

# Nevada System of Higher Education

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** NSHE Board of Regents  
**FROM:** *ma* Thom Reilly, Chancellor  
**DATE:** May 14, 2018  
**SUBJECT:** Periodic Evaluation of President Karin Hilgersom

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By this memorandum I submit to the Board my comments and recommendations on the periodic evaluation of President Karin Hilgersom of Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC). Consistent with the findings of the Evaluation Committee, I believe President Hilgersom has performed well over the evaluation period. Consequently, I recommend that her contract be extended, and her compensation be adjusted to better match her community college peer presidents.

This evaluation was done in accord with the NSHE Procedures & Guidelines Manual (see Chapter 2, Sections 2.2 and 2.3) as established by the Board. Accordingly, I created a committee of four community leaders, including one senior faculty member (the "Evaluation Committee" or the "Committee"). The Committee was comprised of:

- Dr. Precious Hall, Faculty, Political Science (Committee Chair)
- Gigi Chisel, Vice President, Lewis Group; Foundation Board Chair
- Katy Simon Holland, President, Washoe County School District Board of Trustees
- Brad Woodring, Reliant Title; Institutional Advisory Council Member

The committee first reviewed President Hilgersom's self-evaluation and related documents, then interviewed the President about her performance and that of the college. They then conducted interviews with campus personnel, students, and community members interested in the college. With the benefit of those interviews, they met again with President Hilgersom to discuss their findings and observations and to receive her feedback. The Committee then produced a report, which they submitted to me, concluding their service. That report is attached to this memorandum (Appendix A), along with President Hilgersom's self-evaluation (Appendix B). I have not included the many attachments to Appendix B for brevity's sake. Though the Committee had the complete results of the faculty survey, in accordance with Board policy, that is not included in the materials since it is not deemed a public document.

## **Overview of Performance**

President Hilgersom is well regarded, both at the college as well as within the community, as an advocate for TMCC. Her passion for the college and its students is evident. She is quite visible as the college's leader and chief advocate. Her tenure as president, just coming to the end of two full academic years, has been full of significant accomplishments and successes. Her inclusive style and attentiveness to the issue of diversity has been well-noted throughout her presidency. At the same time, her first two years as president have highlighted some of the divisions that exist at the college that have differing perspectives. These factions have, at times, spilled into the public domain in the form of news reports and public comment. The President, and the evaluation committee, seem to be acutely aware of this divisiveness that exists, and she has already taken steps to address the conflict.

The evaluation committee highlights the promising potential of the President. There is a clear recognition that the change the President has embarked upon at the college is ambitious and bold. She has demonstrated her commitment to student success. There are, however, concerns about her communication style, how she manages conflict and her commitment to shared governance principles.

## **Summary of Evaluation Metrics**

Among the Board's metrics for evaluation, the Committee has rated President Hilgersom favorably in most, expressing concerns about campus morale, shared governance, communication, and conflict resolution.

### **1. Fundamental Productivity**

The Committee notes that President Hilgersom's employment with the college began in the summer of 2016 and many of the available performance metrics are for periods that began prior to her arrival. That said, the college continues to have an impressive graduation rate when compared to peer community colleges, both within Nevada as well as across the country.

There is a clear focus on increasing enrollments and simultaneously expanding programmatic offerings to meet regional employer demands. The college has a goal to increase retention and persistence rates by 5% by 2020. The committee highlights the President's student-centered approach as aiding in the hopeful achievement of this goal.

The President has clearly established herself as a strong advocate for promoting diversity and inclusion, having published a Student Services and Diversity Plan in September of last year, as well as creating the Diversity and International Student Center Office (The DISCO). TMCC has also leveraged the Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) designation to further support the diverse student body at the college.

The president's focus on external fundraising has also not gone unnoticed. She continues to be active in the philanthropic communities of the region and, as the Committee points out, this has allowed for an increase in student scholarships since she first began as president.

Overall, the graduation and retention rates, progress in closing the achievement gap, and number of awards conferred have been quite remarkable at TMCC.

While improvements in TMCC's student success have been significant, the integrity of performance metrics is critical and therefore must be accurate. To ensure the accuracy of such metrics, going forward they will be reviewed by the system office in an effort to

ensure that data is reported consistent with appropriate definitions – again ensuring the absolute integrity of such improvement.

## **2. Institutional Well-Being and Management Effectiveness**

The Committee noted the innovative approaches the President has taken when it comes to rethinking new solutions to old problems. There is a sense that she is very much forward-thinking in a way that strongly benefits the college and the region. However, there is also concern that this, at times, could be too aggressive in her ideas and not inclusive enough in implementation.

The campus environment at TMCC has remained a concern as there has been a clear division of opinions. There has even been a division amongst the faculty on key issues facing the college. This division is clear in some of the results in faculty survey. Personnel issues have plagued the institution over the past year in particular. However, the President is keenly aware of this strong difference in opinion and alludes to this in her own self-evaluation. For example, the President and her administrative team are participating in a Relationships By Objective (RBO) training offered by the Federal Mediation and Reconciliation Service (FMCS) in May 2018 for three days along with faculty in an effort for both sides to improve communications and mutual respect at the college.

The topics of shared governance and communication were consistent themes in the Committee's report, as well as the faculty survey results. On shared governance, the President has just recently been successful at achieving an agreed-upon definition of what shared governance is at TMCC. It is our hope that this will help alleviate some of the tensions that have occurred around decision making in the recent past. On communication, the President is considered to be doing a good job of staying in touch with campus constituencies, having ample opportunity for face time with various constituencies, and using a variety of mediums to communicate with the college as a whole. Areas of opportunity continue to exist in how the President becomes as effective at active listening, an important skill for any leader.

## **3. Institutional Relations to External Communities**

As a collaborator, President Hilgersom is viewed as a systemic thinker who effectively uses her pulpit to connect with other institutions and community partners. The Committee's report highlights examples where she has been effective in building bridges to these important partners. There does seem to be a serious sense of competition between University of Nevada Reno (UNR) and TMCC for student enrollments. There is concern that the competitiveness could be impeding collaboration. This tension, however, is not uncommon between community colleges and their receiving four-year institutions. Nonetheless, the system and state rely on a collaborative approach between these two institutions to effectively serve the students in the Reno/Sparks area.

When it comes to the Board of Regents strategic goals, as stated in her self-evaluation, the President has appropriately addressed these goals for TMCC through her leadership of the college. Most notably, TMCC has gained a solid reputation for addressing the needs of the regions workforce over the past several years, with their partnerships with Tesla and Panasonic as shining examples of this responsiveness.

## **4. Other**

As previously mentioned, President Hilgersom receives high-praise as an effective advocate for TMCC in nearly every setting.

There remains concern about the turbulence that has existed at the college and how it has been managed over the past two years. The President acknowledges that her being

an “outcomes” person may have contributed to the friction. However, as the Committee appropriately points out, the President also arrived at the college, and into NSHE, at a turbulent time for the system and without any formal onboarding as a new president in Nevada. This should not be overlooked.

The President will need to consider her communication style, active-listening skills, and tendency to be an urgent leader. The committee makes it clear in their report that the president is perceived as a strong leader who stands her ground, but that can sometimes be perceived as combative or even rushing to decisions prematurely. The committee does point out the drama caused by the TMCC soccer field and sports complex, but also believes that the president has learned from past mistakes as she is approaching a new capital project more cautiously.

On the topic of capital projects, the Committee highlights some confusion or lack of understanding on college priorities. This would be an area where the President, in consultation with her leadership team, may want to consider more effective ways to communicate such priorities to the broader community.

The President highlights her successful completion of the Strategic Master Plan and Strategic Enrollment Management Plan as two examples of the importance of her role in effective planning for the future of the college.

### **Committee Recommendations**

The Committee lists key recommendations for the President to consider as she evolves from the new president at TMCC. Most notably are the recommendations for President Hilgersom to effectively address the undercurrent of discontent that exists within various ranks of the College and the effect this has on overall morale. The committee’s recommendation of a clearly agreed upon definition of shared governance can now be considered accomplished as, just in early May, such a definition was formally agreed upon by the Faculty Senate.

While the accessibility of, and overall communications from the President are plentiful, the Committee suggests that increasing the diversity of opinions the President incorporates, including a greater reliability on her leadership team, will yield positive results. This will also help as the President looks to address conflict when it does arise at the College.

### **Chancellor’s Recommendations:**

Based on the Faculty Survey results, the Committee Report, and my own observations reviewing President Hilgersom’s self-evaluation and in working with her, I recommend that her contract be renewed and the Committee’s recommendations, as written in their report, fully implemented. She has effectively met the evaluation metrics set by the Board of Regents, is a visible advocate for TMCC on campus and in the community and is fully committed to student success. Under her leadership, TMCC continues to increase graduation rates and increase the number of degrees and certificates as well as making modest gains in persistent rates. Launching the First Year Experience in the Fall 2017 that provides supportive services to full and part-time undecided students should assist TMCC efforts with student success

Under her stewardship, TMCC continues to be responsive to workforce needs in Nevada and has been innovative, responsive and successful in various partnerships with private industry. Examples of this includes the implementation of the Panasonic Preferred Pathway (P3) Program, and the creation of a degree emphasis in Critical Systems to support the needs of HVAC personnel. The creation of a two-year degree in Unmanned Aircraft Operations and the

partnership with Renown on the new “earn and learn” program that places trained students immediately into the workforce are additional successful programs she has spearheaded.

President Hilgersom has partnered effectively with Washoe County School District and has worked innovatively with the University of Nevada Reno (UNR) in piloting a program this coming year aimed at teaching remedial math for UNR students. This should serve as a model across the state.

Regarding the aforementioned concerns about campus morale, shared governance, communication, and conflict resolution, both President Hilgersom and I have agreed that she will obtain the services of a coach or mentor over the next year who can support the President in her growth as the College’s leader. The competencies for Community College Leaders outlined by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) will serve as a guide for this mentorship.

Given her successful review, I am recommending a pay increase that I will detail in the contract and in the term sheet accompanying it.