



IAC HEARING COMMITTEE REPORT

HEARING COMMITTEE A

SESSION 1

December 16, 2013

INSTITUTION:	SOUTHWESTERN INDIAN POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
TYPE OF EVALUATION:	Initial Accreditation
STAFF LIAISON:	Andrew C. Lootens-White
COMMITTEE MEMBERS:	Thomas Hamel (Chair), Roberta C. Teahen (Recorder), Sue Darby, Mary Lloyd (public member), Larry Lundblad, Michael Williford

INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVES:

Sherry Allison, President
Edward Hummingbird, Director of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning
Monte Monteith, Education Specialist
Valerie Montoya, Vice President-Academic Programs

TEAM CHAIR:

Donald M. Bird

I. IAC HEARING COMMITTEE CONCLUSION: (Indicate one.)

The IAC Committee recommendation is the same or substantially the same as the evaluation team's recommendation.

The IAC Committee recommendation is different from the evaluation team's recommendation.

II. IAC HEARING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION OR ACTION:

Indicate whether the IAC has taken final action or is making a recommendation for Board action.

IAC FINAL ACTION

IAC RECOMMENDATION

III. IAC HEARING COMMITTEE SUPPORTING EVIDENCE, FINDINGS, AND RATIONALE FOR ACTION OR RECOMMENDATION

In concurrence with the site visit team, the IAC panel recommends that the institution be granted initial accreditation.

Because of the extra expectations associated with initial accreditation, the IAC panel explored the institution's status regarding the criteria for accreditation and its associated core components; the assumed practices; eligibility requirements; and federal compliance. Through this inquiry, the panel found no areas where they felt that any one of these expectations had not been met; in contrast, the panel's interpretation is that Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) not only meets the Commission's expectations in these areas but also may well exceed minimum expectations in each of these areas.

Examples of our evidence to support this claim follow:

The college demonstrated evidence of forward thinking and documenting this in the form of a draft sustainability plan in the areas of finances, operations, and leadership. SIPI appears to be a model for integration of planning, assessment, evaluation, and the alignment of these activities with institutional priorities. Even though this is initial accreditation, SIPI already demonstrates best practices in the area of planning.

Following the loss of HLC accreditation, two specialized accreditors, the Commission of Opticianry Education (COA) and the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) suspended their accreditation of the Southwestern programs. Planful in their approach to assuring their ability to regain these recognitions, the academic leadership has remained engaged with the accreditors through attending meetings, sending in reports, and keeping communications active. One accreditor has indicated they will immediately reinstate upon a positive action of the HLC, and for the other, the institution will need to begin the process anew. The leadership of SIPI indicates they will pursue both, demonstrating their commitment to meeting high standards and assuring academic quality.

In addition to engaging students and staff, the board is also highly engaged in a variety of ways – including politically, since the staff are prohibited from lobbying because the personnel of the institution are federal employees. The board has established a foundation through a 501(C3) corporation to enable it to receive funds and equipment on behalf of the institution. The roles of the Board have been clarified significantly since prior visits, and the unique responsibilities associated with a federally operated college have been codified. In board training, which begins with orientation, the president keeps key factors in the forefront, including the importance of regional accreditation, expectations for assessment, continuous improvement, and program evaluation. The board has significant influence with the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) regarding the president's performance, while the President reports to a supervisor in the Department of the Interior, where BIE resides. The Board is provided an opportunity to review all institutional policies, even though they would not be required to fulfill this role. These

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and other examples provided by the leadership team convince the panel that the Board appropriately fulfills its responsibilities.

Focus on the mission is “laser focused,” according to the team. Evidence of this includes the president’s practice of meeting with each new employee, enabling the new employee’s participation in a president’s cabinet meeting, and talking through the mission and strategic objectives that are printed on a laminated personal ID card provided to each employee. The importance of an aligned culture and a supportive community are articulated by the president and her leadership team.

The institution demonstrates effectiveness in managing its resources given the unique requirements of the federal government. The college has been the beneficiary of a variety of funding sources, including federal Title III, that has provided approximately \$2 million per year. Further, they are proactive in attempting to assure that they maintain this funding.

SIPI did not have an institutional research in the past, and with the hire of a new employee, a Director of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning, much progress has been made. In fact, the institution now reports that no requests go forward without data to support requests and examples were provided of staff members articulating this expectation. Further, SIPI has eliminated multiple academic programs as a result of their program review process when the programs failed to produce evidence to justify their continuation.

There is increasing sophistication in the specification and measurement of outcomes in both academic and non-academic areas. As members of the New Mexico consortium, the general education courses of SIPI are accepted at face value, even though, the institution was only in candidacy status. This affirmation of the curriculum, coupled with the reports from the adjunct faculty who also teach at a local New Mexico university that the transfer students perform well, offers evidence that the academic programs have integrity.

In the spirit of transparency, it is commendable that all of the information concerning the institution’s accreditation status is prominently available on the website, including the original letter from the Commission that concluded that the institution had failed to produce evidence that it met the criteria for accreditation and reporting that the institution would be placed into candidacy mode. The students and all other stakeholders were well informed about the institution’s situation.