**Academic Senate for California Community Colleges Addresses ACCJC Issues**

At its **Fall 2013** Plenary Session the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) approved a number of resolutions related to the ACCJC. The delegates from the community colleges in California made clear their interest in changing the current behavior of the Commission.

**Role of Academic Senate**

First the Senate made clear what they felt the role of the ASCCC and local senates with regard to accreditation should be. The addressed their role in working with the ACCJC and local college faculty. To that end they approved the following statement:

“*The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) values the peer review process of self-reflection and improvement known as accreditation. Since local academic senates have Title 5-mandated roles within the accreditation process, the ASCCC sees its* ***primary responsibility as helping colleges*** *to meet the adopted standards for which they will be held accountable and to generate comprehensive and forthright assessments of progress toward the standards. The ASCCC's main tool for supporting colleges is the annual Accreditation Institute, through which faculty and other colleagues are encouraged to learn about and address the standards and recommendations from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. Additionally, the Academic Senate shares accreditation information and provides support through local college visits and regional presentations.”*

*“As a professional matter,* ***in support of the ideal of a fair and meaningful accreditation process****, the ASCCC's secondary responsibility is to* ***recommend and advocate for improvements to the accreditation standards and processes by providing thoughtful feedback and input to all accreditation participants***.”

In short, the ASCCC expects to take a strong role in the consideration of changes to the standards and processes of the ACCJC.

**Faculty Participation**

A second resolution noted that the ACCJC **has not paid attention to its’ expressed** *“concerns regarding faculty participation and representation on the Commission's committees and on on-site evaluation teams through a variety of means, including resolutions passed by the body, concerns expressed to the California Community College Chancellor’s Office, and the Board of Governors, and letters sent by the Academic Senate to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE).*”

**Transparent Operation**

The Plenary supported a resolution that noted areas where lack of transparency exist in the ACCJC process. The approved resolve called "*on the ACCJC to implement a policy of transparency in its* ***proceedings and decision making*** *which includes the* ***opportunity for the public to discuss proposed sanctions before they are voted on and publishing visiting team recommendations for sanctions and minutes of ACCJC meetings including a tally record of votes taken*."**

In addition, the delegates approved the following Resolve: “*That the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges urge the ACCJC to model and exemplify for its member institutions* ***effective and transparent self-evaluation practices*** *by acknowledging and* ***addressing any areas of non-compliance*** *identified in evaluations by the USDE’s Accreditation Group and the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Improvement (NACIQI), and to document and* ***make public*** *what steps it will take to address any areas of non-compliance*.”

**Time Line for Rule Changes**

The Academic Senate also expressed its concern with rule changes made without their input and with a time line that was difficult to satisfy: “*Resolved, That the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges formally request that the ACCJC provide member institutions opportunities for* ***meaningful input*** *to the ACCJC about any proposed changes to the required annual reports, and that any adopted changes by ACCJC to annual reports be published* ***at least one year in advance of the effective date of implementation*** *of the required annual reports*.”

**Use of the Word “Recommendation**”

Another issue discussed was the requirement to make changes to satisfy “recommendations” of the Commission within two years. They noted in a resolution that “*The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) currently uses the term "recommendation" in* ***two senses*** *when communicating the Commission's actions, namely, "to meet the standard" or "to improve institutional effectiveness," and thus it is unclear which of the "recommendations" issued to member institutions by the ACCJC fall under the Two-Year Rule*.” The resolution added that “*ACCJC's use of the term ‘recommendation’ in* ***two different ways concerned the Accreditation Group of the United States Department of Education*** *enough for it to note in its memo to the ACCJC dated August 13, 20132 that ‘what is not clear is* ***how the recommendations are differentiated*** *between the two types and how an institution, an evaluation team, the Commission, or the public is to* ***know the difference*’**”

This is one of the issues that arose over the ACCJC decision to decertify CCSF.

The resolution concluded with a resolve that “*the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges formally request that the ACCJC adopt and employ* ***two consistent terms****: One, such as ‘****action required****’ for those ACCJC findings of non-compliance that must be addressed under the Two-Year Rule, and a second term such as ‘****recommendation****’ used exclusively for Commission suggestions that the institution may implement at its discretion*.”

Had this distinction been made years ago we may have experienced fewer sanctions by the ACCJC on the community colleges of California.

**Training and Composition of Visiting Teams**

The Senate passed a resolution regarding **improvement in training and inter-rater reliability** of Visiting Teams. The resolution noted that “*visiting teams that visit institutions completing self-evaluations* ***vary widely in composition and background****, resulting in recommendations often more focused on team members' areas of expertise than a balanced evaluation of all standards;*” *“ACCJC standards tend to be* ***subjective, vague and open to interpretation*** *allowing for inconsistencies from one visiting team to another;*” and “*ACCJC does* ***not appear to evaluate its own processes*** *to determine if standards are being applied fairly and consistently across institutions*.” The resolution went on to “*urge the ACCJC to include training to promote inter-rater reliability in and among visiting teams sent to institutions under review*;” and

“*urge that ACCJC conduct evaluations to determine if standards are being consistently applied across institutions and that their findings be reported to all colleges*.”

**CCSF Accreditation**

Another resolution that was approved by the body involved the removal of accreditation of CCSF by July 1, 2014. Noting that the disaccreditation *“is being contested legally by at least three pending lawsuits, an unprecedented situation which has never been faced by colleges on accreditation sanction*” and the difficulty implementing changes in this atmosphere, the ASCCC called on the ACCJC to “***extend the deadline by one year*** *for CCSF to meet accreditation compliance based on CCSF's ongoing efforts to meet the accreditation standards*.” There was much discussion and agreement regarding the various violations that the ACCJC has made in the accreditation process as well as the unusual number of sanctions levied but the body was unwilling to put those into the resolutions themselves for fear of complications that might develop in the working relationships between the ACCJC and the Senate - both statewide and locally.

**Draft of Proposed Changes in Standards**

A number of resolutions involved a draft of new proposed accreditation standards that were revealed by representatives from the ACCJC at lunch meeting. Delegates were surprised at some of the changes that were not made clear by the presenters from ACCJC. One resolution was in response to the proposed movement toward “adopting standards with **less focus on the diversity and equity.”** This concern included the fact that the draft removes the language from Standard II.A.1.a. that states “*The institution identifies and seeks to meet the varied educational needs of its students through programs consistent with their educational preparation and the diversity, demographics, and economy of its communities*.” It makes this removal “without replacement.”

The draft also removes language from Standard II.B ( “*The institution recruits and admits diverse students who are able to benefit from its programs, consistent with its mission*”) without replacement as well as language from Standard II.B.3.d *(The institution designs and maintains appropriate programs, practices, and services that support and enhance student understanding and appreciation of diversity)*.”

As a consequence the Senate passed a resolution “**Affirming Support for Diversity and Equity in Accreditation Standards**.”

“*Resolved, That Academic Senate for California Community Colleges strongly urge the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges to* ***retain requirements in the standards for colleges to actualize the principles of student equity and foster respect for diversity including a standard that institutions recruit and admit diverse students who are able to benefit from their programs, consistent with their mission****; and*

*Resolved, That Academic Senate for California Community Colleges strongly urge ACCJC to include a standard that institutions* ***demonstrate commitment to hiring and maintaining personnel of diverse backgrounds,*** *recognizing the significant educational role such diversity plays in the education of all students.*”

**Libraries and Learning Support Services**

Another area of concern in the draft of proposed changes had to do with Libraries and Learning Support Services. The new standards were drafted “*to replace the 2001 Standards* ***without incorporating proposals given to the Commission from the Council of Chief Librarians****, a group that represents librarians in the California Community Colleges, to strengthen the coordination of student learning among librarians, learning support staff, and discipline faculty*.”

“*The ACCJC draft Standards* ***weaken, to the detriment of student learning****, the criteria used in the 2002 Standards in regard to information competency and access to library materials and services regardless of location or means of delivery” and “eliminate all reference to institutions ‘providing personnel responsible for student learning programs’ and eliminate the current Substandard II.C.2 entitled ‘Library and Learning Support Services’ and places the standards now in that section under Standard IIB (Student Services)*.”

The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges then resolved to *“advocate for the concerns of library faculty and advocates for reconsideration of the draft Standards by the ACCJC at the January 2014 meeting of the ACCJC.*”

**Part-Time Faculty**

Noting that California Education Code §87482.8(d) states that *“Part-time faculty should be considered to be an integral part of their departments and given all the rights normally afforded to full-time faculty in the areas of book selection, participation in department activities, and the use of college resources, including but not necessarily limited to telephones, copy machines, supplies, office space, mail boxes, clerical staff, library, and professional development.*”

The Academic Senate for California Community recommended “*that the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges add to II.A.8 or another appropriate location in the accreditation standards, language that reflects the expectation that colleges will provide equitable access to college infrastructure and resources to all faculty members so that the teaching mission of the college may be more effectively attained.*”