

Successful Recognition Review for ACCJC

December 13, 2013

Novato, California

The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), reviews accreditors and advises the U.S. Secretary of Education on the recognition of accrediting organizations. Every five years, accrediting agencies are required to demonstrate compliance with 93 criteria to remain fully recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE).

Today, NACIQI voted to renew the recognition of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) and ask for a compliance report in one year. NACIQI also voted to grant a change of scope to allow ACCJC to accredit, through its substantive change process, a first baccalaureate degree offered by any member institution, and asked ACCJC to provide its new standards incorporating criteria for baccalaureate education once approved so that scope may be considered for expansion. The ACCJC is asked to submit the new standards language pertaining to baccalaureate programs with its compliance report. ACCJC believes it can easily address the issues cited in the NACIQI decision and will do so expeditiously.

The ACCJC was asked to submit a report demonstrating compliance with a few remaining items in one year. The USDE criteria for recognition have become more demanding in recent years following the 2008 Higher Education Opportunities Act. The one-year compliance report is relatively routine, and in recent years NACIQI has required a one-year compliance report of the vast majority of accreditors and of all regional accreditors.

The ACCJC was asked to follow up on fifteen largely technical issues. Four of these involve placing the baccalaureate degree criteria into the new ACCJC standards that are planned for adoption in June 2014. Nine of the items require ACCJC to submit additional documentation of its practices or implementation of its new policies.

Only three items remain from the complaint filed by the California Federation of Teachers (CFT): One requires the ACCJC to slightly change its definition of academic personnel to exclude persons who are not faculty and not directly involved in instruction, such as student services administrators, from its list of academics for purposes of team service, although they may still serve as administrators on teams. A second change requires ACCJC to provide copies of evaluation team reports and action letters demonstrating the ACCJC's new way of listing recommendations, and information about deficiencies for institutions. The third change requires ACCJC to demonstrate that it adheres to the "two-year rule", which is a requirement that the accreditor take action to withdraw accreditation of an institution that does not come into compliance within two years or provide "good cause" for extension.

The USDE report and NACIQI decision dismiss many of the issues about which CFT complained as in opposition to federal regulations, as lacking evidence, or as outside the scope of federal regulations or the recognition process.

NACIQI discussed the evidence of broad acceptance of ACCJC's standards, policies, procedures and actions demonstrated by the letters of support sent by member institutions, state systems, the American Council on Education and other regional accreditors, and found it to be compelling. What remains is for ACCJC to submit documentation of the participation of educators on its teams and in its workshops, information that ACCJC sent in but that the USDE's data portal, due to a glitch, did not register or retain.

The NACIQI recommendation to renew ACCJC's recognition will become final upon the action of a "senior official" in the U.S. Department of Education, required to be completed within 90 days.

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