Consultant’s Report to the National Hispanic University on the
Assessment of Undergraduate Student Needs
February 2006

The NHU is well positioned to continue attracting a much larger number of undergraduate, graduate and part time students in specialized programs. However, before doing so, it is recommended that the University develop two areas that will be critical for student arrival and persistence. This is particularly true for first time freshmen.

First, the academic program should be designed in order to capture both the cultural and social assets that students bring to campus and second; a robust program in student life is necessary in order to enrich their college experience.

Academic Program

The Provost and faculty should consider developing core courses for all first time freshmen. These could include:

- **University 101**: a course designed to prepare the student for scholarship. It will be important to have this developed and offered by full time campus faculty rather than adjuncts.
- **Technology**: a course that prepares the students for using computers at a greater sophisticated level. A Library Internet section can be added to this so that some coursework and communication with faculty can be done on line as well as in person.
- **Math**: Students should be assessed for math competency and take the appropriate level during the first semester at NHU.
- **English**: A comprehensive assessment of writing and comprehension skills should be done in order to place them in an appropriate level of English course. It is important to note that a large percentage of NHU students are English Language Learners and therefore, an emphasis should be on insuring that NHU students have proficiency in reading, writing and speaking English while also maintaining their cultural wealth in Spanish.

In addition to these courses, there is already a plan to develop strong Summer Bridge program that will prepare first time freshmen for college life. The program will probably be a minimum of a month long and will require faculty and staff resources to assess and work with students.

Preparing the campus for a large number of first time students requires new thinking and new teaching strategies. There will be a better utilization of class space and faculty talent when all first time students are enrolled in the same core courses. This plan will enable NHU to work with its current and new students while it also does academic program reviews of its other curricular areas.

Student Life

Because of NHU’s success in attracting a record number of first time freshmen, NHU should realize that it must provide a student-centered atmosphere that engages the students in learning and extra-curricular activities. Research has shown that students who work or live on campus have a far greater retention rate. NHU cannot provide student housing and our work-study funds are too limited to allow more students to work on campus. However, it is also known that students who are engaged in student activities are also likely to stay in college. Engaging in service to the community and internships will also be central to the University’s mission and to professional development.
It is recommended that NHU hire a full time staff member who would have the title of “Director of Student Service & Activities.” This person could harness student’s natural interests to participate in a variety of activities.

**Sports and Intramural Games:** The LCPA high school has been successful at developing a soccer team. It has already become evident that some of the LCPA students will seek community colleges after graduation because they can remain in a soccer team. NHU should not lose the opportunity to continue the interest in soccer. NHU students have not organized athletic opportunities and many of the students arrive from high school with skills in athletics. The campus could have scheduled sessions for volleyball, tennis, chess, and a myriad of other activities.

**Visual and Performing Arts:** Ballet Folklorico and Music may also hold the interest of many of NHU’s students. UCLA & Stanford have excellent student mariachi’s and there is no doubt that NHU students have talents they have not been able to showcase on campus. Indeed, NHU students bring rich legacies in the disciplines of Art, Photography, Poetry, murals, and more. Setting aside some time and space for these art forms will nourish the spirits as well as minds of our students.

**Clubs and Interest Groups:** Students are more likely to succeed in college and career aspirations if they form friendships and networks based on mutual interests. NHU currently has a Business club, and also a Film club. In the future there can be other affinity groups such as Music, Technology, Journalism, Pre-Law, etc. These grouping could call on NHU alumni for mentoring and networking.

**Capacity Building Issues**

NHU’s vision of being affordable, accessible and working with the next generation of community leaders needs to be reviewed and owned by the NHU Familia. It will be important to engage the campus in articulating and internalizing that vision. NHU has many strengths. A new building that is state of the art, a successful accreditation process and a Board of Trustees that is strong and committed to NHU’s success. It is because of this, that the Board is now being asked to assist us in this phase of institutional capacity building before we charge ahead to bring more and more students to the campus.

**Building a University Profile**

NHU must engage itself in defining its unique and strong niches. Once developing these, the recruitment of students will be a natural outcome of NHU’s strengths. The Hispanic community needs talent in all areas but NHU must define some strategic areas where it will make a uniquely important contribution. Some of these would include:

**Teacher Education:** Our program in Teacher Education has an opportunity to model the conviction that Hispanic students come with assets and dispel the language of deficits that is too often used to characterize the Hispanic population. There is abundant talent in our diverse Hispanic youth. In other words, NHU cannot afford to be “just like any other teacher training program.” Special Education, Literacy, Bilingual or Dual Immersion are all aspects in Education that NHU can work on for bringing more students to specialized areas.

**Early Childhood Education: (ECE):** NHU is well positioned to offer certificates in ECE but we must insure that our curriculum and teaching strategies are truly stellar. There is some talk of planning the building of a Child Care Center that can serve as a laboratory or demonstration school. This entire area of Child hood offers a plethora of career opportunities in the future. This is especially true for professional who are bilingual and bicultural. NHU should be prepared to lead in this field. Student enrollment in this area will be plentiful and long lasting if we build a program that is well respected.
Expanding current program offerings:

- **Liberal Studies:** At present, our program in liberal studies is only geared toward the teacher credential program. If we are to recruit transfers from community colleges, we must have an expanded view of where liberal studies can lead.

- **Social Studies:** In the long term, NHU will have to plan out curriculum in the social sciences that goes beyond the introductory courses offered under General Education.

- **Business:** We need to define out niche in the Business program. We believe that International business may be a strong area with NAFTA in place. In addition, we can combine our business offering with offering Spanish language proficiency training and thus prepare business leaders for Mexico and Latin American trade.

- **Computer Science:** We are in the midst of reorganizing that Math, Science and Computer Science are all within one department. Given our Silicon Valley home, we must develop a particularly strong niche in training our students for technology in our community; our students need concentrated attention to gain mastery in this area. Because we seek to attract more donors from Silicon Valley, we must pay attention to hiring a highly skilled faculty director who will run with this opportunity.

**Study in Mexico:** NHU is fortunate to have a solid relationship with the Tecnológico de Monterrey-Mexico. We believe that we could attract more community college students if we develop strength in offering Spanish and first or second semester in Mexico as a part of the NHU curriculum. The goal would be to graduate students who will be proficient with a proficiency in Spanish. Many of our own undergraduates would also have the opportunity to study in Monterrey for a semester and this collaborating can be viewed as a unique NHU curricular offering. There is no other college in California that stresses bilingual proficiency—perhaps even as a requirement for graduation.