



**33 Edgemont Drive  
Presque Isle, Maine 04769**

**November 15, 2006**

This is an institutional progress report in response to the recommendation of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. Commission on Institutions of Higher Education to grant initial accreditation to Northern Maine Community College on November 7, 2003.

## **Institutional Overview**

### **Description of the Institution**

Northern Maine Community College (NMCC) in Presque Isle, Maine is the northernmost of seven colleges in the Maine Community College System (MCCS). The College's primary service area is Aroostook County, the largest county east of the Mississippi River. Indeed, the breadth and diversity of the geography of the service area presents challenges in themselves to fulfilling the mission of the College. Aroostook County is primarily rural, with agriculture, forestry, tourism, and some manufacturing providing the economic base. Out-migration of the population, particularly young adults, and regional economic decline have had significant impacts on the area.

One hundred and five full-time employees provide instruction (42 full-time faculty), student services, facilities support, and administrative leadership for the College. The College provides instruction and services to off-campus sites in Houlton, Caribou, Calais, and the St. John Valley.

The College offers 25 occupational/career preparation programs which lead to certificates, diplomas, or associate degrees. Another program in Medical Assisting is awaiting approval in January, 2007, from the Maine Community College System Board of Trustees for Fall 2007 startup. These programs are housed in three departments: Business Technology, Trade and Technical Occupations, and Nursing/Allied Health. The fourth department, Arts and Sciences, offers programs in Early Childhood Education, Paraeducation, and Liberal Studies. While designed to prepare students for transfer to a four-year college or university, the Liberal Studies program provides the academic framework for students entering college with uncertain degree aspirations to become initiated into college life, to investigate career options, and/or to complete general education requirements before matriculating into an occupational program.

NMCC enrolled 914 students in the fall semester of the 2006-2007 academic year (622 full-time, 292 part-time). Aroostook County students comprised about 83 percent of the student body. The average age of the student body was 26 years old. About one-quarter of the full-time students live in residence halls or apartments on campus.

### **Recent Developments/Future Plans**

The College is committed to continuing to broaden its service to the region as a leader and innovator in providing quality health care education to meet the ever-growing needs of its population. Not only are community leaders concerned about a looming shortage of nurses, but also about a growing dearth of health care professionals in other highly skilled areas.

Toward addressing these needs, the College has proactively collaborated with other institutions to expand its health care offerings. Following on the successful pilot program of a nursing cohort offered in Houlton, NMCC entered into a partnership with its sister institution, Washington County Community College in August, 2003, to offer its Nursing program on their campus in Calais, Maine, utilizing distance technology to deliver the didactic instruction emanating from the NMCC campus. In May, 2005, the first students graduated from the

program, with 100% successfully passing the NCLEX exam for licensure. A new cohort of nursing students began in Calais in August, 2005, and another cohort of students began their first-year instruction at the Houlton Higher Education Center in Houlton, Maine, in September, 2006.

In August, 2004, NMCC entered a partnership with Eastern Maine Community College to deliver their program in Radiography to a cohort of students on the NMCC campus, again utilizing this same model and technology. The participants graduated in June, 2006.

From August, 2003, to May, 2005, the College offered an accredited program in Surgical Technology to a cohort of students who have since graduated and found employment in regional hospitals. Further, the College is awaiting final approval to begin offering an associate program in Medical Assisting in Fall 2007, and a certificate program in Medical Coding is presently being developed. Finally, the College is exploring agreements with Kennebec Valley Community College in Fairfield, Maine to bring their Occupational Therapy Assistant program to the NMCC campus with an eye toward maintaining an ongoing offering in this crucial service area.

This growth of offerings in the health care professions have taxed the present infrastructure of the College, and proposed growth in this important area would do so further. The College has revised and reprioritized its campus plan and its master plan to feature the repurposing of one of its residence halls, Andrews Hall, for use as an allied health building (see Appendix A). Foremost among the features of this building is the requisite technological support for the College both to continue to transmit its programs beyond its service area and to receive a wider variety of programs from beyond it.

Quality programs in health care require support from other academic arms of the College, especially in the sciences. Since the visit from the accreditation team in March, 2003, the College has utilized funds from a successful bond proposal to renovate its science labs. A biology laboratory was completely renovated, as was a dual purpose physics/chemistry laboratory.

The College has also elected to prioritize its highly successful transportation programs (i.e., Automotive Technology, Automotive Body Repair, and Diesel Hydraulics Technology). Architectural plans have been rendered for the expansion of the present laboratory space for those programs.

In September of this year, the College signed an historic agreement with Husson College, a private college in Bangor, Maine, to provide administrative space to support its extension programs on the NMCC campus. These include baccalaureate and masters degree programs in business administration and in nursing. A significant aspect of the agreement is Husson's guarantee of admission into one or more of its baccalaureate programs to any NMCC student who graduates from an associate degree program with a grade point average of 3.00 or above. Husson has further agreed to accept all credit hours awarded from NMCC.

The College is also excited to have embarked on a capital campaign (i.e., *The Campaign for the County's College*), toward the express goals of (a) improving access to the College for students through increased scholarships, (b) supporting technological innovation and capacity, and (c) providing support for other instructional needs as identified by faculty, donors, and other stakeholders (see Appendix B).

Though the College continues to provide academic support and counseling services to its students through a TRIO grant and has expanded its academic support services and provided supplemental instruction in mathematics through a MELMAC grant, the College has concerns about developments, new regulations and limitations in Carl Perkins funding. In the past, the College has utilized these funds to provide academic support services through its Learning Center and to support faculty/staff development. While there is hope that some of these services may continue to be supported through this grant, there will, no doubt, be an impact.

The work and vision of the College will also be affected by the updating of the Maine Community College System strategic plan, *Envision the Future* (see Appendix C). In preparation of this, the College has completed an environmental scan, and a thorough, comprehensive S.W.O.T. analysis—identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the college (see Appendix D).

### **Subject of the Report**

At its meeting on November 7, 2003, the Commission on Higher Education recommended Northern Maine Community College for its initial accreditation, requesting the submission of a report in the Fall, 2006 which addresses the following concerns (see Appendix E):

#### **1. That the College Continue Its Transition to a Comprehensive Community College**

The College is directed to “continue the transition to a comprehensive community college, with particular reference to the development of the Associate of Arts degree program, and expansion and refinement of the general education core.” These will be addressed separately.

##### Development of the Associate of Arts Degree Program

Prior to December, 1998, general education courses at Northern Maine Technical College (a forerunner of NMCC) were viewed entirely as supportive of the technical programs offered at the College.

In December, 1998, the Board of Trustees of the Maine Technical College System revised its basic mission to incorporate specifically the preparation of students for seamless and efficient transfer to baccalaureate degree granting institutions. In response, the College began the process of consolidating its general education offerings into a more comprehensive Associate of Arts degree program—first in General Studies, which has since evolved into Liberal Studies.

Since the visit by the CIHE team in March, 2003, the College has worked diligently at addressing the concern of the team pertaining to the AA. Specifically, it has;

- a. *Changed the name of the “General Education Department” to the “Arts and Sciences Department.”*

This represents far more than a cosmetic change for the College. It reflects a significant shifting of philosophy and perception of the Liberal Studies degree as a valuable, important degree option overseen by a faculty whose function at the College extends beyond that of providing support to the occupational programs. It reflects, also, the spirit that educating students to meet general education proficiencies is not a function which resides solely in any department, but is, instead, a shared function requiring the embedding of general education in each course in the academic inventory.

- b. *Added new general education courses to the curriculum.*

To date, faculty have developed and added 19 new courses in math, science, social science, and humanities (including four interdisciplinary courses) to the curriculum; one course has been revised (Introduction to Humanities) to eliminate the “work” theme as recommended by the visiting team; and four more courses are in various stages of development (see Appendix F).

- c. *Added new faculty to the Arts and Sciences department.*

Faculty in the Arts and Sciences department has been expanded to include an additional writing/communications instructor and an additional mathematics instructor.

- d. *Expanded its offerings of liberal studies holdings in the library.*

From 2004-2006, the library expanded its holdings in the liberal studies by 10.46%, buoyed by a grant from the Stephen and Tabitha King Foundation earmarked specifically to enhance literature in the humanities and social sciences. At present, 21.53% of the holdings in the library are devoted solely to the humanities.

Holdings in the sciences have increased by 10.84%.

- e. *Revised the Associate in Arts degree in Liberal Studies.*

Several revisions to the Liberal Studies AA have been incorporated since the CIHE visit in February, 2003 (see Appendix G). Included are:

- The requirement for new students pursuing this degree option to complete a first-year seminar course in the liberal studies.
- The delineation of math and science requirements, historically categorized as “math/science,” to ensure that students complete mathematical instruction beyond that required to meet general education core requirements.
- The inclusion of new courses outlined above.
- The addition of a computer proficiency requirement.

- The specification of a history requirement as its own category, resulting in a net course credit hour increase of humanities coursework.
- The increased requirement to complete 21 credit hours at the 200-level (up from six).

The College recognizes that continued and broadened support for the Associate in Arts degree is essential to ensure its quality and utility as a transfer degree. Future plans for the program involve increasing the number of science offerings to include not only Chemistry, but other life sciences as well, such as Zoology, Botany, and/or Environmental Sciences. These courses will, of course, require the addition of qualified, full-time faculty.

The College will continue to utilize systematic and comprehensive assessment of student learning of general education proficiencies, feedback from transfer institutions, and its very active and committed advisory committee to modify the AA degree as necessary.

### Expansion and Refinement of the General Education Core

In January 29, 2003, the General Education Department (as it was known at the time) approved a philosophy of general education on behalf of the faculty of NMCC (see Appendix H). Aside from a “firm grounding in the basics of a technical or major field of study,” the faculty identified an educated person as possessing the knowledge, skills, and values incumbent to grow and to become productive workers, involved citizens, and fulfilled, socially-adept individuals. A general education core curriculum was developed toward providing a framework of courses aimed at this goal.

This general education core was developed in light of the newly expanded mission directive of preparing students for successful transfer to baccalaureate degree granting institutions. The specificity of the courses presented therein reflects that. The general education core has a very striking transfer emphasis that seems to circumvent the needs of students served by the other mission directive: to provide students with “the knowledge and skills necessary for employment.”

The College is mindful that the general education core is a dynamic foundation, not a static one. It should evolve as do the needs of the institution, the region, and its stakeholders. In its report to the College, the visiting team concurred, noting that “the general education core will need ongoing review and enhancement to ensure that student’s needs are being met and that the scope of the courses offered in the general education program is sufficiently broad for a comprehensive community college” (see Appendix E).

Collectively, NEASC recommended two actions: (1) expansion of the general education core, and (2) refinement and enhancement of the general education core and offerings. This recommendation mirrors the concern of several occupational program advisory committee members (most of whom are prospective employers of NMCC graduates), who for several programs have consistently decried in program review surveys both the written and oral communication skills of NMCC graduates. While students in the occupational programs are presently learning important writing skills, they are not apparently learning the writing skills

identified as essential by their future employers and colleagues, or they are failing to apply the information they've learned once employed. Employers are requesting further instruction in applied communications.

The College recognizes that an unrealized but very crucial philosophical distinction (i.e., the distinction between an Associate in Arts (AA) or an Associate in Science (AS) degree and an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree) has yielded unfortunate consequences (i.e., students in the occupational programs graduating with inappropriately focused general education proficiencies).

The American Association of Community Colleges describes the Associate in Applied Science (AAS) as primarily a terminal degree, not a transfer one. Indeed, in its *Policy Statement on the Associate Degree* (<http://www.aacc.nche.edu>), the AACC defines the AA and the AS degrees as those which “prepare the student to transfer to an upper division baccalaureate degree program.” The AACC notes that the AAS degree is “designed to lead the individual directly to employment in a specific career.” The AAS is often referred to by the AACC and in other literature as a “career” or a “professional” degree.

The AACC enjoins its membership to be mindful of and to “recognize the dual possibility” that some baccalaureate institutions grant transfer credit for AAS programs. NMCC has historically allowed this possibility to exert a disproportionate influence on its curriculum, though the number of students pursuing this option does not seem to justify doing so. A brief survey of data from the most recent program reviews for seven occupational programs finds that only 12% of program graduates were continuing their post-secondary education. Of these, only 24% were pursuing their post-secondary education at four-year colleges or universities. The remaining 76% had returned to NMCC to pursue further associate-level study. Consequently, though a mere 3% of the overall program graduates for this sample were planning to transfer to a baccalaureate institution, the general education core was preparing all of these graduates for transfer. Important specific skills required for successful employment for an overwhelming proportion of program graduates were not being addressed. This does not seem to be the intention of the AACC.

The AA and AS degrees are transfer pathways, and their respective general education requirements ought to reflect this. The AAS degree, on the other hand, should require general education befitting the needs of students preparing to go to work immediately after earning the degree. These NMCC graduates have little likelihood of or desire to ever transfer into four-year programs. Some AAS programs of study (e.g., many of the trade programs such as Residential Construction, Automotive Technology, etc.) do not lend themselves to transfer at all. Requiring transfer-specific general education of them when these skills have been specifically identified by prospective employers as insufficient and/or inappropriate is an issue that should be addressed and revised.

It is clear that the AAS degree at NMCC has evolved into something beyond its intended logical design. It has evolved into a “terminal-transfer degree.” However well this “one size fits all” approach to general education may have worked in the past, such is no longer the case. While

the *principles* of general education distinctly apply to each NMCC student, the *means* for meeting the goals of these principles differ dramatically.

Consequently, a taskforce (see Appendix I) has been created toward effecting revision and the refinement to the general education core recommended by the Commission. Working within the parameters outlined by the Vice President/Academic Dean (see Appendix J), the taskforce was charged (a) to expand the general education core to define both a transfer track and an occupational track, (b) to develop the necessary curricula to effect these revisions, (c) to dismantle the diploma programs as options in the occupational programs, and (d) to ensure the continued inclusion of all faculty and of the advisory committees in the process.

The work of the taskforce is to be completed according to the timeline appended to this report (see Appendix K). The rather tight timeline for such sweeping revision is ambitious but entirely necessary. It is the intention of the College to have implemented these revisions expeditiously in order to facilitate a comprehensive and objective assessment of general education competencies in advance of the institutional self study scheduled for Spring, 2008. To date, all of the objectives outlined in the timeline have been met.

Regarding the diploma programs mentioned in (c) above, while each student is required to complete a general education core, diploma-level students have historically not been held to this standard. Diploma programs offered at NMCC fail to meet the general education core requirements or the criteria of the “Educated Person” adopted by the faculty. Absent the social science and humanities coursework required of the associate degrees, diploma programs only tangentially or incidentally meet the general education core requirements, specifically “. . . [an educated person is one] who has a strong sense of the past and its role in shaping the present; who understands his/her role as a citizen and a member of society.” While neither the general education core nor the adopted criteria of the “Educated Person” were developed with diploma program students in mind, it has become all too easy to nurture diploma-level students to remain members of a permanent, academic underclass consigned to completing their science, communication, and mathematics courses at a remedial, 000-level. A comparison of the Auto Body Repair diploma requirements with those of the associate-level requirements (see Appendix L), for example, evinces that the general education requirements for students in the diploma program are both less rigorous and less comprehensive than those for the associate program.

The College has interpreted the directive of the Commission to expand its general education core to include all of its students, even those in diploma programs. Therefore, while the function of the diploma has been grounded deeply into the fabric of the academic culture and history of the College, dating far back into its days as a vocational and technical institution, it is evident that this offering has outlived its usefulness and its propriety as an option for a comprehensive community college. It is the intention of the College to follow the example of three of the seven Maine Community College System campuses and eliminate these programs entirely.

The future efforts of the College pertinent to the general education core will address the needs of under-prepared students, for it is plain that the mission of a community college is not only to provide the breadth of educational experience befitting the nature of a “comprehensive” institution, but to provide the requisite support for students arriving at the institution without the



necessary skills demanded of them to successfully complete academically rigorous programs. The abovementioned revisions to the general education core will, no doubt, place heightened academic demands on a significant proportion of the students in the trade and occupational programs.

The College has and will continue to work diligently to refine its remedial instruction by creating appropriate sequences of developmental coursework to prepare students to complete not only their required general education courses, but to proceed more confidently and capably in their major coursework. Academic support must be broadened to include computer-assisted tutorials utilizing recently acquired PLATO software, peer mentoring, increased support accessibility, supplemental mathematical instruction, and writing assistance.

The College is cognizant that present personnel—both administrative and instructional—lack the level of expertise with developmental study necessary to provide leadership and vision to this very important service. It will, therefore, serve the College and its students well to hire a Director for the Learning Center who can provide consistent administrative oversight of remedial education, to enhance the level of expertise and experience with academic remediation, and to advocate and facilitate a collaborative vision for developmental studies at NMCC.

## **2. That the College Enhance Its Resource Development to Support Remediation/ Counseling**

Efforts to enhance College resource development to support remediation/counseling continue at all levels. In the period since the November, 2003, CIHE visit, NMCC has endeavored to reduce College reliance on soft money to support these vital services. Moreover, institutional and Foundation initiatives to seek new and expanded resources to continue the transition to a comprehensive community college are ongoing.

Acknowledging the precarious position that over-reliance on grant funding used to provide counseling services and remedial education presents to the very mission of the institution, the College has increasingly diversified funding for the support programs. As the level of such soft money has remained relatively flat or even seen a slight decrease in the past three years, NMCC has increased both the amount and percentage of funds allocated to this area from general funds appropriated by the state (see Appendix M). In addition, a concerted effort to seek additional grants, which show greater promise for ongoing funding and future stability, have been and continue to be explored.

One such source of new funding for the College has come through the MELMAC Education Foundation. The College is entering its second year of a project to study the first year experience for students in an effort to enhance retention. The successful grant application has allowed NMCC to enhance its institution-wide strategies for ensuring student success. Among the new developments resulting from the grant funding are increased parental involvement for traditional age students, the development of a first year seminar, enhancement of structured learning assistance, campus-wide professional development in areas relating to student success, and the establishment of an adventure-based learning class.

Initiatives introduced through the MELMAC grant have dovetailed nicely with services offered through the existing TRIO Student Support Services programs offered to NMCC students, which include counseling, tutoring and career placement.

The support for remedial education and counseling services has been expanded through the successful effort to identify additional resources to meet the needs of students. The TRIO project and the MELMAC grants will assist the College; however, it is apparent that the institution must include additional fiscal resources to support remedial education. In the fall of 2006, a committee was established to look at best practices and provide the President with a report on the future delivery of remedial and developmental education. This committee is comprised of the Vice President/Academic Dean, college faculty from each department, and the Dean of Students. This committee will draw on the best practices, as ascertained through the collective experience learned under the MELMAC project and TRIO, to craft a plan for the delivery of remedial education at NMCC.

The challenges and limitations of the College to advance in this regard are shared with leaders within the Maine Community College System. Local efforts to remediate the reliance on soft money to deliver comprehensive student support services are enhanced by similar efforts at the state level. A Fall, 2006, report compiled by a specially convened Governor's Community College Advisory Council to look at the issues facing Maine's seven Community Colleges, calls for additional funding to enhance and grow the Colleges, recognizing the need to properly fund the counseling services and remedial education programs at all of the campuses. The report details the need for expanding access and opportunity for Maine residents to higher education and specifically to the Community Colleges (see Appendix N). As part of their work, the Advisory Council recognized that students will come from various educational backgrounds, and, therefore, it is imperative that such support mechanisms be in place to support diverse needs.

Moreover, both NMCC and the Maine Community College System are currently engaged in a comprehensive and thorough visioning process, designed to identify the areas of critical need and greatest potential for growth both regionally and statewide. The "Envision the Future" initiative has, in its early stages, through an analysis of College Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, identified both counseling services and remedial education as clear assets and areas for resource enhancement (see Appendix D). The information compiled will provide the basis for future strategic planning at both the College and the System level, as well as legislative funding requests moving forward. The goals identified over the next five years as a result of the process will also support our continued effort to become a comprehensive community college.

For the College to move forward with its development, it is essential that we build on the strong relationship we enjoy with our community to support the needs of the institution and our students. In a state that has very limited dollars to support higher education, we cannot rely totally on state appropriation and tuition revenue to achieve our vision.

A significant effort has been undertaken to reorganize the information and infrastructure dedicated to supporting resource development. The College Foundation has been reorganized and strengthened, so that it can better support the efforts to provide support for the college. In

2004, the president's office assumed responsibility for the reorganization of the support for the college foundation. The President has worked to expand the Foundation Board of Directors, which has grown to include 23 members who are actively involved in supporting the college. Their efforts have resulted in an impressive 60 percent growth in the organization's net assets in the most recently completed fiscal year (see Appendix O).

In addition to the strength brought by a newly energized Foundation, development of the organization has been bolstered by bringing the Foundation into the strategic planning process for the College. As a result, the Foundation has updated its strategic plan to coincide with College goals. The Foundation now has an Executive Director assigned to work with the Foundation exclusively. The College also provides clerical support for the Foundation office. Following the reorganization of the College Foundation, the direct line of oversight for the organization was moved to the Director of Development, who provides the direction for the staff dedicated to directing and supporting institutional advancement.

This reorganization of College support for the Foundation and incorporation of the planning processes of the two organizations has set the stage for a major gifts campaign (see Appendix B) being conducted by the Foundation to support the needs of the College. The campaign is focused on addressing three critical needs: providing access to opportunities at the College by establishing scholarship endowment funds; investing in innovation by creating an endowment for instructional technology equipment; and a College and community advancement fund that is designed to meet more immediate college needs.

At this time the campaign has secured gifts and pledges of 1.2 million dollars, with a goal of 2.5 million. This is the first campaign of this kind for the College, and all indications point toward a successful end result.

All of these efforts, including reorganization and invigoration of the College Foundation, as well as successfully applying for continued funding of our TRIO project and the recently obtained MELMAC grant, have improved our resource development capability. The information and knowledge gained from the MELMAC project in particular will assist us as we redefine the services we are providing to students in need of remedial education and counseling support. Additionally, recent initiatives at the state level, including the report of the Governor's Community College Advisory Council and "Envision the Future" process hold promise for future focus on issues surrounding these critical student support service areas.

### **3. That the College Establish a Systematic Review and Update of Policies and Procedures**

The Curriculum Committee is presently undergoing a thorough, comprehensive review of all academic policies and procedures. Though one of the primary goals of this review is to improve and clarify policies, no less important is the goal of presenting this information in a synchronized, consistent manner across campus publications (e.g., the student handbook and the catalog) as well as electronic media (e.g., the college website and the portal).

The College continues to explore means to improve its communication within campus constituencies and with the region at large. The Campus Communication Committee (see Appendix P) has met regularly and has identified several procedural problems which have hindered the smooth operation of the campus and its facilities. Their concerns have been acted upon by the management team and new procedures have been implemented at their recommendation.

In addition, a recently formed Marketing Committee comprised of a representative cross-section of the campus community (see Appendix Q) has recently overseen the establishment of a new marketing campaign for NMCC. The process of refining the brand was inclusive, involving students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community friends of the College. As new materials were developed, including publications, a re-designed website and advertising campaign, appropriate faculty and staff were involved in their development and production. The effort has resulted in materials which are truly reflective of current activity in each of the programs, services offered on campus and in the surrounding community. The committee meets regularly to assess the direction of the campaign and to make necessary revision recommendations for publications and related material.

Portal technology has changed the culture of the institution. Not only is information instantly available to the people who utilize it through the portal, but the portal has become the central medium for most campus communication. Grade submission, for instance, is no longer a paper process, and students no longer receive written grades at the end of the semester. Advising has become integrated and more efficient through the portal. Administrative reports are collected there for easy reference.

Consequently, while the College has historically strived to base most of its planning and its decisions on the analysis of data, the heightened, efficient, and immediate access to accurate, real-time data of all kinds has slowly become incorporated into the fabric of the institution.