



**ACCREDITING
COMMISSION
for COMMUNITY and
JUNIOR COLLEGES**

*Western Association
of Schools and Colleges*

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June 30, 2015

To: Chief Executive Officers, Accreditation Liaison Officers,
Chief Instructional Officers, Academic Senate Presidents,
and Other Interested Parties

From: Barbara A. Beno, Ph.D. *Barbara A. Beno*

Subject: Changes to Commission Accreditation Practices

As part of its review of Accreditation Standards, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) also undertook a review of its policies and practices. As you are aware, the review of Standards resulted in the Commission's adoption of the new Accreditation Standards in June 2014.

Over the past year, the ACCJC examined its accreditation practices using input received from the field and Commissioners. It also sought to align its practice with the new Accreditation Standards.

Attached you will find an article entitled, "Accreditation: New Standards, New Practices", which describes the adopted changes to practice that were articulated at the ACCJC Symposium in April, and finalized with adoption of some new policy language at the Commission's June meeting.

This article also appears in the forthcoming spring/summer 2015 *ACCJC News* (forthcoming). I urge you to read the *ACCJC News* for more information about accreditation in our region. It will be posted to the website later this week.

Thank you and best wishes for a relaxing summer.

BAB/cms

Attachment

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES, Western Association of Schools and Colleges

ACCREDITATION: NEW STANDARDS, NEW PRACTICES

IN NOVEMBER 2011, THE ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) began a formal process for evaluating its Accreditation Standards and practices, and sought input from colleges, constituency groups and the public. Hundreds of individuals contributed their thoughts to the changes they wanted to see in Standards and practices in writing, online, and at several public hearings and constituency group meetings that ACCJC held.

The input asked for the following changes:

- ◆ Eliminate redundancies in the Standards and simplify them where possible
- ◆ Provide a longer accreditation cycle
- ◆ Better balance between the examination of compliance with Standards and support for institutional quality and improvement
- ◆ Give institutions more time to make needed changes after a finding of noncompliance
- ◆ Provide more training on accreditation practices and requirements, and more sharing of good practices in the region

Colleges asked the Commission to *reduce redundancies in and to simplify the Standards where possible.*

In June 2014, the Commission adopted revised Accreditation Standards and Eligibility Requirements that simplified and clarified the Standards, and reduced redundancies between Standards where possible. There are now 30% fewer Standards. The ACCJC also linked Eligibility Requirements to specific standards so that a self evaluation report submitted for reaffirmation of accreditation will be shorter and simpler.

Since then, ACCJC has adopted additional new practices and policies that will complete its response to the input received.

New Practices

Colleges requested a *longer accreditation cycle.* The Commission responded. When colleges are reviewed under the 2014 Accreditation Standards, their comprehensive evaluation cycle will be moved from six to seven years. Colleges will be asked to submit the Midterm Report at the middle of the cycle, in year 4.

Colleges have asked ACCJC to *better balance the examination of compliance with standards with greater support for institutional quality and improvement.* ACCJC will be doing this in a number of ways.

The Institutional Self Evaluation Report prepared at the time of a comprehensive review will change to include a Quality Focus Essay that stems from issues identified in the institutional self evaluation. The Essay will be a description of two or three projects that an institution wishes to work on over a few years and that are designed to improve student outcomes and success. The external evaluation team and the Commission will provide feedback on the proposed projects. Intended to be a “space” for experimentation and innovation, the projects should help the institution move its self-identified agenda for improvement forward. Colleges will be asked to report on their progress or outcomes at the time of their Midterm Report, and this will comprise a significant part of the Report. The Commission will also share, or ask institutions to share, project successes through the ACCJC NEWS and at the new ACCJC annual conference (more on that below).

The Midterm Report will change significantly to focus on institutional quality and improvement, and to provide a data foundation for the next comprehensive evaluation visit. In addition to a report on the projects the institution identified in its Quality Focus Essay, ACCJC will ask institutions to report longitudinal data on students and student outcomes for the four years prior to the Midterm Report (this data is the same asked for in ACCJC annual reports). Colleges will be asked to write about their analysis and interpretation of those data trends, and their implications for college practice. These same data, analyzed for seven years, will form the foundation for data presentations in the next comprehensive Institutional Self Evaluation Report. Commission feedback on the Midterm Report will be designed to support institutional inquiry and self-improvement. ACCJC will provide templates and instructions for this annual report data, but institutions will be encouraged to add data elements that support their work on the quality improvement projects as well.

Colleges asked ACCJC to *provide more time for institutions to work to correct deficiencies before the next evaluation visit.*

Continuing a change made in 2014, ACCJC evaluation team reports and action letters will separate team recommendations to meet the Standards from those to help the institution improve. Team evaluation reports will state more simply whether Standards are met or not. Institutions will be required to come into compliance with all Standards before the Midterm Report in year 4, but may continue working on recommendations to improve throughout the seven-year cycle.

In June 2014, the Commission adopted new language for its “Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions”, which now uses definitions of the meaning of sanctions – Warning, Probation, Show Cause, and Withdrawal of Accreditation – common to all regional accrediting commissions. In that same policy, the Commission also added a new action, “reaffirmation for one year”, which gives the Commission the option of awarding a limited term for accreditation, in lieu of issuing a Sanction, while an institution corrects deficiencies.

Colleges asked ACCJC to *provide more training for colleges on the requirements of accreditation, and the process of preparing for accreditation visits.* ACCJC has made several changes to respond to this request:

- ❖ ACCJC held a region-wide Symposium on the new Standards and practices in April 2015. The Symposium was sold out. Given the strong interest, ACCJC will hold additional, smaller trainings in the 2015-16 academic year at some of the other professional conferences being held in the region.
- ❖ ACCJC held its first CEO Forum providing for CEO dialog with the Commission’s leadership and among CEOs about ideas and concerns about accreditation. The Forum will become an annual event.
- ❖ ACCJC established the CEOForum@accjc.org email address through which the ACCJC and CEOs can readily correspond about accreditation issues.
- ❖ ACCJC has committed to holding an annual conference giving member institutions opportunity to exchange information about good practices and to support a broader opportunity for college members and all of their constituencies to learn about accreditation.

The first annual conference is planned for October 2016, and an Advisory Task Force is already providing guidance on content. Planned sessions include:

- ❖ “Developing an Effective Self Evaluation Report” for institutions one year out from a comprehensive evaluation visit.
- ❖ “What Happens After the Evaluation Visit” session for institutions to share strategies they have used to move institutions forward.
- ❖ “Introduction to Team Training” workshop that will be available to prospective team members *and open to all others wishing to learn about how teams operate.*
- ❖ Plenary speakers on higher education quality.

- ❖ Discussion panels and presentations sharing institutional practices that lead to quality and student success.
- ❖ Sessions and conference tracks for constituency groups and groups such as trustees, persons new to accreditation practices, and institutions seeking assistance after an evaluation visit.

The ACCJC practices its philosophy of continuous quality improvement. It continues to welcome the suggestions of member institutions and constituency groups for improvements to accreditation practice. Quality assurance is the shared responsibility of institutions and the accreditor. ACCJC hopes through its own practices to support improved higher education practice in the Western Region, and is committed to working with member institutions in their work to improve student success. ♦