



**ACCREDITING
COMMISSION
for COMMUNITY and
JUNIOR COLLEGES**

*Western Association
of Schools and Colleges*

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February 11, 2013

Dr. Sharon Hart
President
Northern Marianas College
P. O. Box 501250
Saipan, MP 96950

Dear President Hart:

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, at its meeting January 9-11, 2013, considered the institutional Self Evaluation Report, the report of the evaluation team which visited Northern Marianas College October 22- 25, 2012, the two letters sent to the Commission by President Hart on December 10, 2012 and December 17, 2012, and the presentation by College representatives during the Commission meeting.

The purpose of the review was to consider Northern Marianas College's application for reaffirmation of accreditation, and determine whether the College meets Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards. The Commission found that Northern Marianas College was in substantial non-compliance with its Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards in that it has failed to meet Eligibility Requirements 5 and 13, and has substantial deficiencies associated with Accreditation Standards, as referenced in Recommendations 2, 3, and 8 of the 2012 Evaluation Team Report.

The Commission acted to order **Show Cause** and to require that the College complete a **Show Cause Report** by **October 15, 2013**. The report will be followed by a visit of Commission representatives. Northern Marianas College is also required to prepare a **Closure Report** by **October 15, 2013**, which is to be submitted with the institution's Show Cause Report.

The accredited status of the institution continues during the period of Show Cause but reaffirmation of accreditation will not occur until and unless the institution addresses all deficiencies and is found to be in substantial compliance with all Accreditation Standards, Eligibility Requirements and Commission policies.

Show Cause is ordered when the Commission finds an institution in substantial non-compliance with the Commission's Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, or policies, or when the institution has not responded to the conditions imposed by the Commission. Northern Marianas College (NMC) must show cause why its accreditation should not be withdrawn by the Commission at its January 2014 Commission meeting by demonstrating that it has corrected the deficiencies noted by the Commission and is in compliance with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies. The burden of proof rests on the institution to demonstrate why its accreditation should be continued.

Dr. Sharon Hart
Northern Marianas College
February 11, 2013

Since the loss of accreditation would likely cause Northern Marianas College to close, during the show cause period, the College must make preparations for closure according to the Commission's *Policy on Closing an Institution*.

For specific reference to the Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards that NMC was found by the evaluation team and the Commission not to meet, either fully or partially, the institution is referred to the Evaluation Report which connects each of the evaluation team's findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the applicable Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards.

The Evaluation Report describes in detail the findings, analysis and conclusions of the 2012 evaluation team. The College is urged to very carefully review the *entire* report and use it as a basis for developing and enacting strategies to come into compliance with accreditation requirements. The October 2013 Show Cause Report should demonstrate that NMC has addressed all recommendations and Commission concerns expressed in this action letter, resolved all deficiencies, and come into compliance with Eligibility Requirements 5 and 13, and with Accreditation Standards II.C.2, III.A.1, III.A.2, IV.A.2, IV.B.1.a, IV.B.2, IV.B.1.j and their specific component parts noted in the recommendations listed below, and has the ability to sustain this compliance.

Evaluation Team Findings on Eligibility Requirements:

Eligibility Requirement 5: Administrative Capacity

The Commission is concerned that the College lacks sufficient staff with appropriate preparation and experience to support its operations. This deficiency was identified in the commission's January 2008 action letter, and is still not fully addressed. The Evaluation Team Report states that, having failed to hire a Chief Financial Officer, the College hired a Dean of Administration to perform the duties of fiscal management and oversight (Evaluation Team Report, page 45). The institution has also stated that it has been unsuccessful to date in hiring a Director of Information Technology, and is still involved in search for an individual for this position. The 2012 Evaluation Team Report also notes that these administrative vacancies also affect the institution's ability to meet Standards IV.B.2 and IV.B.2.a (see page 65 of the Evaluation Team Report). **Recommendation 5 of the October 2012 Evaluation Team Report, although listed as a recommendation for improvement, also addresses the need to fill vacancies in administrative support areas.**

Eligibility Requirement 13: Faculty

The Evaluation Team Report states that the institution has not established in policy the minimum qualifications for persons who are employed as faculty members, has not consistently conducted annual evaluations, and has not provided evaluations that are completed to faculty in a timely manner such that they can use the relevant information to improve their performance in the next semester. Many of the faculty graduate degrees are in teaching or education, rather than in the discipline to which they are assigned to teach. **The 2012 Evaluation Team Report's Recommendation 3 also states that there needs to be improvement in this area.**

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Evaluation Team Recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 2:

To meet the Standards, the team recommends that the library build on its successful student satisfaction survey efforts by implementing strategies to directly measure Student Learning Outcomes concerning information literacy. (Standard II.C.2)

An information literacy component has become a requirement of all NMC degree programs. However, limited work has been done on establishing and assessing meaningful student learning outcomes (SLOs) in library and other learning support services. The student survey data used to assess learning, while helpful, does not capture or adequately assess student learning.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

To meet the Standards and assure the integrity and quality of programs and services, the team recommends that the College develop, and consistently apply, clear criteria in determining qualifications for faculty (Eligibility Requirement 13--Faculty, III.A.1, III.A.2).

This deficiency is related to the College's failure to meet Eligibility Requirement 13, as described above.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

To meet the Standards, the team recommends that the Board and the president assure that Board policies consistently distinguish between their roles, of the Board as a policy-making body and the president as responsible for the operation of the College, and improve the understanding of the College community regarding the responsibility of the president in advising the Board. Specifically, the team urges the College and Board to reconsider its policy of having Honorary Regents, who are elected to represent some College constituent groups, participate in direct discussion of policy issues during Board meetings (Standards IV.A.2, IV.B.1.a, IV.B.1.j).

The Commission is concerned that the Board of Regents has adopted a policy of appointing Honorary Regents representative of faculty and staff. These members sit on the board and regularly engage in direct discussions related to policy issues during board meetings. As these members represent faculty senate, staff senate, and student senate groups, the practice violates Accreditation Standards that require board independence (Standard IV.B.1.a). The Evaluation Team Report states the following: "Although the College has a number of collegial governance bodies and a stated decision-making process through those bodies, the existence of Honorary Regents suggests that the College Council does not truly act as the advisory group to the president. In discussions with the Regents, the Honorary Regents are expected to provide additional information directly to the Board of Regents outside the decision-making path." (Evaluation Team Report, page 65). Over the past many years, the Commission has repeatedly identified areas in which the operation of the governing board has not met Standards.

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The Board of Regents' problems have contributed significantly to the institution's other difficulties meeting Accreditation Standards. The failure of the Board to structure its membership properly such that the Board retains its appropriate roles and responsibilities, and does not undermine the administrative and decision making structures of the college, has been central to the College's accreditation difficulties.

The Commission noted the significant amount of work that Northern Marianas College has done in the last two years to come into compliance with accreditation standards, most of it under the leadership of the current president. In the past, instability at the Chief Executive Officer level has led to the institution's inability to organize itself to meet Accreditation Standards. It appears that except for the difficulties with the governing board, the College currently has leadership capacity to address the remaining accreditation issues. However, the Commission is concerned that the current president's contract is expiring, and that the institution has taken no actions yet either to stabilize its current leadership or to recruit new leadership. The Commission wishes to recommend that the governing board seek immediate advice on what it should do to come into compliance with all Accreditation Standards, and then take the steps necessary.

I wish to inform you that under U.S. Department of Education regulations, institutions out of compliance with standards or on a sanction are expected to correct deficiencies within a two-year period or the Commission must take action to terminate accreditation. Northern Marianas College has exceeded the two years on some of the issues noted in this letter and in the 2012 Evaluation Team Report. Unless the Commission finds during its January 2014 meeting that Northern Marianas College met its burden to show that it has fully resolved the deficiencies noted in this action letter, the Commission will act to terminate accreditation, effective at the end of the Spring semester 2014.

A **final** copy of the Evaluation Report is enclosed. Additional copies may now be duplicated. The Commission requires that the Evaluation Report and this action letter be disseminated to College staff and to those who were signatories of the institutional Self Evaluation Report. This group should include campus leadership and the Board of Regents.

The Commission also requires the College to make the Self Study Report, Evaluation Report, and this Commission action letter available to students and the public by placing the materials on the College website. *Please note that in response to public interest in disclosure, the Commission now requires institutions to post accreditation information on a page no farther than one click from the institution's home page.* If you would like an electronic copy of the Evaluation Team Report, please contact Commission staff.

Federal regulations require the Commission to post a Public Disclosure Notice (PDN) for institutions placed on Probation or Show Cause, or when accreditation is terminated. The PDN is used to inform the public of the reasons for such a severe sanction. The Commission will post the PDN on the College's entry in the Directory of Accredited Institutions online at www.accjc.org. The institution is permitted to post a response to the PDN. Enclosed find the proposed notice for Northern Marianas College with this action letter, and your comments on it are invited. Please provide the College's response for posting, if any, by March 11, 2013.

Dr. Sharon Hart
Northern Marianas College
February 11, 2013

Please call this office if the ACCJC staff can be of assistance or if you have any questions.

On behalf of the Commission, I wish to express continuing interest in the institution's educational programs and services. Professional self-regulation is the most effective means of assuring integrity, effectiveness and quality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara A. Beno".

Barbara A. Beno, Ph.D.

BAB/tl

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Amanda Allen, Accreditation Liaison Officer
Board President, Board of Regents
Dr. Gari Browning, Superintendent/President Ohlone College, Team Chair
Ms. Martina Fernandez-Rosario, U.S.D.E.