting edge pedagogy. Administration of NMC reports no knowledge of operating deficits for the lab school: The SOE also identified need for additional classrooms on NMC campus due to increased enrollment in duplicated headcount (508 students in 1997-1998 to 804 in 2000-2001).

The team encouraged the administration to investigate ways to improve faculty compensation and workload and two formal recommendations were made by the October 2004 visiting team regarding SOE:

1. The administration, working with the SOE, should examine the operations of the College Lab School to determine whether it is supporting the Teacher Preparation Program, as stated in the mission statement for the SOE.

2. The college should consider ways to clarify communication with faculty regarding the budget planning process.

In February 2005 the ACSCU and ACCJC removed warning status and reaffirmed accreditation for NMC. A progress report was received from NMC in fall of 2005 and a special visit was conducted in November of 2005 to validate the progress report addressing Recommendation #2 from the 2000 visit:

"The college direct sufficient resources to its institutional effectiveness efforts in order to build its capacity to collect, analyze, and use information for effective institutional decision-making. These resources

-50-
should support the institution’s ability to have a systematic, information-driven approach to decision-making at all levels of the organization, including the capacity to train faculty and staff in the effective use of information in their ongoing decision-making processes.”

The team commended NMC for commitment to open communication, improvement of its fiscal stability regarding a contingency reserve and payment status with U.S. Department of Education Pell Grants program, investment of significant funding for professional development on SLOs, significant investment in strategic planning and institutional effectiveness dialog, progress in SOE regarding assessment of SLOs and relationship with PSS. The team concluded that “there is sufficient confidence that the college can withstand the period of heightened cash monitoring.”

Context

This report represents a description of findings and observations regarding the Northern Marianas College bachelor degree program in Elementary Education accredited by WASC. While the report on SOE and the bachelor degree program is primarily the focus of this section, the reviewer specifically draws attention to the following general areas of institutional concern cited by the team in the comprehensive report and reflected in the Senior Commission Standards as indicated below. These concerns and information supporting these concerns are reported in the complete report provided by the ACCJC team of which the Senior Commission representative was a voting member. (Senior Commission Standards are indicated in parentheses)

1. Planning/Shared Vision/Priorities (1.1, 1.3, 3.8, 3.10, 4.1): 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 instructional sites 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

2. Program Review (2.7, 4.4): 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.

3. Distance Education: The college should provide quality assurance for instructional programs at distant instructional 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 instructional sites until new connectivity is established.

4. Student Learning Outcomes (2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.6): The team recommends that the college complete the cycle of developing, measuring, analyzing, and discussing Student Learning Outcomes as part of a continuous effort of improvement. *Note: While this concern is generally diffused throughout the campus, this concern does not apply to the SOE.

5. Employee Evaluation: 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.

6. Facilities master plan (3.5): The college should pursue funding to renovate or replace aging facilities that are appropriate to meet the current and future needs of the college.

7. Technology Plan (3.5, 3.7): The college should develop and implement college-wide planning that includes a technology plan that evaluates, supports, and plans for the future of instructional, student services, and administrative functions across the college's sites.

8. Governance Process (4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 1.3): The college should develop a governance process by which it integrates and connects the various planning activities into a coherent institutional effort in which dialogue is open and sustained, that focuses on the institutional mission and student learning outcomes, and provides for an on-going assessment of that process for the continuous improvement of the institution.

9. Finances (3.5, 3.6, 4.2): The college is highly encouraged to establish sustained channels of communication with the legislature in an effort to enhance its operational budget and capital improvement projects. As added resources become available the college should reexamine and align its budget allocation priorities to be able to competitively retain and recruit high quality faculty and staff to ensure the institution's effectiveness.

General Comments regarding Review of School of Education BA Program in Elementary Education

During the team site visit to Northern Marianas College on October 16–19, 2006 the representative from the Senior Commission of WASC met with eight members of the SOE faculty including the director, members of the Academic Council for NMC, members of the accreditation steering committee, library personnel, CRC library coordinator, four students in the elementary education program, and three members of the SOE Advisory Council; visited two SOE classes in session; visited three elementary schools; observed two student teachers; interviewed two master teachers in PSS schools; and interviewed two elementary principals. The Senior Commission representative also reviewed the self study Report for the 2006 Reaffirmation of Accreditation visit, all previous team reports from 2000 to 2006, SOE meeting minutes, SOE evidence reports
for student learning outcomes, Academic Council minutes, college catalog and course schedules, and HR reports of SOE faculty workloads in 2005 and 2006.

**Findings & Evidence – BA Program in Elementary Education**

**Faculty Perspectives:** Senior Commission representatives met with eight members of the School of Education and discussed current mix of faculty contributions to the program, workload concerns, SOE “fit” with NMC community, relationship with the PSS, assessment progress using SLO analysis to affect program improvement, general morale, faculty governance within SOE, and leadership changes of NMC. The new director of the SOE began his position in January 2006 and reports he is addressing considerable challenge adapting to and learning local educational systems, teacher education, and faculty governance environments of the institution and the PSS. The director’s position is a full-time administrative position which is needed for direct communication with PSS administration and advocacy for the importance of the Bachelor’s degree program at NMC with the local government. According to SOE Advisory Council members, the director’s position has recently been changed from a dean’s position and this change has reduced the influence and primacy of SOE at the college. They intend to advocate immediately with college administration to reestablish the Dean level of administration for SOE in order to communicate the importance of the SOE programs and provide critical influence on community stakeholders and college administrators. Currently the program enrolls 234 students which represents a considerable drop in program enrollment. Two staff positions and one administrative position (dean) have not been replaced. The faculty have accepted and supported the discontinuation of the lab school at NMC and report that the PSS is now their extended lab school and “that is how it should be.” They report that placing students in local schools gives them more contact with teachers and administrators in the PSS and helps build bridges of collaboration, shares new strategies and skills with current teachers in PSS, and promotes collegiality with PSS members. Interviews with local master teachers supervising NMC students in classrooms also confirmed that they are receiving significant benefits from having NMC student teachers in their classrooms. PSS master teachers observe new teaching strategies and share those strategies with their colleagues in PSS. The Commissioner of PSS indicates they could hire up to 60 teachers per year from NMC if they were available (4.1).

SOE faculty report, however, that strained relationships do remain between top level administrators at NMC and PSS and the resulting pressure is affecting SOE faculty in expectations for workload (professional development activities) and program design (1.6).

**Student Perspectives:** Students in the Elementary Education program express pride and satisfaction with the program. The majority of students interviewed are planning to remain in the Northern Mariana Islands to teach (1.1). Students report excellent, enthusiastic, and supportive faculty and, for the most part, helpful advising and student services. Students observed in class and in student teaching settings demonstrated solid skills in content clarity and pedagogical strategies. PSS principals and master teachers
express appreciation and continued interest in having student teachers and practicum students in their schools.

**Developing Local Island Faculty for SOE:** The faculty are exceptionally proud that two of the eight current faculty are native Islanders and they are working diligently with several current graduates in the field to complete their MA degrees and join the faculty ranks. They report that the development of additional SOE faculty from the local community is a primary goal of their unit's mission. They believe they will add two to three additional local faculty within the next three years. (1.1, 3.2)

**Workload:** Faculty Workload continues to be an issue for SOE personnel (2.1, 3.2). In spring 2006 semester the faculty workload ranged from 16.5 to 24 credits with several faculty also doing additional work for CDI (Community Development Institute) programs. Faculty also perceive that other program faculty at NMC have little understanding of the extensive administrative oversight and paperwork demanded by external agencies' involved with teacher education. Recently the NMC administration has worked with SOE faculty in an attempt to resolve equity concerns over compensation for practicum and student teaching supervision. Faculty report they are strongly encouraged and sometimes required to engage in grant writing and administration but are not then compensated in workload release to fulfill the requirements of the grants when received. They report that excessive interest in attaining available grant funding distracts them from the focus of teacher preparation curriculum delivery.

**Morale:** In addition to actual workload concerns, faculty also feel unappreciated and unacknowledged for the success, academic strength, and mission-centeredness of their program. Even when attempts are made by the college administration to acknowledge faculty, it is done without appropriate professional and public visibility. (For example, after graduation exercises in the spring of 2006, faculty teaching award plaques were distributed individually after the ceremony rather than acknowledging the faculty during the public ceremony.) These conditions plus lack of salary raises, multiple assignments, staff reductions, and recent austerity holiday cuts in salary have left the faculty demoralized and tired.

**Student Learning Outcomes & Program Improvement:** Program assessment has been completed through entire feedback cycle. Faculty have identified SLOs for each course and those SLOs are contained in the individual syllabi for all courses. Class instructors gather student evidence and collate evidence class-by-class. Then faculty meet in a group setting and discuss findings from that evidence across courses in the program. As a summative analysis activity, the full faculty of SOE met in May 2006 for a three-day retreat to share and discuss cross-course SLOs. Eighteen courses from SOE were reviewed in this activity. The result of that meeting was a series of course changes and program emphases reported in a Curriculum Map Overview report.

One specific result of continuous program improvement and collaboration with the local school district (PSS) is the incorporation of PRAXIS testing from ETS which has been added to the initial curriculum to provide accountability within the program as well as

-54-
professional development and focus/support for teachers in the PSS. SOE reports that 97 percent of teacher education candidates are passing PRAXIS I as part of the program requirements. PRAXIS II is not required in the program but is available for candidates to complete when ready. Teachers in the PSS are also required to pass PRAXIS I and II in order to qualify as “qualified professionals” in the district under NCLB (No Child Left Behind) legislation. SOE faculty assist and provide preparation workshops and classes for PSS to support successful completion of PRAXIS exams by PSS teachers. At the present time, NMC and PSS have different levels of “passing scores” on the PRAXIS exams which is causing confusion and consternation for both PSS and NMC. Faculty and Advisory Council members both report this resulted from poor communication between NMC and PSS with the recent transitions in SOE leadership and PSS leadership. The Advisory Council does intend to address this issue early in the fall 2006 agenda.

SOE Advisory Council. An SOE Advisory Council was reconstituted by the new SOE director in the spring of 2006 and has begun to meet as of fall 2006. The Advisory Council reports its role to be that of offering recommendations regarding the priority of the SOE at the College, the need of a higher level administrator in SOE – re-establishing the dean’s position to communicate and negotiate with the PSS and government of the Commonwealth, advocating support and priority of SOE initiatives to the government of the Commonwealth, suggesting curriculum components to the present degree which reflect needs of the local community, advice regarding governance and workload of faculty in SOE, communicating the needs of the PSS.

Conclusions of Review of BA in Elementary Education Program

Program Planning & Design: Curriculum of the elementary education program continues to be excellent, coherent, and based upon current research and best practices in teacher education development literature. Students, PSS teachers and administrators, and government officials praise the teacher training program as high quality and effective: Clinical site selections, preparation of master teachers, and evaluation of student achievement and skill development is consistent and documented. Faculty are involved in curriculum design, alignment, mapping, and improvement as a team.

Student Learning Assessment & Program Improvement: While the faculty is clearly engaged in departmental program reflection as a unit, there is little evidence of using actual SLO achievement by analyzing the student evidence gathered by the course instructors. The changes recommended in the Curriculum Map Overview (May 2006) seem to represent more of a curriculum duplication/omission study rather than results from the analysis of SLO evidence gathered by the instructors. While 18 courses from SOE were reviewed in this activity, nothing in the report template for each course provides results of the analysis of targeted student evidence of learning to support the curriculum changes. In interviews of the faculty, it became obvious that individual instructor’s sense of student learning was being used; however, the faculty’s informal impressions were documented in the decision-making process rather than a summary report of the actual evidence itself. While this resulted in constructive program changes, a clear summary of the program changes initiated as a result of SLO evidence analysis
would be stronger justification that student learning is motivating program changes. SOE may now benefit from a review of their evidence collection and analysis procedures with the intention of simplifying and documenting data collection, analysis, and program changes in summary (perhaps matrix) fashion.

**Projections of Program Need & Enrollment Targets:** It is sometimes difficult to establish the long-term trends for either need or expectation from the PSS for graduates of the SOE. Currently the Saipan PSS employs 300 elementary teachers. Board of Regents chairperson indicated that the PSS could employ 60 teachers per year from the SOE program. At this rate, however, it would appear that within five years the need would have been significantly saturated. At the same time the SOE graduates have been reduced from 65 program completers in 2003 consisting of two large cohorts of students, 20 students earning their Certificates of Early Childhood Education and 20 Certificates of Completion in Related Services to 13 program completers in 2006. The explanation of this enrollment decline is attributed to tighter economic context in Saipan, a significant tuition raise at the college, and uncertain dependability of financial assistance at the time of registration.

**Distance Delivery of SOE Courses:** Team members had serious concerns about the quality of education courses delivery on Rota via the VTC transmission delivery. The televised transmission of courses is not dependable enough to present critical information and the substitution of written handouts when the system is down does not represent adequate instruction and support for students. Faculty also report that when Rota students come to Saipan for culminating experiences, they are not as ready for clinical experiences as are students on Saipan or Tinian.

**Commendations from Review of BA Program in Elementary Education**

1. The SOE faculty are commended for their curriculum design evidencing current literature and theory of teacher education.

2. The SOE faculty are commended for establishing positive working relationships with PSS personnel and collaborating with PSS personnel in curriculum development for K-8 schools in PSS.

3. The SOE faculty are commended for their willingness to participate regularly in professional development initiatives for the PSS.

4. The SOE faculty are commended for identifying and implementing student learning outcomes for all courses and for significant attempts to use SLOs in program improvement.

5. The NMC administration is commended for attempts to move SOE faculty into one location with facilities to support and nurture unit dialogue and collegiality.
6. The SOE is commended as an exemplary effort of how the college's mission is being translated in a program that serves Commonwealth needs.

**Recommendations from Review of BA Program in Elementary Education**

1. The SOE is encouraged to further clarify the specific SLO evidence that supports curriculum changes and to simplify the reporting process for documenting both the evidence and the changes in program design.

2. The institution is strongly encouraged to monitor workload limitations of faculty in the Bachelor degree program by providing adequate faculty resources to deliver the curriculum of the elementary education program.

3. The institution is encouraged to review workload credit assigned for work on grant proposal preparation and implementation/administration.

4. The administration and Board of Regents are encouraged to review the original intent and the current appropriate "fit" of the Bachelor degree program in Elementary Education in the mission of the institution and to assure that collegial relationships exist among all faculty in the learning community of NMC.

5. The administration and faculty of SOE are encouraged to work diligently toward maintaining and building positive and constructive relationships with the PSS to provide a professional dialogue involving both the NMC perspective and the PSS perspective on best practices for preparing and supporting teachers in the Northern Mariana Islands.

6. SOE faculty are strongly encouraged to review the adequacy of VTC delivery of courses to Rota and to develop both criteria for and evaluation of student learning outcomes using this mode of delivery.