

Improvement at the College of Micronesia - FSM Review of Options

Issues Affecting Quality of Graduates

The College of Micronesia - FSM has received isolated feedbacks from its stakeholders either through informal communications or through regulated information mining through interviews and surveys on their perception of the college's graduates. Even with the current disconnect between the school systems and concerns over the quality of students entering and exiting the college, the stakeholders generally commend the quality of work performed in work areas that deal with communications technologies. However, many stakeholders still prefer expatriate workers over Micronesians including our graduates due to the low level of commitment and dedication to work displayed by a prevailing number of local workers. The college has recognized this and is looking at certain training interventions to help breach the gap especially in the areas of the dimensions of learning. Though the current deficiency in our graduates' workforce readiness and soft skills is mostly attributed to the prevailing attitudes, the college is looking towards the dimensions of learning as a possible strategy to help improve the situation. This direction would require the college to evaluate itself in order to become a model for its students in the non-training areas of workforce readiness skills.

An institutional understanding of what quality actually entails has not yet been established. Currently, members of the college community define quality according to their own standards. The college is just starting to improve its assessment and evaluation practices and to align these efforts directly with planning and resources allocation. Though quality is recognized as something that the college should aspire to in all its activities, a clear institutional understanding of what quality really means is still to be defined and interred as part of the institutional knowledge and practice.

Current statistics from official FSM National Government data indicate the likelihood of a population reduction over the course of 15 years should the current migration trend continues. More than half of those migrating are of the childbearing and college-going age. About half of this age group is seeking employment or educational opportunities off island.

Due to the recent setup of the educational system from K-14, the nation cannot guarantee compliance with established standards throughout the system. Possible contributing factors which were commonly discussed include the disconnect between the educational systems, lack of clear and continuous communication/feedback between classroom teachers and state DOE offices, between state and national DOE offices, between the primary, secondary, and postsecondary school systems, and between the school systems and the

stakeholders. Against this backdrop, it almost is impossible to guarantee the quality of students as they ascend the three levels of our educational system. These same concerns were discussed during the College of Micronesia - FSM President's Retreat of 2006, at the College of Micronesia - FSM Programs Planning Conference of 2007, and the Pohnpei State Department of Education Strategic Planning Conference of 2007.

Through its placement test, the college enrolls students as: (1) college ready - those who are able to handle college-level courses; (2) developmental - those who need specialized training to improve in some core subject areas; and (3) beginner - those who cannot perform at college-level and are often placed in the general studies program. The combined percentage of students belonging to the developmental and beginner camps is always higher than the college-level group or an average of 75 percent. With the absence of an institutional enrollment plan, the college is receiving mostly fresh-out-of-high school students. The college occasionally enrolls continuing education or adult learners. The college is yet to develop an enrollment plan to recruit and retain fresh-out-of-high school, adult, and continuing education students. Classes are currently taught onsite. The college is just starting to implement the utilization of distance education techniques to share courses between campuses or to bring training to the trainees.

The current structure of the college is being normalized after many years of developments. Technically, the College of Micronesia - FSM is considered as one college but existing at different sites or campuses. As such, the college is mandated to ensure the quality of its programs and services regardless of which campuses these are offered. All campuses report to a central administration that is intended to oversee the administration, student services, and instructional services of the college at all its campuses, which are separated by miles of the Pacific Ocean. The college has documented an improvement of employee understanding of the nature of the college. However, the tendency for each campus to establish its own distinctive identity remains.

The college is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior College (ACCJC) of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Like other institutions accredited under this accrediting body, the college is required to comply with the following four standards: **Standard I: Institutional Mission and Effectiveness** - *(The institution demonstrates strong commitment to a mission that emphasizes achievement of student learning and to communicating the mission internally and externally. The institution uses analyses of quantitative and qualitative data and analysis in an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, implementation, and re-evaluation to verify and improve the effectiveness by which the mission is accomplished)*; **Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services** - *(The institution offers high-quality instructional programs, student support services, and library and learning support services that facilitate and*

demonstrate the achievement of stated student learning outcomes. The institution provides an environment that supports learning, enhances student understanding and appreciation of diversity, and encourages personal and civic responsibility as well as intellectual, aesthetic, and personal development for all of its students); Standard III: Resources - (The institution effectively uses its human, physical, technology, and financial resources to achieve its broad educational purposes, including stated student learning outcomes, and to improve institutional effectiveness); and Standard IV: Leadership and Governance - (The institution recognizes and utilizes the contributions of leadership throughout the organization for continuous improvement of the institution. Governance roles are designed to facilitate decisions that support student learning programs and services and improve institutional effectiveness, while acknowledging the designated responsibilities of the governing board and the chief administrator). The college has been cited for noncompliance in certain areas under each of the four standards. The college is also preparing itself to submit a progress report on compliance issues to the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) on the 15th of October 2008. A comprehensive self-study of the college is due to the commission in 2010 against the four standards.

The accrediting commission that accredits the college, after evaluating the college's programs, services, and management, has noted the necessity for the college to constantly evaluate and assess its services and to make improvements based on the results of such evaluations. The college is gradually developing a culture of evidence by utilizing assessment and evaluation exercises that fully reflect the specific services and needs of the college. The college is also developing a student information system (SIS) database which will link all databases at all COM-FSM campuses and consolidate student records. Most evaluations and assessments are currently done manually given the unavailability of automated or electronic data miners and databases which results in extra costs and efforts to produce any documentation of evidences.

In an effort to obtain stakeholders' input on the quality of students who went through the COM-FSM system, the college interviewed segments of the community where the college's graduate usually seek employment. Through the interviews, it was revealed that employers of our graduates are generally satisfied with the competence of our graduates in most areas. Entities like the FSM Telecommunications Corporation and the Pohnpei Utilities Corporation generally praised the competence of our students due to their proficiency in the areas of understanding and using communications technologies, especially computers, efficiently. The state and national DOE commented on the need to improve the proficiency of our graduates in language arts, an issue that the college is already aware of. An analysis of the situation seems to indicate that some employers place our graduates in positions beyond their level of education. Most employers choose our graduates over others due to the relevance of their schooling to local needs. Still, most employers lament the

lack of dedication and attention to details displayed by most of our graduates. The college recognizes this as lack of understanding of the workforce readiness skills that are also prevalent even among other Micronesians. This trend fits under what the world of academia classifies as the fourth dimension of learning. The college is currently studying its options and opportunities as part of its efforts to improve the workforce readiness and soft skills of its graduates.

Three Possible Options

Options	Description
Option 1: Community college (2 year college with not more than one 4-year program)	Current situation with AA/AS and certificate programs at all campuses with the possibility of one four-year (BA/BS) program offered directly by the college. The college would maintain its status as a community college and continue to be accredited by the junior commission (ACCJC).
Option 2: Community college (2 year college with not more than one 4-year programs, but with an extensive network of degree offerings with other Institutions of Higher Education (IHE))	Current situation with AA/AS and certificate programs at all campuses with the possibility of one four-year (BA/BS) program offered directly by the college. The college would also have direct links to higher degree offerings at other colleges and universities. For example, the college could offer a BA in Education through and in cooperation with the University of Guam. The actual degree would be from Guam, but courses could be offered at the college's various campuses. The college would maintain its status as a community college and continue to be accredited by the junior commission (ACCJC).
Option 3: Full 4-year university	The national campus would function as a 4-year institution offering multiple BA degrees, masters and doctoral degrees. State campuses would function as community colleges and offer AA/AS degrees and certificate programs. This system would be similar to the University of Hawaii system; the national campus would be accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (ACSCU) and the state campuses by the junior commission (ACCJC).

Financial Implications

- Basic cost per student at COM-FSM for fall 2006 was less than \$4,000 per student
- Average for 2 year U.S. institutions \$9,172

- Average per student for 4 year U.S. institutions \$12,309

Some basic comparisons:

- To bring the college to a comparable funding status as other 2-year institutions would require a doubling of the current budget - \$20,000 for operations
- To bring the college to a comparable funding status for a 4-year institution would require tripling of the current budget - \$30,000 for operations
- Facilities costs would vary depending on the option selected. In all cases, the facilities master plan would continue to be implemented:
 - Highest increase in costs would be for the 4 year option - Facilities would need to increase to ~ \$6,000,000 for the next 5 - 10 years.
 - Option 2 would require minimum improvements to current facilities.

Major Categories	Option 1 (2-Year + 1 BA)	Option 2 (2-Year + 1 BA + Extensive Offerings Through Other 4 Year IHEs)	Option 3 (4-Year)
Academic	Same as current	Some increase due to need for increased distance education (tend to be smaller classes) Additional faculty might be necessary to support articulated program agreements with other IHEs (10%)	Higher per cent of Ph.D. faculty required; Additional faculty for program areas; Research component for faculty required; Higher faculty wage scale necessary to recruit quality faculty- significant increase (30-70%) over current costs
Student Services	Same as current	Increased support for counseling, tutoring, mentoring, recruitment and retention (10%)	Increased student support services (10%)
Administrative Support	Same as current	Increased IT support for distance education (5%)	Additional staff and expertise required to support 4-year

			program (10%)
Learning Resources Center	LRC still needed at Kosrae, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Yap campuses	Increased LRC resources for distance education and remote access to databases, journals, etc. LRC still needed at Kosrae, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Yap campuses	Substantial increase to provide for research capacity and selections in degree areas (\$1m - \$3m) LRC still needed at Kosrae, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Yap campuses
Research	Same as current research	Some increase to support college mission of supporting development in the FSM	Substantial increase in quality of staffing and facilities
Facilities	Same as current including facilities master plan	National campus - construction of distance education center for increase access for adult and advanced degree programs students and enhanced IT facilities all campuses (\$2m - 5m) plus implementation of current master plan	National campus - new and specialized student services will be required, expansion of LRC and laboratories and faculty office space (\$5m - \$10m) State campuses - implement current master plan

Analysis of Options

Options	Key Issues	Pros	Cons
Option 1	College maintains its standing as a community college and operates under the less strident	No expected sudden increase of operations costs College is	The noncompliance of one campus could implicate the entire system Maintaining the

	<p>requirements of a community college Maintain same level of services at all campuses</p>	<p>becoming better at what it is currently doing</p> <p>All campuses share the same standards and shares only one accreditation status</p> <p>The same quantity of services and resources don't have to be duplicated at all campuses</p> <p>Faculty, staff, and students can easily transfer between campuses</p> <p>The college can spend time providing specialized training based on community needs</p> <p>The educational requirements of most positions with the college are compatible the level of education achieved by some Micronesians</p>	<p>same quality of programs and services at all campuses is a constant challenge</p> <p>The current campus setup can easily be influenced by each campus based on its local needs</p> <p>Constant flow of communication/ feedback and the movement of personnel between campuses is becoming too expensive to cope with</p> <p>The college is not eligible for funding sources usually awarded to specialized programs which are common to 4-year universities</p> <p>The college will continue to be seen as inferior to 4-year institutions</p>
Option 2	<p>College maintains its standing as a community college and operates</p>	<p>[All of the pros in Option 1]</p> <p>Students can</p>	<p>[All the cons in Option 1]</p> <p>COM-FSM will have</p>

	<p>under the less strident requirements of a community college</p> <p>Maintain same level of services at all campuses yet providing direct linkage to specialized degrees in any field</p>	<p>begin at COM-FSM and continue on to earn any degree from certain universities either off island or on island</p> <p>Students do not have to look for other universities by themselves</p> <p>Information needed to earn specialized degrees will be provided</p>	<p>to be vigilant to program changes by partner IHE's</p> <p>COM-FSM can not dictate the types of program offerings at the partner IHE's</p> <p>Many students continue to leave the country</p>
Option 3	<p>College will operate both as a university as well as a community college utilizing different operations standards, expanded management expectations and greater academic/research integrity</p>	<p>Faculty would be required to publish original research papers</p> <p>Less need to travel off island for advanced degrees</p> <p>Increased likelihood of graduates staying in the FSM after graduation</p> <p>May increase non Micronesian students to attend the college</p> <p>Prestige of the college would likely increase</p> <p>Students</p>	<p>Student enrollment levels in programs would be low based on current graduation rates and enrollment and retention trends</p> <p>Number of programs offered would be heavily dependent on available funding</p> <p>Does not by itself address current efforts to ensure quality and equity of programs and graduates across all campuses</p> <p>High costs approximately three times the current budget would be needed for the national campus for</p>

		<p>qualified for employment requiring more advanced degrees</p> <p>Each campus will need to be accredited independently with the expectation that all services common to a college will be available at that particular campus</p> <p>Could lead to increase of minimum education requirements for employment in more positions</p> <p>Likelihood of retaining highly trained Micronesians to teach or conduct research</p>	<p>operations</p> <p>Facilities would be needed to be constructed immediately for a student services center, expansion of the LRC into a research library, and improved classroom and laboratory facilities</p> <p>Each program would require a certain percentage of instructors with doctoral degrees</p> <p>Faculty would be required to publish original research papers</p> <p>Low exposure of students to international cultures</p> <p>Each campus will need to be accredited independently with the expectation that all services common to a college will be available at that particular campus</p> <p>Overall reputation of the system will either positively/negatively affect each campus</p>
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Recommendations

The college would like to thank His Excellency, Manny Mori, President of the Federated States of Micronesia for recognizing the College of Micronesia - FSM as a vital player in the educational development of the country's workforce. The college appreciates President Mori mentioning the college in his inaugural speech. The college administration is pleased to work with the President to better understand his intentions regarding the most suitable disposition of college to better serve the needs of the nation. After the meeting with the President and his staff, the college administration was of the impression that the President is keen at developing/improving the ability of FSM citizens to take on specialized jobs which are often more demanding as well as being less popular with the local workforce. The college further believes that the President sees the college as having a major role in improving the ability of Micronesians who are also occupying less specialized positions. Given its current status and recent assessments of its contribution to the local workforce, the college recognizes the shortcomings of its graduates to be more into the areas of workforce readiness skills and soft skills and less of competence or learnability skills.

Given the information presented in the main body of this document, and should the nation consider a different direction for the college, the most feasible option would be Option 2. Regardless of the option selected, the college is committed to improvement of students workforce readiness and general skills as well as soft skills such as communications and teamwork while maintaining or improving current levels of cognitive knowledge. To this end, the college has drafted new dimensions of learning (attached) that would be the basis of improved curriculum and instructional approaches. The college stands ready to

work with the President and the FSM National Government to arrive at the most feasible option for the good of the nation and its people.