

President's Retreat 2011
State of the College
Interim President Ringlen Ringlen
August 24, 2011
FSM-China Friendship Sports Center

REGCOGNIZATION of Participants

Good morning, I would like to welcome you to the College of Micronesia's President's Retreat 2011. The retreat will help us to pause and acknowledge where we are in our common aim to fulfill our national building mandate to develop the Federated States of Micronesia by providing academic, career and technical educational opportunities for student learning.

This retreat will review our common mission, vision and values in light of current needs and our ability to meet these needs. This retreat will also recommend the direction of the college in light of the changing economic, political and social conditions. Special emphasis will be made of the expected major transition for the nation by 2023 that corresponds to the end of the current economic provision of the Compact of Free Association.

This retreat will also have to discuss developments this week related to funding for the college. Recommended JEMCO resolutions have been received from the Office of Insular Affairs that would reduce Education Sector Grant of the college by \$700,000 beginning in FY 2013 and continuing for four years. The basis of this recommendation is to direct (ESG) Education Sector Grant Funding to basic education services.

For many years, the College of Micronesia-FSM has been one of the beneficiaries of US and even Chinese assistance. We were made beneficiaries mostly due to the good relations between the two nations and our own. We should take an extra step and reach out to our friends from other neighboring nations and institutions of higher education within the Pacific region.

We must ensure that the college is on a path that will assist the FSM in its economic and social development. We must also ensure that we are committed as a college to ensuring that students come out of their college experience with the knowledge and skills needed for the 21st century. This means student will be able to communicate effectively, employ critical thinking & problem solving, possess specific knowledge and skills in a major discipline or professional program of study, take responsibility and develop skills for learning, and interact responsibly with other people, cultures, and their environment. At the same time, we must ensure that we directly address accreditation concerns and farther ensure that we meet and exceed all accreditation standards.

There are a number of major trends affecting higher education in the US and in the FSM. First, is the international, US and FSM economic landscape. The weak U.S. and FSM economies do not bode well for current and future development of the FSM. The weak U.S. economy means potential reductions in federal programs such as TRIO and Land Grant and even in PELL grant and SEG. In the FSM the current economy is not creating needed quality jobs for FSM citizens (and our graduates) that will lead to accelerated development of the FSM economy. The

Compact Trust Fund is underperforming and is unlikely to provide a major source of funds for the college. Additionally, the trust fund was never intended to replace U.S. federal programs including PELL grant.

Second is a new normal in Higher Education Finance and in the FSM. In the U.S. colleges and universities have seen dramatic reductions in national and state funding. With the ongoing deficit reduction discussions in the U.S. this trend is only likely to continue. For the college, some of our external stakeholders have raised serious issues regarding the current level of Education Sector Grant and Infrastructure Development Funding for the college. Cost benefit issues are being raised – does the number of graduates of the college justify the amount of funds being expended in the light of the step down in compact funding. A second area is asking the question – If there are such large numbers of underprepared students entering college – should not the bulk of compact funding address K – 12.

We must be proactive in showing the value of a college education and in increasing our working relationships with K -12 to ensure the college readiness of high school graduates.

Third is a rethinking of the “Business of Higher Education”. This trend expects colleges to have greater impact over a shorter time on student learning. This means looking and implementing innovative instructional and assessment approaches. One area of focus might be using the findings of L. Robert Barber of UOG regarding Micronesian Learning Environments – fitting instruction and support services to Micronesians learning styles.

Forth is ascendance of for-profit providers. The college itself has had faculty and staff obtaining degrees via distance education through San Diego State University (SDSU) - while not a for-profit it does show that distance education programs are a model that can work in the FSM. As the connectivity improves - students will have greater options for obtaining a degree even if they elect to stay in the FSM. The college must ensure that it provides a unique education experience that fits the needs of the FSM. A second area that for-profits are impacting the college is in the area of gainful employment. Along with other Institutions of Higher Education, the college must show its graduation rates for certificate programs and how those graduates are being employed. The expectation is that we will graduate more students and those students will be gainfully employed in their area of expertise.

The fifth trend is an emphasis on quality assurance in higher education. There is a greater emphasis on ensuring that students complete programs in a prescribed time and are gainfully employed as a result of their college education. Gainful employment is that students are able to obtain employment in their area of study at a quality wage. The college must be able to demonstrate that the value of a college education (student learning and employment) is worth it to individuals and stakeholders. The bottom line is that yes we are expected to achieve more with less and be able to document the impact on student learning and job placement.

This retreat will deal with some specifics – all are related to both meeting accreditation concerns and short and long term continuous improvement of programs and services.

First is our mission, vision and values both in the short and long term. The college cannot be everything to everyone. What is the identity of the college? Are we strictly a U.S. style community college? Are we the only institution of higher education for a small island developing state? Or are we a combination of the two. What mission will best fit the needs of the FSM both in the short and long term? What is our vision for the future – especially in light of expected changes after the end of the current economic provisions of the Compact? What steps do we need to be taking now to adequately prepare for the future? These are all issues that must be addressed in light of what our stakeholders need and expect of the college.

Second is to begin the process of prioritizing our academic program and all services of the college. This prioritization process must be based on clear criterion (established in advance) that addresses multiple issues related to program quality and need. In this retreat we will be reviewing the process of prioritization and having discussions on appropriate criterion for making informed discussions.

A third step will be to review our master plan, communication plan along with accreditation concerns and develop work plans that will be tied to performance evaluation. Critical issues are to improve our implementation, ensure that evaluation occurs and that resource allocation is linked to both the planning and evaluation. However, the most critical issue is to improve accountability of individuals, programs and offices for continuous improvement at the college.

Additional activities are to review our 2012 budget in light of the revised organizational structure of the college and how the 2013 budget will be developed. The budget 2013 discussions now will have to take into account the OIA recommendations for JEMCO and a possible response from the college and the FSM.

We have three full days of serious work ahead of us. I would encourage everyone to demonstrate those skills we expect of students – critical thinking, problem solving, good communication skills, take responsibility for learning at the college and work well with all the different segments of the college.

We are on sanction by the commission. Let's work together to lift ourselves above this situation. At the same time, we must not forget that this focus on our accreditation entails a strong commitment to look forward and tackle other fundamental need areas of the college in order to foster genuine student learning. We, as a college and individually, are collectively accountable for the promotion of student learning as our contribution to the development of the Federated States of Micronesia.

It's only through working together that we can provide the continually improving higher education needed for developing this nation.

One more thing, please take care of your good health. Without our good health, we cannot do our work.

Thank you. Have fun and may we have a successful retreat.