ACCJC Letter

TO: US Department of Education or NACIQI

I am writing on behalf of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) regarding our experience with the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). Our organizations have an extensive history, and we hope that the information we provide will be useful to you in your deliberations concerning ACCJC’s request for recognition by the USDE. The ASCCC represents the 56,000 faculty in the California Community College system in all academic and professional matters.

The ASCCC has partnered with the ACCJC on a number of occasions in the past. ACCJC representatives have presented at numerous of our events, including ASCCC accreditation institutes, plenary sessions, and other venues, most recently in spring of 2016. Our membership has greatly appreciated these interactions, as they have given faculty direct access to ACCJC commissioners and staff. This sharing of information and viewpoints in a collegial setting has been a positive aspect of the relationship between our organizations.

However, the ASCCC has also experienced numerous frustrations and concerns regarding ACCJC, many of which have been reflected in resolutions regarding accreditation processes approved by the delegates to our bi-annual statewide plenary sessions. These resolutions represent the voice of faculty representatives from all 113 California community colleges. A sample of the concerns raised by resolutions during the past few years is as follows:

* Resolution 2.02 Spring 2015: Failure of ACCJC to provide evidence of deficiencies when sanctions are imposed on institutions.
* Resolution 2.01 Fall 2014: Unclear and intrusive language in ACCJC Standard III A.6 regarding the use of student learning outcomes data in employee evaluations.
* Resolution 2.02 Fall 2014: ACCJC’s lack of transparency regarding commission decisions that conflict with evaluation visiting team reports.
* Resolution 2.03 Fall 2014: Insufficient faculty representation on ACCJC evaluation visiting teams.
* Resolution 2.03 Fall 2013: Changes to ACCJC processes and requirements without sufficient notice to member institutions.
* Resolution 2.10 Fall 2013: Lack of consistency in the expectations of evaluation visiting team members and need for improved team member training.

These resolutions represent only a few of the concerns that have been raised regarding ACCJC processes and decisions by faculty of the California community colleges.

More recent issues have also arisen with ACCJC during the 2015-16 academic year. One such issue is the number of colleges that have seen their accreditation reaffirmed for only eighteen months rather than a full accreditation cycle. The ASCCC understands that ACCJC’s intent with this new practice may be to warn colleges and allow them to address deficiencies without being placed on formal sanction, which is a laudable objective. However, the June 2016 report of ACCJC actions lists ten institutions granted eighteen month reaccreditation, the same number granted such a status in the January 2016 report. Thus, in the space of less than one year, nearly 18% of institutions in the California Community College system (20 out of 113) were assigned an abbreviated reaccreditation status. While the concept of providing a period for improvement rather than official sanction is in itself positive, in practice this new, abbreviated reaffirmation is being overused and appears to be on its way to becoming the new expectation in place of full re-accreditation.

Other recent concerns have involved ACCJC’s standards for the California Community College system’s newly created baccalaureate degrees. After the community colleges had worked diligently and collegially to establish standards for these new degrees that would ensure admirable academic quality, integrity, and rigor, the ACCJC imposed standards that not only exceed those developed by the community college system but were in fact more rigid and intrusive than similar standards from any other accrediting body in the United States. ACCJC ignored protests that these new standards would unfairly and unnecessarily inhibit the development of the new programs and the hiring of faculty to teach in them. Instead, ACCJC simply stated, with no offer of evidence or confirmation, that these new standards that go beyond those of any other accreditor were dictated by the USDE. This situation remains very problematic for the colleges that are attempting to develop the new baccalaureate degrees and provides an example of the lack of collegiality and collaboration that we have too often experienced from ACCJC.

For reasons such as these, ASCCC Resolution 2.02 in Fall 2015 endorsed the report of the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Task Force on Accreditation, which stated, “The structure of accreditation in this region no longer meets the current and anticipated needs of the California Community Colleges” and “The California Community College system and its member institutions have lost confidence in the ACCJC.” The report called for “a new model for accreditation” that would involve ending the California community colleges’ relationship with ACCJC by moving to the WASC Senior College and University Commission or another regional accreditor. No new developments have occurred since that passing of this resolution that would change our organization’s position, and thus the ASCCC’s view that our institutions could be better served by another accreditor remains.

We hope that this information is useful to you in your deliberations concerning ACCJC’s request for recognition. We thank you for your time and attention to this letter, and we would be happy to provide further comment or information at any time.

Sincerely,

Julie Bruno

President, Academic Senate for California Community Colleges.