



Strengthening Purposeful Dialogue

This paper outlines a strategy for COM-FSM to follow in replacing its existing Communications Plan by embedding a goal (with subordinate goals) for purposeful dialogue within *Wasabn Kamarain: 2013-2017*, the college's next strategic plan. By taking that step, the college will require that links to that goal be reflected in the operational plans and assessments of academic programs, non-academic programs, college offices and governance entities across the institution.

Premises: Conditions for Purposeful Dialogue

- Purposeful dialogue within an institution is not merely a goal but also a reflection of the institutions values, culture and modes of governance.
- While the president is the public face of the institution and speaks for it, purposeful dialogue is an everyday activity that must be tied to the Mission and Strategic Plan in terms that are measurable and active at all levels of the institution.
- Purposeful dialogue at COM-FSM must be multi-directional, of high quality, and subject to evaluation based on specific goals and objectives.
- Responsibility for purposeful dialogue must be clear at institutional, program, unit and individual levels.
- Purposeful dialogue must reflect the special characteristics of cultural diversity and geographic separation at COM-FSM.
- Resources devoted to effective purposeful dialogue should accrue through normal college planning and assessment activities.

Summary Status

The 2010 Communications Plan was an effort to respond to a recommendation from ACCJC to develop and strengthen “purposeful dialogue” at COM-FSM. Yet the recommendation persisted through two further cycles of ACCJC review of Follow-Up reports. In April of 2012 the college began an evaluation of the Communications Plan through a comprehensive survey followed the report *Purposeful Dialogue at COM-FSM*. In May campus constituencies gathered to discuss the findings and recommendations of that report. Those events presented the following:

- The existing *Communications Plan* was not widely recognized, understood or deeply embedded in the culture of the institution. It is, in effect, a “dead letter” plan with its main benefit being a cataloging of formal communication activities. Neither its three main goals nor its primary outcomes were cast in measurable terms.
- The ACCJC Recommendation 1 links “purposeful dialogue” with “participatory governance,” and the existing plan reflects a focus on communication activities at the administrative level. Ongoing changes in governance will require a different approach.



- The existing Board of Regents *Policy on Communication* was dated 2006 and needs revision to support this different approach.
- The previous Strategic Plan contained a poorly defined goal (SP 4) of “improving communication,” which does not guide either implementation or evaluation.
- The spring 2012 evaluation survey and report and subsequent campus-wide feedback revealed a plethora of concerns that are not addressed in the existing Communications Plan.

A New Direction

The steps below reflect a new and different approach for developing and sustaining purposeful dialogue at the college.

- By the end of 2012, dissolve the existing *Communications Plan* and transfer its useful elements throughout a new strategy that is linked to a well-developed goal for purposeful dialogue from *Wasabn Kamarain: 2013-2017*, the new Strategic Plan. (See an example of such a goal in the text box below.)
- By the end of 2012, promulgate a new Communications Policy for BOR approval, a policy that facilitates the new strategy.
- By the end of January 2013, develop guiding principles and protocols for implementing the strategy across the college in terms of both internal and external communication. Publish these principles and protocols, with advice on their implementation.
- By June 2013, embed evaluation of purposeful dialogue in academic programs, non-academic programs, college offices and governance entities.

Strengthening Purposeful Dialogue (an example of text)

In alignment with its Mission, the College of Micronesia-FSM will adopt communication practices and guiding principles that foster purposeful dialogue among the institution’s internal and external stakeholders. It will employ these practices and principles in a manner that marks it as a model institution.

GOAL: Achieve and strengthen purposeful dialogue by

- Embedding appropriate communication practices and guiding principles in the objectives of each college program, governance body and administrative office;
- Adopting a continuous improvement model to measure progress in these communication practices and guiding principles within the college’s ongoing assessments;
- Ensuring that college communications are accessible, accurate, timely, clear, and understood by their intended users;
- Developing technology to improve communications among all campuses of the college;
- Developing and maintaining a centralized database of college policies and procedures;
- Some language referring specifically to students and their families.



SPA Contributions

During the current contract, SPA would

- Advise on process design and execution of the steps listed above.
- Assist in drafting new BOR *Policy on Communications* (a draft by November 1).
- Design and publish a 20-24 page resource on guiding principles and protocols that can be used across the college to support best practices in purposeful dialogue (deliverable with draft by January 1, 2013 with usability testing to follow).
- Assist in coordinating these steps with ongoing changes in governance and evaluation activities.

Pending Issues

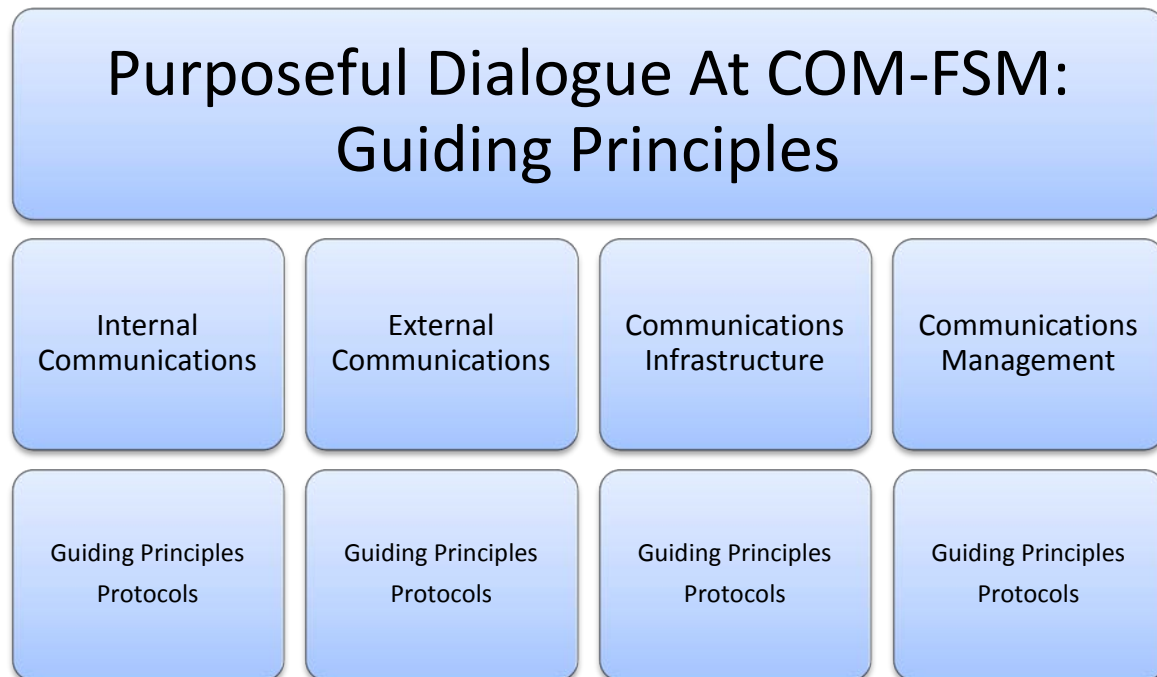
Design and implementation of this new direction and strategy will depend on resolving a number of issues:

- Pending governance changes should be completed and approved by BOR.
- *Wasahn Kamarain: 2013-2017*, the new Strategic Plan, should be completed and approved by BOR in December 2012 as planned. Note that the feedback sessions reveal that the concept of *Wasahn Kamarain*, “the place of enlightenment” is not yet fully understood as an aspiration. Such understanding is crucial to many aspects of the college, but none more so than purposeful dialogue.
- The language of a new BOR Policy on Communication should accommodate the linkage of purposeful dialogue to the Strategic Plan.
- Communication protocols and their ownership must be fully defined, particularly in terms of external, compliance and governance communication.
- The new strategy must be linked to the plans and procedures embodied in the *Integrated Educational Master Plan*.

The process will reveal others.



An Simple Scheme for the Proposed Guidebook



This handbook will feature the same structure for academic programs, non-academic programs, college offices and governance entities, with specific advice across the four larger categories of communication. All the guiding principles will be developed from the existing value statements of the college, as well as from the purposeful dialogue goal of *Wasabn Kamarain*.

Coupling this approach with the BOR approval of governance changes (especially as reflected in new Terms of Reference) promises to give the college its best chance of finally resolving Recommendation 1 from ACCJC. Doing so will, of course, be greatly aided by a first quarter 2013 assessment of strategic plan goals.