

**EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT REPORT
REGARDING
THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS COUNCIL
FOR THE HUMANITIES
October 2005**

Introduction

At the kind invitation of Ms. Edythe Manza, Director, Federal/State Partnership, National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in Washington, D.C., President Emeritus Agnes McPhetres of the Northern Marianas College and Dr. Hiro Kurashina, Emeritus Director of the Richard Flores Taitano Micronesian Area Research Center, University of Guam, served as site visitors regarding the external assessment of the Northern Mariana Islands Council for the Humanities (NMICH). The actual on-site visit to the NMICH by Director Edythe Manza of the NEH and the present writers took place during the period June 7 – 9, 2005. The present report is prepared as a final fulfillment of the external assessment requested by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Self-Assessment Report and Recent Annual Reports/Reviews

Prior to the on-site visit made by members of the External Assessment Team, the Office of the NMICH provided a copy of the Self-Assessment Report which had been submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities in April 2005. The Self-Assessment Report, which is 77 pages in length, covers a number of topics, including its mission statement; an overview of the Northern Mariana Islands in its geographic, cultural and historical space; an overview of the NMICH; the Council's operating environment; the constituents, services and results of various programs sponsored or supported by the Council; the governance and management of the NMICH explaining its Board as well as the staffing pattern of permanent office employees; future plans; an evaluation of existing council programs; an evaluation of Council's community grants programs; and conclusions. In addition, six appendices are included at the end of the Self-Assessment Report. The appendices are: 1) Organization Chart and Staff Justification, 2) Biographies of Board and Staff, 3) FY 2005 Council Budget, 4) Community Grant Guidelines, 5) Community Grants Awarded 2004 –2005, and 6) Summary of Board's Self-Assessment Exercise. Copies of the 2004 Annual Report and the 2003 Annual Review were also provided to the members of the External Assessment Team prior to the actual on-site visit.

The Self-Assessment Report as well as the attractively designed 2004 and 2003 Annual Reports/Reviews are impressive documents that reflect the outstanding leadership of the Council's past and present Governing Boards and the hard-working permanent staff members of the Council, represented by its new Executive Director Ms. Paz C. Younis, Assistant Executive Director/Program Officer Mr. Scott Russell and Fiscal Officer Ms. Honora Tenorio. The present writers wish to extend their special compliments to the present and immediate past Chairs of the NMICH, namely Chairperson, Herman T. Guerrero, Vice-chairperson, Felicidad Ogumoro (Acting Chairwoman during site visit), Dr. Elizabeth D. Rechebei and Ms. Carmen Gaskins (immediate past Chairs) and all the dedicated Board Members past and present.

**Orientation & Introductory Meeting of the Assessment Team
Hyatt Lobby Lounge, 5:00 – 6:00 p.m., June 7, 2005**

The External Assessment Team, comprised of President Emeritus Agnes McPhetres from Saipan and Emeritus Director of MARC Dr. Hiro Kurashina from Guam, accompanied by NEH Director Edythe Manza from Washington, D.C., informally met in the lobby lounge of the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Garapan for about one hour in the late afternoon of June 7, 2005. This brief orientation meeting was for the purpose of getting the team members together prior to the official commencement of the on-site assessment process. It also served as an important opportunity for the team members to get re-acquainted with one another and start rebuilding the team since the same team conducted the external assessment of the NMICH in the year 2000. During the informal meeting, NEH Director Edythe Manza advised that the general assessment process should be more “analytical” in approach (a modification made by NEH for all 56 of the humanities councils) especially in light of dramatic demographic changes that have continued to occur since 1980 in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands as noted on page 14 of the Self-Assessment Report. The composition of the present External Assessment Team, which is identical to the one in 2000, enables the Team to have a longitudinal perspective from which to examine the progress of the Northern Mariana Islands Council for the Humanities across the time span of 5 years since Year 2000.

Findings

Based upon a careful review of the Self-Assessment Report and all other relevant documents provided by the NMICH to the External Assessment Team as well as a series of informative meetings held during the site visit during June 7– 9, 2005, the present writers wish to present the following findings with regard to Four Criteria.

**Criterion One: The Council has clear and publicly stated purposes,
consistent with its mission and appropriate to a state-wide humanities
institution.**

The NMICH is one of the youngest Councils established by the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, D.C. It is the 55th Council established in 1991 out of 56 Councils that exist throughout the United States of America and its affiliated commonwealths and territories. As clearly stated in the Self-Assessment Report, Annual Reports, its website, and other related materials available to the public, “*the mission of the Northern Mariana Islands Council for the Humanities is to foster awareness, understanding and appreciation of the humanities through support of educational programs that relate the humanities to the indigenous cultures and to the intellectual needs and interests of the people of the Commonwealth*”. The mission of the NMICH broadly supports the legislative definition of humanities specified by the NEH. It emphasizes the importance of the understanding and appreciation of humanistic disciplines such as History; Philosophy; Languages; Linguistics; Literature; Archaeology; Jurisprudence; History and the philosophy of Science; Ethics; Comparative Religion; and Social Sciences employing historical or philosophical approaches to their content such as Cultural Anthropology, Sociology, Political Theory, International Relations, and other subjects concerned with questions of human value. (See <http://cnmi.humanities.org.mp>)

Five years ago, the External Assessment Team made a recommendation for consideration to update the Council's website so that information to the public would be kept current. Additionally, it was recommended that more people-oriented announcements might be included in the web design, incorporating photographic images. The present External Assessment Team appreciates that the Council seriously and kindly considered the Team's input and the Council has updated its website according to the Team's previous recommendations. The Team acknowledges the Council's efforts to widely disseminate information with the use of Information Technology via its website.

It is apparent that the NMICH is clear about its purposes and its mission as evidenced through the excellent Self-Assessment Report as well as the articulation of those whom the External Assessment Team met with during the course of the site visit. Although we respect and appreciate the current mission statement of the NMICH, one area of increasing concern is the emphasis placed on the indigenous cultures, especially considering the prevailing demographic trends within the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. As indicated on page 14 of the Self-Assessment Report, the proportion of the indigenous/US population was 34.5% in 2000 according to the U.S. Census Bureau Statistics. The obvious social reality is that the CNMI has become a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic entity wherein the indigenous population appears to occupy about one third of the entire CNMI population. A particularly noticeable contemporary social phenomenon observed by the Team is the substantial presence of Chinese people in Saipan. Their plight may be linked to the closing of many garment factories in the CNMI. Considering all of the above circumstances, the present writers strongly urge the CNMI Board to revisit the mission of the Council. The present writers have made attempts to visit the websites of other Humanities Councils in the U.S. to see how their mission statements were written and presented to the public. For example, we wish to cite below an example from our Nation's Capital, the mission statement of the Humanities Council of Washington, D.C., which is also a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic community.

The Humanities Council of Washington, DC (HCWDC), transforms lives through the power of the Humanities. As a far-reaching community catalyst, we build bridges between multiple and diverse neighbourhoods to affirm and enliven the human spirit, promote cross-cultural understanding, enrich the quality of life, and foster intellectual stimulation. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and public and private partners, we support local humanities projects and Council initiated programs. (http://wdchumanities.org/about_mission.htm)

The present writers certainly see the importance of emphasis placed on the indigenous cultures of the CNMI for many reasons. Such efforts carried out by the NMICH are greatly lauded by the present writers. Following the excellent example from our Nation's capital, one recommendation is to add one or more sentences to the existing mission statement of the NMICH so that, perhaps, the Council can also foster or promote cross-cultural understanding among all ethnic populations represented in the CNMI through various humanities programs. The present writers believe that the NMICH can continue to make significant contributions to the general public by empowering all people who reside in the CNMI through the power of the humanities.

Criterion Two: The Council is accomplishing its purposes.

Overall, the present writers were favourably impressed by the past and present accomplishments of the stated purposes, goals and objectives of the NMICH. The NMICH has successfully implemented a wide range of programs, publications, public lectures, public

forums, symposia, public exhibits, grant writing workshops, and such signature programs as the Teachers Institute, the Motherread (and Fatherread) Program, the Governor's Annual Humanities Awards, the Covenant Day Debate, and numerous other fine programs initiated by the Council. Both the Self-Assessment Report and the Annual Reports/Reviews for 2004 and 2003 provide detailed accounts of Council Initiated Projects and Community Grants. The following activities were succinctly summarized in the 2004 and 2003 Annual Reports/Reviews:

2004 Council Initiated Projects:

- Teachers Institute
- Humanities Lecture Series
- Chautauqua
- Motherread/Fatherread Program
- Governor's Humanities Awards
- Deportado Research
- Oral History Workshop
- Covenant Day Debate
- 24th Infantry Regiment Exhibit
- Sengebau Poetry Competition
- Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of World War II

2004 Community Grants:

- We Drank Our Tears Publication
- One Commonwealth, Many Cultures
- Traditional Micronesian Art Forms: A Public Collection
- Oral History Video Project
- Spanish Documents Collection
- Presidential Libraries Project
- A Time for Recovery

2003 Council Initiated Projects:

- Online Encyclopaedia
- Motherread Program
- Teachers Institute
- Workshop for Effective Board Governance
- Chautauqua
- Community Grants Workshop
- Governor's Humanities Award
- Spanish Deportado Research
- Humanities Lectures
- Art of Association
- Covenant Day Debate
- Publishing the Poetry of Valentine Sengebau
- Council Supported Publications

2003 Community Grants:

- German Colonial Literature Copying Project
- The Insular Empire Film Documentary

- French Naval Visitors to the Mariana Islands
- Shared History of Images
- Malawar Refaluwasch (The Lives of the Carolinians)
- Chamorro Short Stories
- Sponsorship of Humanities-based Programs on KRNM Radio

During the on-site visit, the External Assessment Team was able to meet and/or talk with a number of humanities scholars, project directors, and collaborators as described in earlier sections of the present report. All those whom the External Assessment Team met shared the distinct impression that the NMICH has a special role in the CNMI for improving the quality of life through humanities projects and grants supported by the Council such as the programs listed above. The high intellectual quality of humanities programs is corroborated by the high quality of outcomes as reflected in publications and comments made by many individuals whom the External Assessment Team spoke with. The Self-Assessment Report provides summaries of a) resources and financing, b) audience, c) impact, d) strengths, e) weaknesses, and f) plans for the future for each of the existing council programs.

As can be seen in the above list of projects/grants and in supporting documents, the NMICH has carried out a wide range of humanities projects involving reputable humanities scholars, partners, and partner institutions such as the NMI Museum, CNMI Historic Preservation Office, the Northern Marianas College, the Public School System, the Joe-Ten Kiyu Public Library, RFT-MARC at the University of Guam, Charles Sturt University in Australia, and Southern Illinois University, to name but a few. The present writers wish to encourage the continuation of valuable collaborations with reputable local and international humanities scholars and humanities institutions on and off-island as close partners.

Criterion Three: The Council has effectively organized adequate human, financial, and physical resources to accomplish its purpose.

By the inherent nature of its creation, the NMICH is a non-profit, non-political entity supported by funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, D.C., and other public and private sources. The present external assessment of the NMICH clearly indicates that the Council appears to be effectively organized according to its structure of governance and management as described on pages 21 – 24 of the Self-Assessment Report. At this time, the Council is comprised of “a very active thirteen member volunteer board of directors” (page 21, Self-Assessment Report) including one Carolinian, one Palauan, one Filipino, and ten Chamorros. There are 5 women and 8 men who comprise the Board. One member each represents the islands of Rota and Tinian. The Board members serve on one or more of the five standing committees (Executive Committee, Program Committee, Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee, Development Committee, Nominations and Bylaws Committee) and on ad hoc committees whenever necessary. On page 22 of the Self-Assessment Report, it is stated that seven members of the Board are from the public sector and the remaining six members are from the private sector. Biographies of Board members are given in Appendix 2 of the Self-Assessment Report. The educational and professional backgrounds of all the Board members are truly impressive. For example, the immediate past Board Chair (Dr. Elizabeth D. Rechebei) holds a Doctorate (Ed.D.) in educational leadership. The current Board Chair (Mr. Herman T. Guerrero) is a recipient of the National Humanities Award (2002). The Board also includes Attorney Robert Torres who served as the CNMI Attorney General until his resignation. Attorney Torres was a member of the NMICH Board in 2000 and he is still very active in community projects. One of the recent appointees by

Governor Juan N. Babauta (Mr. Galvin S. Deleon Guerrero) has been just named the new Principal of Mt. Carmel School (Marianas Variety, June 13, 2005). Another recent appointee (Mr. William Ron Barrineau) by Governor Babauta is a former Executive Director of the NMCH. In Year 2000, the External Assessment Team noted one area of possible weakness by citing the under-representation of Tinian and Rota. The External Assessment Team is pleased to see the inclusion of representatives from both Tinian and Rota on the current Board of Directors of the Council. The present writers extend their praise for the fine volunteerism as shown by the active membership of the Board. To strengthen more active participation of the Board members, there may be a need to develop and implement an attendance policy, if such policy is not yet in place, as suggested by NEH Director Edythe Manza.

The Council has currently three permanent employees: its Executive Director (Ms. Paz Younis), Assistant Executive Director/Program Officer (Mr. Scott Russell) and Fiscal Officer/Administrative Assistant (Ms. Honora Tenorio). The educational and professional backgrounds of the permanent staff members are equally impressive, as described in Appendix 2 of the Self-Assessment Report. As was the case in Year 2000, the External Assessment Team recognizes the considerable responsibility and workload of the permanent staff. The Team has observed once again that the permanent staff is professionally competent and demonstrates a friendly work style, particularly with the Council's clients as articulated by a number of people such as project directors and collaborators that the External Assessment Team met with during the course of the present assessment process. The permanent staff is highly lauded for their professionalism and high degrees of productivity.

The present writers have reviewed the Independent Auditor's Report prepared by J. Scott Magliari Company (Certified Public Accountant). The report states "... *the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Council as of October 31, 2004 and 2003 and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America*" (page 1). The Independent Auditor's Report has also noted that "*Substantially, all of the Council's revenue is derived from restricted Federal monies made available by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and restricted and unrestricted gifts from local government and private sources in the CNMI*" (page 5).

As far as the present physical resources of the NMICH are concerned, one attribute that is especially outstanding is its location. It faces directly towards the main road that leads to such major landmarks as the airport in one direction and the Northern Marianas College in the other direction. The Council's office at its present location affords easy access to the public. The space inside the Council's Office appears adequate for the purpose of daily routine tasks performed by the permanent staff.

Criterion Four: The Council can continue to accomplish its purposes.

The excellent progress and outstanding track records of the Council, especially between 2000 and 2005, represent reasonable indicators that the Council can indeed continue to accomplish its purposes in the foreseeable future. It is evident that Board members are actively involved in accomplishing its purposes and the permanent staff members are hard working. There is sufficient support from the Council's collaborators, partners and other humanities institutions to accomplish its purposes. However, one or two main concerns have become apparent during the present assessment process. The present writers perceive that the relationship

between the extent of planned activities and the changing fiscal environment may become more volatile, given certain factors.

Examining the Plans for the Future, including specific plans for Fiscal Years 2005 – 2007, and General Plans for FYs 2008 – 2009 as outlined in the Self-Assessment Report, in addition to the 2003-2004 Financial Reports as summarized in the respective Annual Reports, the present writers have agreed with NEH Director Edythe Manza's keen observation that clear prioritization would have to be established in order to accomplish planned activities. While the list of planned activities is certainly impressive and compelling, in some ways, it can be seen as a "wish list" as it lacks realistic details for actual implementation. For example, no cost estimates are given for any of the planned activities. No specific time lines are given in terms of days, weeks, or months. The availability of human resources is unclear for some of the planned activities. The Team has also astutely observed that the revenues have decreased from \$494,550 in 2003 to \$419,503 in 2004. The decrease in revenues is approximately 15% from 2003 to 2004 which is a substantial decline. It was also noted that the proportion of administrative costs/operations and staff salaries/benefits have increased to about 50% of the total expenditures.

Given the prevailing fiscal environment, the Board of Directors appears to be well aware of the need to do more fundraising, as described in Appendix 6 (Summary of Board's Self Assessment Exercise) of the Self-Assessment Report. Their awareness, however, appears to be more at the theoretical level. One of the challenges that the Council must meet in the near future will be to devise various strategies and implement actual fundraising activities with tangible results. The present writers appreciate the Board's comments in Appendix 6 to be genuine and real. However, what the list of the comments lacks is an action plan including details for actual implementation as to who, when, where, and how the Board can effectively conduct fundraising. A comment has been made to "establish a permanent fundraising committee (possibly as an arm of the Development Committee)" on page 75 in Appendix 6. A Special Task Force for Fundraising may be more appropriate at this time.

During the course of the discussions at some of the meetings the present writers have made various suggestions for fundraising. Emeritus Director Kurashina mentioned that to aid the sustainability of the Council, the Council might consider forming effective partnerships with successful businesses in the context of tourism. Through such partnerships, the Council might enter into a new area of heritage tourism, to promote the humanities as well as to acquire external funding through heritage tourism. NEH Director Edythe Manza mentioned that some Humanities Councils in the United States have in fact taken such a direction to incorporate heritage tourism within the scope of their activities. The present writers encourage the Council, particularly the Development Committee, to visit appropriate websites of Humanities Councils in the U.S. mainland for the purpose of exploring innovative strategies for fundraising.

Recommendations

Based upon the careful review of the Self-Assessment Report, annual reports, and other supporting documents, augmented by input from everyone the External Assessment Team met during the on-site assessment process, the present writers wish to provide the following recommendations for consideration by the Council. Justifications for the following recommendations are imbedded in the foregoing sections of the present report.

Recommendation One

Given the changing demographics of the CNMI, the mission of the NMICH should be carefully revisited and, if appropriate, the mission statement should be modified to be more in conformity with today's realities. Perhaps, the scope of the mission could be expanded to include cross-cultural understanding of various ethnic groups now present in the CNMI using the power of the humanities. The catalyst for facilitating cross-cultural understanding may include American democracy and Empowering People through the Humanities.

Recommendation Two

Related to Recommendation One, given the changing demographic realities of the CNMI, the size and composition of the Board should be objectively revisited. The membership of the Board appears to be at times perceived as an "Exclusive Club" and primarily comprised of "Elites." Given the number of planned activities and greater challenges ahead, it might be wise for the Board to revisit the number of members. The present writers are inclined to think that the number of members should be increased, bearing in mind today's demographic realities.

Recommendation Three

It is the perception of the External Assessment Team that the Council can continue to perform its outstanding projects for the community, provided that additional funding is acquired through more concerted fundraising efforts in the community. Partnerships with successful businesses in the private sector may be one effective way to do capacity building for the Council. As stated previously, a Special Task Force should be created within the Council to address the issue of fundraising and capacity building.

Recommendation Four

It would be worthwhile for the Council to visit websites of other Humanities Councils throughout the nation (there are 55 others at present) to learn what other councils are doing to improve the quality of life of people, using the humanities in their constituencies. Visiting these websites may actually lead to communicating and networking with some counterparts in other Humanities Council. Co-lateral networking with Humanities Councils may open new doors for fresh ideas, visions and innovative projects.

Recommendation Five

The External Assessment Team certainly appreciates the Council's kind consideration and implementation of the previously put forth recommendation to create a Strategic Master Plan. The present writers once again recommend that the Strategic Master Plan be carefully revised for the next five years, with a carefully thought out vision for the Council. The revised Strategic Master Plan will be an important planning tool for the further successful development and growth of the NMICH. The fourth recommendation made above may provide inspiration for innovative ideas or creative new projects.

Conclusions

First and foremost, the External Assessment Team extends its most sincere appreciation for the warm hospitality and courtesy provided by the entire NMICH Board and staff members during the site visit. The External Assessment Team was most impressed by the deeply committed spirit of volunteerism of the Board and professionalism of the permanent staff of the NMICH.

The External Assessment Team congratulates all those present and past Board members, permanent staff, humanities scholars, project directors, collaborators, and others who have made significant contributions to the development of the NMICH over the years. Since the last external assessment, made by the same Team five years ago, the Team has made observations that the Council is maturing very nicely along its paths of development. With respect to the Four Criteria of Assessment, overall, the NMICH has demonstrated excellence in meeting all the Criteria with distinction. Although the Team sees challenges ahead, the Team did not identify any major problems.

As was previously stated back in 2000, to continue to develop an even more excellent and successful Council, the NMICH must continue to develop or modify its comprehensive master plan with new visions, goals, objectives, and strategies to attain these goals. The Council is blessed with having capable individuals not only to make future plans, but also to implement a wide range of humanities projects. Input from as many segments of the community as possible, humanities scholars, and past and present project directors will be of critical importance for planning and implementation of short-, mid-, and long-range goals.

In view of the growing cultural and ethnic diversity seen in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the members of the External Assessment Team reaffirm the increased importance of the presence of the Northern Mariana Islands Council for the Humanities within the context of a globalizing world. It is one of the strong beliefs of the present writers that the NMICH can play a major role in the enrichment of the present and future of CNMI by using the power of the humanities.

Respectfully submitted:

Agnes McPhetres
President Emeritus
Northern Marianas College

Hiro Kurashina, Ph.D.
Emeritus Director, MARC
University of Guam