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December 8, 2006

George Wheeler
Interim Campus Executive Officer
New Mexico State University-Carlsbad
1500 University Dr.
Carlsbad, NM 88220

Dear Interim Campus Executive Officer Wheeler:

Enclosed is the report of the team that conducted the New Mexico State University-Carlsbad Quality Checkup site visit. In addition to communicating the team's evaluation of your compliance with the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation and with the Commission's Federal Compliance Program, the report captures the team's assessment of your use of the feedback from your last Systems Appraisal and your overall commitment to continuous improvement.

As you should note, on page 5 the team comments on the distance education degree program that you plan to begin in summer 2007. Higher Learning Commission policy requires member institutions to obtain the HLC's prior approval before offering degree programs via distance delivery. The process for requesting such approval is straightforward (there are instructions under Downloads – Change on the AQIP website that will guide you), and you can always phone me or my staff if you have specific questions. Approval is not guaranteed or instantaneous, so it is important not to advertise programs that you have yet been approved to offer, and it is important to seek approval at least 6 months before the program is scheduled to begin.

I hope you will read and study the report carefully, because the team invested heavily in preparing for and conducting this visit, and its perceptions and advice are valuable to your institution. Please consider distributing it widely throughout your institution, since its positive feedback can be helpful in strengthening and broadening involvement in your quality improvement efforts.

A copy of the report will be read and analyzed by the AQIP Panel that reviews institutions for Reaffirmation of Accreditation at the time your review is scheduled. Prior to that review, we will send you a listing of the materials the Panel will consider, and give you an opportunity to update or supplement them if you so desire.

Since we are still working to develop a permanent Quality Checkup process that delivers real value to the institutions participating in AQIP, we would welcome any comments, cautions, or advice you wish to share with us, either about the visit itself, the report, or any related topic.

Sincerely,

Stephen D. Spangehl
Director, Academic Quality Improvement Program

QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

New Mexico State University - Carlsbad

Carlsbad, New Mexico
November 29 - December 1, 2006

Quality Checkup team members:

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Background on Quality Checkups conducted by the Academic Quality Improvement Program

The Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) conducts Quality Checkup site visits to each institution during the fifth or sixth year in every seven-year cycle of AQIP participation. These visits are conducted by trained, experienced AQIP Reviewers to determine whether the institution continues to meet The Higher Learning Commission's *Criteria for Accreditation*, and whether it is using quality management principles and building a culture of continuous improvement as participation in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) requires. The goals of an AQIP Quality Checkup are to:

1. Affirm the accuracy of the organization's online Systems Portfolio and verify information included in the portfolio that the last Systems Appraisal has identified as needing clarification or verification (System Portfolio Clarification and Verification);
2. Review with organizational leaders actions taken to capitalize on the strategic issues and opportunities for improvement identified by the last Systems Appraisal (Systems Appraisal Follow Up);
3. Alert the organization to areas that need its attention prior to Reaffirmation of Accreditation, and reassure it concerning areas that have been covered adequately (Accreditation Issues Follow Up);
4. Verify federal compliance issues such as default rates, complaints, USDE interactions and program reviews, etc. (Federal Compliance Review); and
5. Assure continuing organizational quality improvement commitment through presentations, meetings, or sessions that clarify AQIP and Commission accreditation work (Organizational Quality Commitment).

The AQIP peer reviewer(s) or staff trained for this role prepare for the visit by reviewing relevant organizational and AQIP file materials, particularly the organization's last *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report* and the Commission's internal *Organizational Profile*, which summarizes information reported by the institution in its *Annual Institutional Data Update*. The report provided to AQIP by the institution is also shared with the evaluator(s). Up-to-date, complete information about Quality Checkup preparation, procedures, and related information in the *Quality Checkup Visit Guide* available for download from the AQIP website at www.AQIP.org.

Copies of the Quality Checkup report are provided to the institution's CEO and AQIP liaison. Additionally, a copy is retained by the Commission for the institution's permanent file, and will be part of the materials reviewed by the AQIP Review Panel during the institution's Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

Clarification and verification of contents of the institution's *Systems Portfolio*

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

It is clear that administrators, faculty, and staff of New Mexico State University - Carlsbad (NMSU-C) have worked diligently to address all feedback received from the Portfolio. In response to each of the 19 Os and OOs raised, the Portfolio has been updated and published on the university's web site so that all Community members are included in these processes.

Review of specific accreditation issues identified by the institution's last *Systems Appraisal*

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

There were no accreditation issues listed in the Systems Appraisal feedback report of August 2004.

Review of the institution's approach to capitalizing on recommendations identified by its last *Systems Appraisal* in the *Strategic Issues Analysis*.

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

- ◆ Dependency on Part-Time Instructors -- The University recognizes the need to assure student outcomes of students taught with part-time instructors and full-time faculty are comparable. The assessment plan in development provides a process by which department chairs have oversight of curricula and outcomes for adjunct faculty. Additionally, the University is making a concerted effort to involve adjunct faculty in University activities.
- ◆ Government by Local School Board – While it did not seem clear from the Portfolio, the local school board serves in an advisory capacity, with real control of the University under the auspices of the New Mexico State University system. NMSU-C is working to build a more dynamic relationship between the local advisory board and the University.
- ◆ Data Collection and Utilization – The 2006 Portfolio Update demonstrates NMSU-C is making strides toward identifying critical data to assist in the quality improvement process.
- ◆ Stable Base for Future Funding – As a university largely dependent on New Mexico State funding, primarily driven by FTE, the University recognizes the challenge of establishing a stable base. They are in the process of developing proposals for alternative funding.

- ◆ Financing Faculty Recruitment, Development, and Retention - The NMSU-C average faculty pay scale is one of the highest within the NMSU system, largely because of the tenure of many faculty members. The University is working to develop a process for effectively prioritizing professional development opportunities and needs.

Review of organizational commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

The University is clearly committed to the AQIP process as demonstrated through the 2006 Portfolio Update, and dialog with administrators, faculty, staff, and students. All five strategic issues and all 19 opportunities for improvement have been studied and some type of corrective action/intervention has been implemented and documented for each.

USDE issues related to default rate (renewal of eligibility, program audits, or other USDE actions)

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

The team reviewed the documents relating to USDE default rate. The documents show that the default rate in 2003 was 4.7%; in 2004, 3.9%; and in 2006, 5.8%.

Other Title IV compliance issues

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

The University has a well-defined student grievance process based upon the New Mexico State University EEO Grievance Form. The Employee Relations Office is mandated to respond to any grievance within 10 working days.

In May 2001 the USDE re-approved eligibility and full certification for the distribution of federal financial aid at the University. The next renewal date is March 31, 2007

Compliance with Commission policy 1.C.7. Credits, Program Length, and Tuition

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

The University catalog lists all general fees, contains a refund policy and lists refund dates and amounts. The length of classes and course requirements are listed as well.

The web site reflects that for Spring 2007, tuition for New Mexico residents will be \$47 per credit hour; out-of-district students will be \$52; non-resident tuition will be \$107.

Compliance with Commission policy IV.B.2. Advertising and Recruitment Materials

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

The University published the third-party comments advertisement in the Carlsbad Current-Argus on October 15, and aired radio spots inviting public comment on November 10, 13, and 16. Additionally, the local newspaper printed a public interest story on October 15 in which comments were invited. No responses were received.

The team observed an advertising brochure and web information soliciting applications for a proposed distance education degree program slated to begin in summer 2007. The team reminded the visitation host and the CAO that the Statement of Affiliation Status stipulates prior Commission approval is required for the addition of distance education degree programs. The CAO acknowledged the need to prepare a Request for Change and agreed to cease advertising until Commission approval was secured.

Compliance with Commission policy III.A.1, Professional Accreditation, and III.A.3. Requirements of Organizations Holding Dual Institutional Accreditation

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

The Statement of Affiliation Status indicates New Mexico State University – Carlsbad is accredited through 2007 – 2008.

In addition to the institution-wide accreditation relationship with the Higher Learning Commission, the University has specialized accreditation for the nursing programs with the National League for Nursing Accreditation Commission, Inc. The last date of reaccreditation was July 16, 2003 with the next evaluation visit scheduled for spring 2011.

Compliance with Commission policy IV.B.4, *Organizational Records of Student Complaints*

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

The Fiscal Office maintains a student and stakeholder complaint log, which includes the student's name and a detailed description of the complaint as well as steps taken for resolution. There are also multiple Student Suggestion boxes located throughout campus. Dialog with students confirms an open-door policy and timely responses to complaints.

Other USDE compliance-related issues

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

Other AQIP issues

New Mexico State University – Carlsbad's commitment to continuous quality improvement as a leadership model is apparent in multiple ways. The University is the recipient of the State Quality Award, and most faculty and staff members have completed the State quality training. Certificates for those employees are displayed prominently in the Business Office reception area.

The response to the System Portfolio Feedback clearly shows attention given to significant issues and opportunities for improvement. The entire University's governance system has been redesigned to align with the AQIP categories.

Anecdotal reports through discussion with community leaders, faculty, staff, and students confirm the positive campus climate improvements which they attribute to the commitment to AQIP principles.

Throughout the University there is enthusiasm for the continuous quality improvement processes that are being used to move toward the goals set by the University. A "culture of quality" acts as a continuous thread throughout the fabric of New Mexico State University – Carlsbad.