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Memo to: Commission

From: Sharon Whitehurst-Payne, Chair
ACCJC Evaluation and Planning Committee

Subject: Report on Review of Accreditation Standards and Processes

The Evaluation and Planning Committee has been charged with organizing the Commission's process for review of accreditation standards and processes. The Committee met on July 13, 2011, October 21, 2011 and January 9, 2012. This report provides information about the steps taken to date to organize, plan and begin the review process. Every six years, the Commission undertakes a significant review of its accreditation standards and processes. Previous reviews were conducted in 1993-4, 1999-2001, and 2007-8.

The Committee has decided that the federal regulatory environment and national discussions of restructuring accreditation and/or higher education warrant a review of Accreditation Standards that heavily emphasizes the concerns raised in those discussions. The Commission asked Dr. Peter Ewell to craft a background document that might assist in synthesizing these many national and federal discussions, and Dr. Ewell provided the paper entitled "The New "Ecology" for Higher Education: Challenges to Community College Accreditation", which was published in the ACCJC's fall edition of *Accreditation News*.

In addition, the Committee considered reports and draft reports by National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Improvement (NACIQI), the American Council on Education (ACE); the National Institute for Learning Outcomes and Assessment (NILOA), the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Voluntary Framework of Accountability, and some IPEDS reports provided to institutions.

To date, the Committee has discussed the following issues that *it wishes to consider* in its review of Accreditation Standards and processes.

- Accountability issues as discussed nationally
- Working to improve focus on outcomes, and institutional improvement of outcomes
- Focus on certification of student learning through presentation of outcome data
- Focus on student equity issues by requiring institutions to disaggregate data used in institutional self evaluation activities

- Potential use of IPEDS data or in the longer term, (new proposed) U.S. Department of Education data definitions and methodologies for calculating important metrics, and reporting same to the ACCJC and the public
- In the short term, verification of the metrics used by institutions currently to satisfy gainful employment reporting requirements and to report student success to the ACCJC
- More transparency of college quality to the public
- More transparency on the accreditation process to the public

The Committee recognized that the Accreditation Standards deserve careful review with specific attention to the following ideas:

- Remove unnecessary repetitiveness;
- Improve clarity of language, with possible additional specificity required for some areas such as financial management standards;
- Incorporate greater emphasis on newer pedagogies and delivery modes in the redesign of Accreditation Standards and review processes;
- Better use of electronic evidence files, including a possible review of some evidence in advance of a comprehensive evaluation team visit;
- Revise the “outline” structure of the Accreditation Standards to better align the more important elements;
- Revise the notations within Standards that reference related Policies and federal regulations
- Establish data templates for institutional reporting; setting minimum data requirements for all institutions
- Examine the degree to which institutions achieve or meet mission through student outcomes
- Better define the specific criteria for judgments about quality
- Focus on the present and *future* needs of institutions, students and the public
- Address general education/civic education needs of states and national governments

The Committee issued a brief survey to all current and former Commissioners and Staff asking three main questions: What content of the current Accreditation Standards needs to be change? What structure or organization of the current Accreditation Standards needs to be changed? What changes are recommended to the accreditation review processes? **Eight individuals responded** to this survey, including only two current commissioners, several current and former staff, and one former commissioner.

The Commission announced the beginning of its process for review in the summer 2011 edition of the ACCJC newsletter, *Accreditation News*. Peter Ewell’s paper was published in the fall edition.

The Commission Chair, Michael Rota, drafted a letter that was sent to all institutional CEOs (in keeping with ACCJC policy of communicating to/through the CEOs of member institutions) on November 9, 2011. It announced the Commission’s review of Accreditation Standards and Processes, and identified some of the major issues that will

be included in the review. The letter asked for institutional ideas about **key issues** that should be included in the review. The Commission received **one institutional response**.

The Committee has decided that the Review of Accreditation Standards and Processes should be Commission-driven in order to maintain the focus on the national and federal discussions and debates. It created a Steering Committee composed of the members of the Evaluation and Planning Committee and two additional Commissioners. Staff members assigned to the project include Dr. John Nixon, Vice President Krista Johns, and President Barbara Beno. The Steering Committee includes Michael Rota (Hawaii system representative), Sharon Whitehurst Payne (public member), Susan Murata (faculty representative), Charles Meng (public member), Marie Smith (public member), John Zimmerman (private, independent college representative), Eleanor Siebert (ACSCU representative), and Frank Gornick (administrative representative). The Steering Committee will serve as the editorial board of new standards language.

Input from member institutions will be sought through surveys, through public hearings, and through participation in specific work groups and task forces created to address key issues. You will see some of these elements on the timeline chart.

Finally, the Committee has created a **draft Timeline for Review of Accreditation Standards and Processes**, which lists the activities that will be part of the Review of Accreditation Standards and Processes. You'll see on the chart some of the upcoming events designed to get input from the field. There will be a public hearing for southern California institutions at the March 2012 Commissioner Development Workshop, a public hearing for northern California institutions held at the June 2012 Commission meeting, and a public hearing for Hawaiian/Pacific institutions held in September, to be scheduled in conjunction with training events. These hearings will ask member institutions for their input on the needs for change in the Standards or processes of accreditation. There will, of course, be a second set of broad hearings on the draft versions of the standards, currently scheduled for spring 2014, before they are finalized in June 2014.

There are several task forces listed on the Timeline; these will consist of experts from member institutions. Some have already met, others will be formed and begin meeting in the next six months. Commission staff will also make presentations on the review process and seek feedback from the many affiliation groups that the Commission meets with, including CEOs, other administrative groups, and faculty groups.

This concludes the Report of the Evaluation and Planning Committee. Your comments are welcome.

SP/bb