

# Effective Practices in Accreditation

A GUIDE TO SUPPORT COLLEGES IN THE ACCREDITATION  
CYCLE

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<b>I. Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II. Justification for the Paper .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Resolution 2.01 Accreditation Effective Practices Paper .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>III. History of Peer-Review .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Other Countries and Accreditation Processes.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Historical Changes to the Standards.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Applying for Accreditation and Eligibility Requirements.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Effective Practices for College Processes .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>IV. Faculty Involvement .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Which Faculty Should Be Involved? .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The College Accreditation Committee and Faculty.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The College’s Accreditation Standing Committee and Faculty Leadership .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The Role of Senate Committees in Accreditation Oversight.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The Importance of Training and Communication .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Campus-Wide Dialog .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Planning Ahead.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>V. Accreditation is a Continuous, Ongoing Process .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Ongoing Responsibilities of a Standing Committee.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Systematic Planning and Evaluation and Longitudinal Evidence .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Addendums .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>VI. Sending Faculty on a Peer Evaluation Teams .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Benefits of Being on a Peer Evaluation Team .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Time Commitment.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Who Should Apply To Be on a Peer Evaluation Team?.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>VII. Using ACCJC Guides .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b><i>The Accreditation Reference Handbook.....</i></b>	<b>14</b>
<b><i>Guide to Evaluating Institutions .....</i></b>	<b>14</b>
<b><i>Manual for Institutional Self Evaluation.....</i></b>	<b>14</b>
<b><i>Guide to Accreditation for Governing Boards.....</i></b>	<b>14</b>
<b><i>Guide to Evaluating Distance Education and Correspondence Education .....</i></b>	<b>14</b>
<b><i>Substantive Change Manual.....</i></b>	<b>15</b>
<b>VIII. Responding to the Standards.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Use the Language in the Standard as Part of Your Answer.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Make Sure That You Answer Every Part of the Standard .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Repetition Is Not Necessarily a Bad Thing.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Link to Relevant Evidence .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Write It Like It Is .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>IX. Developing a Culture of Evidence by Documenting College Processes.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Developing a Culture of Evidence .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>X. Preparing for Your Site Visit.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>After Your Visit .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>XI. Reports .....</b>	<b>19</b>

<b>Institutional Self Evaluation of Educational Quality and Institutional Effectiveness .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Mid-Term Report .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Follow-Up Report.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Special Report.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Annual Report and Annual Fiscal Report.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>XII. Distance Education and Accreditation: Things to Think About To Be Prepared..</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>XIII. The Standards .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Standard I: Mission, Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness, and Integrity.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Mission.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Institutional Integrity .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Support Services .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Instructional Programs .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Library and Learning Support Services.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Student Support Services.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Standard III: Resources .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Human Resources.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Physical Resources.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Technology Resources .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Financial Resources.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Standard IV: Leadership and Governance .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Decision Making Roles and Processes.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Chief Executive Officers.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Governing Board .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Multi-College Districts or Systems.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>XIV. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Appendices &amp; References.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Bio Data Form for ACCJC Evaluators .....</b>	<b>35</b>

\*All references in this paper to the “Accreditation Standards” refer to the Standards adopted by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) in June 2014, unless otherwise noted.

## I. Introduction

Every college works to create and implement processes that assure quality and continuous improvement to demonstrate and ensure its service to students and community. Accreditation is one avenue that ensures some uniformity across many institutions in the eyes of the public. While this paper focuses on accreditation processes and meeting the needs of accrediting commissions, it is important to remember the overarching goals of service and improvement when devising systems appropriate to each individual college.

## II. Justification for the Paper

The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges was directed to create a paper by resolution 2.01 at the spring 2012 plenary session. The resolution states:

### **Resolution 2.01 Accreditation Effective Practices Paper**

Whereas, The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges has traditionally developed and distributed papers and resources that provide guidance to local districts in meeting state developed regulations;

Whereas, The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges held its annual Accreditation Institute on February 10-11, 2012, in Anaheim, and feedback from the attendees indicated the value of the specific examples presented in the general sessions and breakouts;

Whereas, The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) participated in planning and presenting the 2012 Accreditation Institute, and the ACCJC has expressed interest in continuing to work with the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges; and

Whereas, The ACCJC staff reiterated numerous times that colleges need to develop their own processes and that the ACCJC has not historically provided specific examples of the multiple ways that colleges can document evidence in meeting the Standards, yet the collaboration with the ACCJC at the 2012 Accreditation Institute provided the opportunity to solicit multiple examples to meet accreditation compliance;

Resolved, That the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges develop resources, including a paper, on effective practices for accreditation compliance including but not limited to effective examples of the following: completion of a self evaluation, actionable improvement plans, institutional effectiveness, surviving sanctions, program review, budgeting process, and governance structures.

### III. History of Peer-Review

#### Other Countries and Accreditation Processes

There are several systems of accreditation throughout the world. Some countries provide direct oversight of quality assurance through a governmental department or ministry. Others may have a council of higher education that directly accredits colleges and universities. The United States uses a system of non-governmental agencies that respond to input from the U.S. Department of Education. Each system emphasizes that the government's role is to ensure the public interest is served.

The first regional accreditation agencies formed in this country in the 1880s with a primary purpose of ensuring minimum educational standards and admissions processes. A variety of regional accreditation agencies formed subsequently, all operating on a peer-review basis. Since that time, accreditation has evolved into a systematic peer-review process within the structures of state and federal governmental oversight. The government's role is to ensure the public interest is served through the establishment of minimum standards of quality and fairness. However, the regional organization remains with six major regional accreditors across the country.

California, Hawaii, and other Pacific colleges and universities belong to the Western region. The Western region is further divided into the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC, commonly called WASC senior), the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), and the Accrediting Commission for Schools. The ACCJC traditionally has only accredited associate degree granting institutions; however, in response to recent legislation, ACCJC has been approved to accredit colleges that grant one bachelor's degree. All other institutions of higher education that grant bachelor's degrees or higher use WASC senior. The Accrediting Commission for Schools is an agency for K-12 and non-degree granting institutions. These accrediting bodies are defined as non-governmental and voluntary, though the benefits of accreditation create a strong incentive for institutions to become and remain accredited. While these and other accrediting agencies across the country are not operated by the government, they are periodically reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education and by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) which influences the minimum standards for quality assurance.

#### Historical Changes to the Standards

The Standards, throughout their history, have been intended to define characteristics of good practice. Currently, there are four broad Standards in the ACCJC review process, but this has not always been the case. The self-evaluation report, also called a self-study, is used by colleges to examine their processes and structures against identified standards, but the standards were not established until the 1950s in the United States. The Standards arose in response to the desire to ensure institutions were uniformly providing quality education given the rapidly growing number

of new students, particularly veterans utilizing the G.I. Bill. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, the requirements that colleges must apply for reaffirmation of accreditation and that colleges must host a site-visit from regional peers became standard mechanisms, along with the self-study, in the accreditation process. In the 1980s, the focus of accrediting agencies began to shift from defining characteristics of good practice to the actual results, or outcomes, of institutional work. Programmatic review processes were also introduced as an expectation of institutions to evaluate the work of the institution.

In the 1990s, an emphasis on student learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness became a focus in the accreditation process. This was introduced in 1996 to the community colleges in the Western region through ACCJC. In 2002, ACCJC reduced the number of Standards from ten to four and the idea of a *culture of evidence* was introduced. In 2014, ACCJC revised its Standards once more to, among other things, incorporate requirements for baccalaureate-degree granting institutions.

### **Applying for Accreditation and Eligibility Requirements**

All institutions must apply for accredited status in order to ensure that all policies determined by the accrediting body are met and all eligibility requirements are addressed in an ongoing manner. A similar process of self-evaluation, including a site visit by an accrediting team, is required during the application period. As part of every Institutional Self Evaluation process and external Educational Quality and Institutional Effectiveness Review, the ACCJC monitors to ensure continuous compliance with all 21 of the Eligibility Requirements is occurring. These requirements touch on fundamental and comprehensive aspects of your college, such as financial viability, governance structures, and educational quality and equity specifically focusing on student learning outcomes as and student achievement outcomes as metrics.

### **Effective Practices for College Processes**

There is no single way by which colleges meet accreditation Standards. The Standards reflect the minimum requirements expected of institutions and each institution must find its own way to best serve the needs of the community and uphold the standards of educational quality. This paper outlines some effective practices that colleges should consider and regularly review, both in terms of processes and topics as well as in terms of the most recent ACCJC Standards adopted in 2014.

## **IV. Faculty Involvement**

The Accreditation Standards begin with the message, “The primary purpose of an ACCJC-accredited institution is to foster student learning and student achievement.” This is, obviously, impossible without faculty involvement. Similarly, the accreditation processes, from the self-

evaluation to the site visit to the continuing responses to ACCJC recommendations, are impossible to measure without significant, continuous faculty involvement.

### **Which Faculty Should Be Involved?**

In short, all faculty should be involved in the accreditation effort. The effort should involve full-time and part-time faculty; instructional and non-instructional faculty; counseling faculty; career technical education faculty; recently retired faculty; faculty from all areas of campus; and involvement should be continuous across each accreditation cycle. Some faculty will act as writers or editors of the self-evaluation. Others may provide input into particular areas that must be addressed (such as curriculum or distance education issues). Some faculty will co-chair committees. Finally, all faculty should review each self-evaluation to ensure that it is consistent with the college's mission and provides an honest and clear picture of the college.

The most visible sign of faculty involvement in accreditation is within the committee structures a college adopts particularly in regards to a college's accreditation or institutional effectiveness efforts. On most campuses, these committees function as ad-hoc or standing committees, but, in either case, these committees should be charged with developing the self-evaluation, preparing for the site visit, and then working to address any recommendations that emerge from the process.

### **The College Accreditation Committee and Faculty**

Many colleges do this continuous work through a standing Accreditation Committee. Ideally, a single accreditation committee is an ongoing committee or a standing committee of a college's shared planning committee and provides continuity from one accreditation cycle to the next. Accreditation committees that meet regularly throughout the 6 year cycle can be charged with monitoring compliance with the Standards, ensuring that recommendations are completed in the two year required window, addressing Department of Education compliance requirements and collecting evidence. Standing committees can also provide an opportunity for dialogue from all constituent groups on Accreditation topics including creating useful evidence, faculty participation in Standard writing, using SLO's data to improve student success, linking assessment to resource allocation, linking planning to the college mission, institutional effectiveness and using program review quantitative and qualitative data analysis for program and college improvement.

It is faculty, more than any other group, which should provide continuity and institutional memory in a committee like this. After all, administrators will often come and go from one accreditation cycle to the next, but most tenured and tenure-track faculty will remain. Therefore, it is imperative that the accreditation committee includes a significant faculty presence.

At many schools, the accreditation committee has a faculty chair or co-chair, a position that often includes some release time. A faculty chair, working with the local senate president, should ensure that a significant number of faculty from across the campus participate in the committee's activities alongside administrators, staff, and students.

The accreditation committee should not act alone or in vacuum. The entire committee structure should have a hand in the accreditation process, beginning with the Academic Senate. The senate should receive regular reports from the accreditation chair and accreditation liaison officer (ALO). Further, the senate should provide oversight over any documents produced for accreditation and accreditation-related purposes—not just the self-evaluation but the annual reports, midterm reports, program reviews, substantive change reports, and other educational plans.

Faculty involvement in a college accreditation committee also promotes communication. The local Academic Senate, as well as other college shared-governance committees, should include the review and progress of any action plans that are included in a self-evaluation report in monthly meetings to keep faculty engaged in the process. Frequent updates allow for more faculty inclusion and involvement in the process and mitigates the loss of engagement that occurs as other faculty duties become priorities throughout the academic year. The local senate has the responsibility to appoint faculty to a standing accreditation committee which keeps faculty leadership connected to the process and gives an opportunity for any faculty member to be involved.

### **The College's Accreditation Standing Committee and Faculty Leadership**

Faculty involvement in an accreditation standing committee is key. As “faculty roles and involvement in accreditation processes, including self-study and annual reports” is a designated 10+ 1 function, it is recommended that there be a faculty chair or co-chair for any standing Accreditation committee. The local senate should be involved in selecting a co-chair who will work as a liaison between the committee, the local Academic Senate, and the faculty at large. It is also recommended that faculty have a strong voice on the committee and that local senates have specific appointed faculty on any standing accreditation committee. The faculty co-chair(s) would work in consultation with the administrative co-chair(s) and other co-chairs to outline the needs, procedures, and timelines for the committee. The committee should remain focused on best practices for the college, rather than correcting areas where the campus is lacking in the Standards. In highlighting the procedures that are efficient, the committee will develop techniques to address areas where the Standards may not be fully met more effectively.

### **The Role of Senate Committees in Accreditation Oversight**

The senate, its standing committees, and other key committees on campus also play a role in the development and continuous monitoring of particular Standards. Local senates should review their committee structures and assign monitoring duties to their standing committees based on their purview. The student services committee, for example, should play a role in developing II.C Student Support Services. The library and learning services committee should monitor II.B. Curriculum, SLO, basic skills, distance education, and other committees that directly relate to instruction should have a hand in developing II.A (among other Standards). Other college-wide committees such as finance, facilities, and technology committees should work with the accreditation committee in the development of the Standard III sections. All of these committees should have faculty participation, and the faculty on those committees should provide regular reports on progress to the senate and the faculty as a whole. Finally, departments and divisions should provide input in any Standard that directly impacts their respective areas.

### **The Importance of Training and Communication**

Committees provide a great mechanism to ensure faculty involvement. However, not all faculty, particularly part-time faculty, participate in these committees. Therefore, training and information distribution should be a key component to ensure faculty inclusion, and regular forums should be organized and advertised to keep the college abreast of compliance with accreditation Standards. Newsletters or other updates should be regularly sent out to the whole campus with information on the Standards, the college's institutional learning outcomes, and other pertinent matters. Workshops and other trainings should be established to provide continual instruction in key accreditation-related issues like SLOs, curriculum, and distance education. For example, Southwestern College's Office of Institutional Effectiveness provides a bi-monthly newsletter highlighting various aspects of integrated planning including accreditation, student learning outcomes assessment, strategic planning, and budget development.

### **Campus-Wide Dialog**

It is important that the academic senate form a plan for when and how to more completely involve faculty in integrating discussions with student and administrative services. This dialog should include:

- Techniques shared from across the state
- College representatives to the ASCCC Accreditation Institute who could report back to their local senates and respective committees.
- Reporting structures that filter through local senates. Senate representatives appointed to governance committees would then report back.
- Cross-pollinating committee structures with the standing accreditation committee. The committee can identify and link discussions to the needs of students. For example, the

committee might ask “How does enrollment management tie to facilities?” Faculty should be informed regarding all aspects of the college.

- Discussion of the Standards by local senate leaders in meetings. They can then disseminate information to department chairs and faculty via their senate representatives, minutes, and resolutions.

## Planning Ahead

As part of the 10+1 agreement, local senates should have a formal position regarding the faculty’s role in accreditation. The role itself should be evaluated during accreditation cycle. The Senate should work to:

- Integrate accreditation questions regarding the Standards into Program Review, which will help make data easily accessible when writing a self-evaluation for the Commission.
- Collect evidence for the new cycle shortly after an action letter and/or recommendations are sent to the college, and if sanctions are imposed.
- Plan committee chair orientations to include their responsibilities for the committee as well as how they can work with accreditation in mind, including where to find supporting data.
- Assist in preparing a keyword searchable website linking divisions, committees, program reviews, and other accreditation-related materials for easy access to data, reports and documents for any administrator or faculty to access. This should include updates and timelines for the accreditation process.
- Encourage the senate president or designee to work with the strategic planning committee to ensure faculty engagement in integrated planning efforts
- Formulate clear planning cycles and communicate them to the committees, department chairs and faculty at large with the goal of the college being more systematic in its approach to accreditation.
- Assist multi-college districts to work through task forces and district committees to bring ideas together. Faculty need to be a driving force for change and be attentive when the boards are micromanaging beyond their own board policies

## V. Accreditation is a Continuous, Ongoing Process

~~Gone are the days~~ In the past, there were times when colleges could work on accreditation Standards just the year or two before a site visit and be successful in their bids for reaffirmation of accreditation. Accreditation today is an ongoing and systematic process. Colleges are expected to meet all of the accreditation Standards at all times, and colleges must continuously work on and evaluate their compliance with the Standards.

In a recent study entitled *Accreditation In the California Community Colleges: Influential Cultural Practices* presented by Dr. Nathan Tharp of Feather River College at the 2013 ASCCC Accreditation Institute, the research emphasized the importance of accreditation awareness and preparation as an ongoing, if not daily, activity to ensure reaffirmation and provide meaningful improvements to meet the institution's mission. Dr. Tharp writes, "An engaged institution can integrate the meaning behind accreditation into ongoing self-assessment processes and avoid the experience of accreditation being merely a compliance exercise" (57). Colleges should take steps to institute these processes that emphasize ongoing discussions on accreditation and faculty should be involved regularly in discussions of quality in all aspects of the Standards.

ACCJC states in their *Manual for Institutional Self Evaluation of Educational Quality and Institutional Self-Evaluation* (published in January 2015), "Accreditation should not be seen as an event that takes place every seven years where compliance with the ACCJC Accreditation Standards (Standards) and other requirements is assessed. The accreditation process provides an opportunity for the institutional leadership to take stock of the continuous improvement of the institution in cooperation with college stakeholders. Every ACCJC-accredited institution must meet the ERs, Accreditation Standards, including federal regulations, and Commission policies at all times." These pronouncements make clear ACCJC's expectation that a quality, evaluative process supporting institutional effectiveness is ongoing.

College-wide monitoring and discussion regarding accreditation need to be an ongoing process. All too often colleges focus their accreditation efforts during the two years before a campus visit. In this model, committees act more along the lines of task forces that disband, or significantly ease their responsibilities, after the site visit and following the release of the Commission's actions or recommendation letters. This approach can lead to chaos and mistrust when institutions attempt to write and address Standards under time constraints. Also, this type of structure often produces new, untested policies and procedures for the college that the faculty members struggle to implement and understand in the rush to the site visit. For more fluidity in the accreditation cycle, many colleges have instituted standing accreditation committees, through which awareness of accreditation compliance is an ongoing and constant process for a campus.

Part of this ongoing process includes the periodic review and continued implementation of any actionable improvement plans indicated in the Quality Focus Essays required by the Commission beginning with the 2014 Standards. These actions help provide both new and established faculty opportunities to collaborate and discuss the continued implementation of plans to improve and support ongoing awareness of accreditation Standards throughout the accreditation cycle and in preparation for the writing of future self-evaluation reports.

### **Ongoing Responsibilities of a Standing Committee**

On an ongoing basis, a standing accreditation committee should take responsibility for next actions that the college needs to take to remain in compliance with the Standards, implement plans for improvement, and to reflect on areas of the Standards that are well-served by current processes. In years when the college faces reaffirmation, the committee would assume responsibility for addressing any Commission recommendations and any action plans created in the process of completing the self-evaluation. Committees should have ongoing meetings to prepare for the next accreditation site visit, follow-up reports and mid-term reports, and the committee has responsibility to develop strategies and plans for addressing sanctions if needed.

Responsibilities include the following:

- Receive ongoing reports from other governance committees with purview of areas relevant to the Standards
- Review the Standards and collect evidence needed for ongoing ACCJC reporting
- Review integrated planning processes and look for overlap in order to confirm the Standards are met. For example, distance education should be discussed in more areas than the Distance Education Committee. The accreditation committee would maintain documentation of agendas, minutes, and reporting to various other committees as evidence of an ongoing, campus-wide discussion.

The faculty representatives on the committee or the committee co-chairs should report to the local senate and provide updates as actions are taken to comply with Standards or to collect evidence and documentation. As the college's landscape changes due to the addition and elimination of courses and programs, new and ongoing state initiatives, and budgetary fluctuations, ongoing committee activity in support of accreditation awareness and compliance allows for a more proactive response and can lead to better preparation as a college progresses through the accreditation cycle.

### **Systematic Planning and Evaluation and Longitudinal Evidence**

Since colleges are expected to meet accreditation Standards at all times, it is important that colleges show and support, with evidence, systematic, consistent, and wide-reaching planning and evaluation mechanisms. By the time the self-evaluation is due and the team arrives, the college should have an integrated planning cycle that has been implemented and supports student success. Also, the college planning mechanisms should have been evaluated and that evaluation has been used to improve institutional effectiveness. Colleges who have created planning documents just prior to the team visits and have not had time for evaluation and improvement do not meet many of the Standards including I.B.3, I.B.4, I.B.6, I.B.7 and I.B.9. College/District Planning should be done early in the accreditation cycle and to give time for the college to demonstrate that its process are systematically and regularly evaluated. This will create longitudinal evidence that shows that the college has continuously met the Standard. Some

colleges create a listing of all planning documents, their review cycle, and what improvements were made to show how they continuously meet the Standards.

## **Addendums**

Even when colleges submit their self-evaluations, accreditation work is not complete. Colleges can complete an addendum to the self-evaluation starting from the date the report is submitted to the Commission. Colleges can include in the addendum any additional evidence and the work they have done up to the team visit, including work on self-identified concerns by the college. This addendum can be submitted to the Commission to be shared with the Peer Evaluation Team, also called the External Evaluation Team. This is another way for colleges to show their continuous work in meeting/exceeding the Standards.

## **VI. Sending Faculty on a Peer Evaluation Teams**

### **Benefits of Being on a Peer Evaluation Team**

Faculty participation on Peer Evaluation Teams is a benefit to the accreditation process, the faculty member's college and the faculty member's own professional development. Faculty voices on accreditation teams are essential for a true peer evaluation process. Faculty who have participated on teams bring effective practices and experience in reading and assessing accreditation Standards back to their home institutions, which could help in their own accreditation compliance and improvement. For the faculty member volunteering to participate on a team, it is a great professional development opportunity and gives them an opportunity to dialogue and work with faculty and administrators from across the region.

Faculty understanding and perspectives of the process are dynamically changed through the experience of serving on a visiting team. The skills gained from the training and the participation on a visiting team are invaluable.

### **Time Commitment**

Being on a Peer Evaluation Team is a significant time commitment consisting of the following:

- One full-day peer-evaluation-team training workshop. Try to attend the workshop your group is assigned to so you can meet your team before the visit.
- Reading the institution self-evaluation, evidence, previous reports and recommendations including communications with the Chair.
- Prep work on your assigned Standard or Standards before the visit. The Standards are divided among the team either through selection or assignment.

- At least 4 full days for the site visit. Each day will begin very early and end late. The days are structured to complete requirements of the visit and to accommodate writing time. Writing time will be divided in individual and group segments.

You will start reading and working on the self-evaluation about two months before the visit. The Chair of the Peer Evaluation Team typically contacts members of the team early in the cycle to share relevant information from communication the Chair has had with the institution. The Chair typically has a pre-visit meeting with the college president to discuss areas of concern in the self-evaluation. The Chair is the primary contact with the institution and may have visited the institution prior to the team visit. You will have completed the majority of the work once the team visit is complete, including the writing. During the visit, update reports may be given to the institution for review and response, allowing the institution the opportunity to clarify or present additional evidence. Typically, after the visit you will only need to review the final report.

When you receive a letter from the Commission to be on a team, be realistic about whether you can commit to the time necessary to be on a team. There have been times when team members dropped out at the last minute. This is especially troublesome when it is one of the limited faculty members on a team.

### **Who Should Apply To Be on a Peer Evaluation Team?**

Any faculty member can apply to be on a Peer Evaluation Team by completing the Commission's Bio Data Form (Appendix A) and having it signed by their college president. ACCJC states in their *Team Evaluator Manual* (January 2015) that the Commission forms teams with individuals with "expertise and or experience in learning outcomes and resources, career technical education, distance/correspondence education, planning, research and evaluation" (4). Local senates should encourage faculty members who are Curriculum Chairs, SLO or Program Review coordinators, Distance Education coordinators, Academic Senate Presidents, Accreditation Chairs/Coordinators, Student Services and Library faculty, and CTE faculty to apply to be on a Peer Evaluation Team (Appendix A ACCJC Bio Data Form for Evaluators).

## **VII. Using ACCJC Guides**

All colleges in the California Community College system are currently accredited by the ACCJC, which provides multiple guides and handbooks to assist districts to meet the Commission's Standards and to navigate a successful accreditation cycle. With the Commission's emphasis on protocol and consistent presentation of evidence, it is in the best interest of colleges preparing to write a self-evaluation or to host a Peer Evaluation Team to be aware of these guides and use them in all steps of the process. The following is a brief explanation of several Guides and how they might be useful.

### ***The Accreditation Reference Handbook***

For institutions preparing for a self-evaluation report, also known as the Institutional Self Evaluation of Educational Quality And Institutional Effectiveness, this handbook provides the basics: the Standards, the eligibility requirements colleges must meet prior to making a formal application for accreditation and maintain after affirmation of accreditation, and the Commission's policies. This document enumerates those requirements and cross-references them to the Standards, including the statutory basis for its policies. Institutions can use this manual as an "Accreditation 101 guide" for new faculty involved in accreditation.

### ***Guide to Evaluating Institutions***

This guide is essential for an institution preparing to write its Institutional Self Evaluation of Educational Quality and Institutional Effectiveness report. This Guide contains questions for each component of the Standards that promote discussion at a college regarding how well its processes and execution of those processes support the institution's ability to meet the Standard. These questions are often asked by visiting team members during a site visit, and the guide provides examples of evidence that would be helpful to prove a college meets a Standard. Institutions can use this guide and its questions to spur discussion in its committees working on the self-evaluation and to gather information for writing the self-evaluation.

### ***Manual for Institutional Self Evaluation***

Organizing the Institutional Self Evaluation of Educational Quality and Institutional Effectiveness report is a daunting task for any college. This manual suggests ways to organize the report, provides samples of necessary forms that must be submitted with the report, and includes precise formatting information. An effective practice is to use this manual to determine ways to organize your college's decision-making structure to support accreditation Standards in order to integrate Standards into daily operations at your college.

### ***Guide to Accreditation for Governing Boards***

In the last decade, actions of a college's Governing Board or Board members have played a role in colleges being sanctioned. This Guide provided by the ACCJC describes the duties and responsibilities of governing board members in regard to the Standards.

### ***Guide to Evaluating Distance Education and Correspondence Education***

Now more than ever, scrutiny of distance education programs is on the minds of faculty and staff at many colleges. This manual helps institutions understand the Commission's expectations of distance education and how all areas of the institution's operations can support an effective distance education program.

### ***Substantive Change Manual***

Colleges often find themselves out of compliance with ACCJC requirements for receiving approval prior to making substantial changes to education programs or to the college mission. This manual should be consulted frequently as your institution makes changes to programs to avoid issues during a self-evaluation visit. This handbook can be particularly useful when preparing a substantive change report when curriculum changes in a program lead to 50% or more of the program's courses being offered online, including general education courses.

Other manuals are available at the ACCJC website, <http://www.accjc.org>.

## **VIII. Responding to the Standards**

Remember when you are writing to the Standards that team members are reading hundreds of pages of materials. You want to make your answers to the Standards as explicit and as easy to read as possible. Here are a couple of effective practices for answering the questions.

### **Use the Language in the Standard as Part of Your Answer**

To make it clear to the Peer Evaluation Team members that your institution meets the Standards, use the language of the Standard to identify how you are meeting the Standard. Using the accreditation language makes it easy to identify how you meet the Standard and shows that accreditation language is part of your everyday institutional culture. Use common phrases like; “regardless of location or means of delivery,” “identifies and regularly assesses learning outcomes,” “continuous improvement of student learning and achievement,” and “regularly evaluates and improves” in your answers.

### **Make Sure That You Answer Every Part of the Standard**

Many Standards include multiple elements. In demonstrating that the college meets the Standard it is important that you answer every part of the Standard. You cannot “partially” meet the Standard: either you meet the entire Standard, or you do not meet the Standard. For example, Standard I.B.3 states, “The institution establishes Institution Set Standards for student achievement appropriate to its mission, assesses how well it is achieving them in pursuit of continuous improvement, and publishes this information.” Make sure in your response to this Standard that you answer each part. For Standard I.B.3 make sure you address how the college established these Institution Set Standards, show that the standards are appropriate to the mission, show how they were assessed, and demonstrate that the assessment results were published.

## **Repetition Is Not Necessarily a Bad Thing**

One of the major complaints of self-evaluations is that they are repetitive. However, repetition in answers can show how well your institution integrates its policies, procedures and planning. If the college uses program reviews for planning, assessment, and resource allocation, referencing the process to answer multiple Standards shows how fundamental the process is to the institution. Remember, although team members read the entire document, they typically concentrate on one or two sections. Being repetitive in the Standards makes sure that each team member gets the necessary information so they can validate that the college meets the Standards.

## **Link to Relevant Evidence**

Colleges work hard to create a culture of evidence and in so doing create an often difficult to manage abundance of potential accreditation evidence. When writing, the temptation might be to include everything you have connected to a specific Standard, hoping that something will satisfy the Standard. For the sake of the reader, make sure to cite only relevant evidence when describing how your college meets a Standard. Sometimes an entire document is relevant for the Standard, but sometimes it is only a section. It would also be helpful if you referenced not just the evidence document but also the paragraph, page, or section of the evidence that is relevant to a specific Standard. Again, using one piece of evidence for multiple Standards can show integration; however, make sure you let the reader know what area of the item is relevant for each Standard. Some colleges have set up their electronic evidence links in the self-evaluation to link directly to the most relevant part of the document, or create a document that presents a the relevant page of a larger document. Other colleges have set up folders of evidence based on the Standards and provided them for team members, while some colleges develop separate websites with organizational hierarchies based on the Standards or links to individual pieces of evidence.

## **Write It Like It Is**

An institution may find itself in a difficult position during the writing of its self-evaluation report if it becomes clear college practices are not meeting the Standard. This can trigger concern and conflict among the well-meaning faculty and staff that are working with the common goal of reaffirming accreditation. Inevitably in this situation, discussion will focus on what to leave in, what to leave out, and what will be the consequences of either choice.

Many of these conflicts can be avoided in advance of writing the self-evaluation report by ensuring inclusion of all voices at every step of the creation of the self-evaluation draft. Committee structures should include faculty and administrative leadership as well as ample opportunity for classified professionals to be engaged in the process and to have their input valued. Having a clear, realistic, and well-publicized timeline of milestones for the writing of the self-evaluation and maintaining a high profile of those faculty and staff leading the effort can also help mitigate disagreements during the eleventh hour regarding how to word an uncomfortable truth.

Then there is the question of word choices or “spin-doctoring.” There can be an inclination to choose words that connote a rosier picture than may actually exist at a college. Given the high stakes involved, it’s certainly understandable; however, purple prose and embellishment are only obstacles to your evaluation and should be avoided. This approach can also exacerbate negative feelings from constituent groups if the perception is that the college’s situation is being misrepresented and a peer evaluation team will often see through the effort. A few rules of thumb:

- Report the facts
- Avoid unnecessary superlatives
- Limit describing future plans to your actionable improvement plans or quality focus essay
- Only make claims that can be substantiated with evidence
- Use a one-voice narrator

Given the desire to put the institution’s best foot forward in the self-evaluation, unfortunately there are times when information and evaluations of the college that are put forth in the report are seen by faculty to be inaccurate and unproven. If collegial efforts to agree on language that is acceptable to all parties fail, faculty may decide that they wish to provide the Commission or the visiting team with a second report addressing the inaccuracies. Often called a minority report, this option, if agreed to by the full Senate, should be sure to focus on provable and accurate claims and give clear explanation for the disagreement.

## IX. Developing a Culture of Evidence by Documenting College Processes

### Developing a Culture of Evidence

When writing, the evidence of your institution’s quality should direct the creation of the self-evaluation report rather than the tendency to declare that the college meets a Standard then attempt to find supporting data after the fact. A “write first-find evidence later” approach will add pressure to the committee when trying to locate evidence for statements that may have been overly polished in the writing. If your college adopts an “accreditation, every day” motto, existing procedures established by colleges and districts generally have mechanisms in place that have supporting evidence readily available for reference. Examples of supporting evidence colleges likely have as a quick reference are:

- Use of the California Community College Chancellor’s Office Scorecard in planning
- Program Review documents
- SLO assessment results, analysis and changes made due to ongoing assessment.
- Previous self-evaluation reports
- Student learning and achievement data also from institutional reports

- Institutional Effectiveness data
- Policies and procedures
- College website and usability of it
- Human Resources (positions) intended to help meet Standards
- Committee minutes
- Administration and faculty surveys
- Standing accreditation reports to senate and other college groups.
- Campus climate surveys, student equity plans, student support plans, educational master plans, etc.

Be sure to have a clear committee reporting structure that sends information both ways. Follow-up reports should be sent back to lower committees to ensure linked communication.

## X. Preparing for Your Site Visit

Preparing a self-evaluation is a time-consuming process for faculty and administration. By the time the Peer Evaluation Team arrives on campus, the committee preparing for that visit is often under pressure and exhausted. However, proper planning and preparation for a site visit can lead to an efficient and successful visit for the college and team. Good communication between the campus and the team leading up to the visit, including ensuring the team has the proper workspace, that meetings have been arranged per the requests of the team, and that documentation is prepared ahead of the visit will all aid in a smooth visit.

Locally, the members of the campus need to be aware of who is coming for the visit and what events are planned for the week. Efforts should be made to familiarize all staff with the self-evaluation report and key concepts. Some things that may help include the following:

- Pamphlets or email-blasts with the names of the team and/or their pictures to help the faculty identify the team.
- Acronym quizzes to familiarize faculty with important terms related to your campus processes
- Monthly accreditation updates from your senate president or other leaders
- Well-prepared charts and visual representations for faculty and staff to review
- Creative engagement tools to make faculty and other service areas aware of the accomplishments of the college and what is being presented to the team (e.g. Accreditation Jeopardy).
- A summary report distributed to college employees and the team describing what the college has done since its last self-evaluation

The self-evaluation should be an honest reflection of what the college is doing. The summary may accentuate the improvements the college has made, emphasize what is working

exceptionally well, and identify ways to improve where college constituents may feel they are in need of improvement.

### **After Your Visit**

At the conclusion of a Peer Evaluation Team's visit, the chair of the Team will meet with the CEO of your college to discuss the report it will send to the Commission. The CEO may choose to host a forum opportunity for the Team to provide a summary of the report and provide any general comments it feels it can provide. The final report, after it has been sent to your college's CEO for an opportunity to respond or make corrections, is sent to the Commission along with a confidential recommendation on accreditation status. For multi-college districts the Team chair will also meet with the system CEO.

## **XI. Reports**

The ACCJC, like most institutional and discipline-specific accrediting bodies, requires a series of reports as well as a cyclical, institution-wide self-evaluation. These reports are intended to ensure compliance with eligibility requirements for accreditation, but also encourage institutions to think of accreditation as an ongoing process of evaluation and re-evaluation in service to the goal of continuous quality improvement. These reports have different purposes and are briefly explained below.

### **Institutional Self Evaluation of Educational Quality and Institutional Effectiveness**

This report is a comprehensive evaluation all Standards and is the basis for reaffirmation. Many of the additional reports required and the timelines for turning them in are dependent on the outcome of this evaluation. This self-evaluation is required by the Commission every seven years.

### **Mid-Term Report**

The Midterm Report addresses deficiencies identified in an earlier self-evaluation and describes improvements the institution has achieved based on the Commission's recommendations and any self-identified issues that are detailed in the Quality Focus Essay. Mid-term reports sometimes coincide with a second visit from a site team.

### **Follow-Up Report**

The Commission may require an institution to submit a Follow-Up Report at any time in order to verify deficiencies identified in the Commission's action letter have been addressed, that Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies are met and improvements are ongoing.

## Special Report

Special Report requirements from the Commission may be called for if the Commission has reason to believe an institution may have fallen out of compliance with Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and/or Commission policies. Specific requirements of a Special Report are communicated to the institution via an action letter.

## Annual Report and Annual Fiscal Report

The Commission requires an annual report, submitted electronically, using data from the current fall and two previous fall terms, to respond to specific questions regarding Institution Set Standards, Student Learning Outcomes, Substantive Change and enrollment data. Also, the Commission requires a similar Annual Fiscal Report using data from the same time period. This report captures your College's fiscal snapshot including current fiscal picture, short and long-term liabilities and debt, cash position, and most recent audit information.

Other ACCJC guides and manuals are available on the ACCJC website.

## XII. Distance Education and Accreditation: Things to Think About To Be Prepared

In response to changing federal regulations and innovations in online instruction, ACCJC has developed specific guidelines for establishing quality in a college's Distance Education offerings that colleges must address and be prepared for when a site team visits.

According to the ACCJC's *Guide to Evaluating Distance Education and Correspondence Education* (2013), distance education is "defined, for the purpose of accreditation review as a formal interaction which uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and which supports regular and substantive interaction between the student and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously" (2). This definition identifies a number of key points regarding both distance education and accreditation. It puts the focus not just on the technology that is used to convey a DE class, but also on the students and instructors who bring these classes to life. The phrase "regular and substantive interaction" here parallels the "regular effective contact" phrase found in California Title 5, sec. 55204. In both cases, the focus is on instructors engaging with students using available technological tools. If your college's DE program is to succeed (in the eyes of ACCJC), it must demonstrate that this interaction is at the heart of all of your online classes.

It is this interaction that differentiates a distance education course from a correspondence course. Correspondence courses typically are self-paced and involve receiving or submitting course materials by mail or electronic transmission. Interaction between the instructor and student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. A clear

understanding of the distinction between distance education and correspondence education is very important when considering the Substantive Change process and a clear definition is necessary due to the impact on pedagogy, financial aid, and district funding.

~~Before that interaction can happen, however,~~ To support distance and correspondence education, your college needs to have a system in place to enable online classes to succeed. First, faculty need proper training to engage effectively with students at a distance. Requiring all potential online teachers to undergo training is common. The training itself could be handled in-house by qualified trainers or offered through online services like @One. This training can focus on best practices in design and development of online courses, regular and effective contact, accessibility, and the use of social media, among other topics. Ensuring that your faculty are fully qualified to both develop and teach online is essential for any successful distance education program.

Along with training, it is common to subject potential online courses to peer evaluation for both content and quality of design. These evaluations should be conducted by experts both in online design and in the subject matter being taught in the particular class. There should be a support system in place to help faculty develop quality online courses, particularly in the event that potential online teachers do not pass the evaluation process and need to revise and/or redesign their course materials.

The college must ensure that quality courses are being developed and delivered, and that there is ample support for both the teachers and the students, and that services are equitable for students on campus and online. To this end, make sure that there is ~~ample~~ sufficient and equitable technology support for both students and instructors, that there are tutoring and library services available for online students; and that student services provides counseling, financial aid, and disability support for online students. In short, online students at your college must have at their fingertips all of the programs and services offered to on-campus students.

ACCJC expects that all distance education programs offer quality classes and quality support for students and teachers alike. However, it is not just the self-evaluation and site visits where distance education is under scrutiny; it is also in the substantive change process. If any program at your college that offers a degree, certificate, or certificate of general education reaches a threshold whereby 50% or more of the classes (including general education) are offered as distance education, then the college must submit a “substantive change” request. According to the ACCJC’s *Substantive Change Manual* (2014), institutions submitting a substantive change for distance education “must ensure that sufficient fiscal resources are available to support the program by providing a cost-impact analysis, and that the curriculum, faculty, equipment, and facilities meet Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies” (9). In other words, the ACCJC will expect that your substantive change proposal documents and explains how your online program develops, trains, offers, and supports online classes.

## XIII. The Standards

### **Standard I: Mission, Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness, and Integrity**

In the Accreditation Standards (adopted June 2014) the Standard I focus is on Mission, Academic Quality, Institutional Effectiveness and Integrity and is broken out into three sections.

#### **Mission**

The mission section of this Standard looks to make sure that all of the college programs and services align with the mission. The Standard also addresses specific elements in the college's mission: a broad educational purpose, intended student population, types of degrees and certificates offered and a commitment to student learning and student achievement. The Standard also requires confirmation that the mission guides decision-making, planning and resource allocation. Colleges are also responsible for using data to determine how they are meeting their mission.

#### **Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness**

The second part of the Standard asks institutions to collect different types of data, including Student Learning Outcomes data, student equity data, achievement data, institution set standards, and to encourage dialog about that data. Dialog is used to identify performance gaps, including those for disaggregated groups, and to implement improvement plans. Colleges are also supposed to use this information to systematically evaluate college planning and make needed changes. It's important that colleges widely distribute and publish this information to faculty, staff and the community.

#### **Institutional Integrity**

The final section of this Standard focuses on Integrity. This includes providing clear and accurate information on the college to its faculty, staff, students and the public and communicating that information widely and effectively. This includes placing information on the college website, in the catalog, and in correspondence with the Commission. This standard also requires that the institution regularly review its policies, procedures and publications, the primary mechanisms of communication to the public, to ensure integrity, accuracy, and comprehensiveness. In addition, the Standard addresses academic freedom and academic honesty/dishonesty (cheating /plagiarism.)

It is also important to review the Eligibility Requirements connected to Standard I. Colleges must meet all eligibility requirements at all times. Standard I is connected to the following

Eligibility requirements: 6 (Mission), 11 (Student Learning and Student Achievement), 13 (Academic Freedom), 19 (Institutional Planning and Evaluation), 20 (Integrity in Communication with the Public) and 21 (Integrity in Relations with the Accrediting Commission.)

### **Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard**

**Identify processes and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and using outcomes data on student learning and achievement. This practice is of particular importance as there has been an increase in the number of recommendations being given to colleges regarding the collection and use of assessment data for planning. Other practices are as follows:**

- Review your mission systematically, not just the year before the visit
- Reference the mission in all of your planning documents
- Use the mission as a guiding force for resource allocation
- Collect disaggregated data on achievement of student learning outcomes and use that data in discussions of student equity and disproportionate impact
- Identify specific data that is used to show how the institution is accomplishing its mission
- Set up a timeline for regularly evaluating college policies and procedures, publications and plans
- Create and assess institution set standards
- Identify short and long-range needs for education program, services, and resources based on data
- Confirm that all the information in institutional documents and publications is clear and accurate including availability of the schedule of courses listed in the catalog
- Confirm that students can complete degrees and certificates listed in a reasonable timeframe
- Make sure that the college/district has an academic freedom statement
- Have a policy on academic integrity including those on academic honesty/dishonesty

Faculty, including the local senate, should be involved in the following:

- Assessment of the current mission and any revisions of the mission
- Ensuring that the mission is part of any program review or assessment process
- Collecting and reviewing student learning outcomes data to measure student learning and achievement
- Identifying strategies for improvement in programs and services based on data and dialog
- Creating and monitoring of institution set standards
- Understanding and reviewing the college/district academic freedom policy
- Crafting an academic dishonesty policy that addresses academic issues of cheating and plagiarism

## **Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Support Services**

In the Standards, Standard II is often considered the Standard most relevant to faculty and the Standard that will require the most faculty attention both during the creation of a self-evaluation report and during the implementation of ongoing planning processes. The Standard II focus is broken into three different sections: Instructional Programs, Library and Learning Support Services, and Student Support Services.

### **Instructional Programs**

This Standard requires colleges to demonstrate how their educational offerings support their college's mission as well as evidence that learning, as well as degree and certificate completion, is, in fact, happening at the college. Standards of academic rigor and teaching methodology are scrutinized in this section. Many of the specific expectations found in this section of the Standard have, as their basis, federal regulations found in the Higher Education Act. College curriculum approval processes are evaluated and expectations are set regarding the length, breadth, and rigor of academic programs.

An important component of this Standard is the discussion of student learning outcomes and the processes colleges have put in place to ensure the use of student learning outcomes assessment data in program evaluation and resources allocation. This Standard identifies all areas in which colleges should have student learning outcomes and how the assessment data should be central to planning. Along with outcomes assessment, this section also explains expectations regarding the relevancy of career technical education programs at colleges, general education requirements, and the requirement of colleges to have a program discontinuance procedure that clearly provides for students enrolled in a program that is deemed to no longer be viable.

### **Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard**

- Work with your college to provide for sufficient resources to faculty to ensure curriculum, including courses and educational programs, is updated frequently and meet appropriate discipline or industry standards in the case of career technical education programs.
- Establish clear timelines and expectations for curriculum development and how faculty engage in the development of curriculum.
- Establish a calendar for the regular review and approval of policies and procedures relevant to instruction, curriculum development, program development or discontinuance, and the collection and use of student learning outcomes data in planning.
- Review your processes for the discontinuance or elimination of programs and requirements for “teaching out” programs in which students are enrolled.

- Include student learning outcomes on all official course outlines of record and have a faculty body approve them
- Establish clear procedures and criteria for determining which courses fulfill general education requirements which are primarily determined by faculty and are based on institutional student learning outcomes competencies.

### **Library and Learning Support Services**

More and more student learning support programs are being recognized for the essential roles they play in student success and learning. Under this Standard, library and tutoring services are examined to determine if they are sufficient in quantity, currency, depth, and variety to support educational programs for on ground and online students. The Standard stretches these services to include instructional technology and access to these learning services. The role of faculty here is to be heavily involved in selecting and maintaining educational equipment and materials to meet student support needs and to help achieve student learning outcomes. These services should be reliable, pervasive throughout a college, and regularly evaluated for their effectiveness in supporting student achievement.

### **Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard**

- Develop a reliable tracking system for recording the frequency with which students receive support services in your college library or other learning assistance service centers and open computer labs.
- Establish comparable student learning support services for students who are enrolled in courses online as well as for students in on ground courses (i.e. an Online Writing Center, Online Library Services, etc.)
- Regularly notify faculty of student support resources available and work with your local senate to advocate for and support resources for maintaining comprehensive library and student support services
- Collect student learning outcomes data for all student support services and document the use of assessment data to make program improvements in the appropriate short-term and long-term planning documents, such as program review.

### **Student Support Services**

With recent legislation and the introduction of significant funding to support counseling and matriculation efforts, colleges are beginning to establish more stable student support services to help students make effective educational planning choices. To assess these programs, the Standard calls on colleges to establish student learning outcomes for student support services and to use the results of assessment to make planning decisions which lead to increased student learning and achievement. Of great concern in the Standard is equitable access to appropriate,

comprehensive, and reliable services for all students, whether in person or online. In addition, this Standard examines how co-curricular and athletic programs support the college's mission and serve educational purposes.

Counseling faculty play a major role in student achievement of their educational and personal goals. Colleges responding to this Standard will need to provide evidence that counseling and academic advising programs support student development faculty are given the necessary training and tools to advise students with information that is timely, useful, and accurate regarding transfer and graduation requirements, among other information. Such evidence includes policies and procedures that determine clear pathways and necessary requirements for students to achieve their goals. Colleges regularly assess their practices while taking steps to eliminate bias and ensure all students are treated fairly and equitably. Finally, this Standard requires evidence that student records are permanently, securely, and confidentially maintained and students are aware of their rights to their information.

### **Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard**

- Establish student learning outcomes for all student support offices, measure those outcomes on a regular basis, and use the data from outcomes assessment to create goals and request resource allocations through your college's short-term and long-term planning processes to improve student support services.
- Participate in ongoing and open dialogue between discipline faculty and counseling faculty regarding the importance of advocacy for resources for student support services as a strategy to improve student achievement. Establish opportunities for regular contact between counseling faculty and discipline faculty.
- Establish a calendar for the regular review and approval of policies and procedures relevant to admissions, financial aid, evaluations, enrollment priorities, student equity, and students' rights and grievance procedures, among others.
- Work with appropriate administrators to ensure that student counseling and matriculation services are available online and are comparable to on ground services.
- Collect outcomes data and disaggregate that data by a variety of demographics in order to determine any disproportionate results in student learning and achievement.

### **Standard III: Resources**

Standard III is divided into four different sections: Human, Physical, Technology, and Financial Resources.

## Human Resources

This Standard seeks to ensure that a college's hiring processes lead to the hiring of administrators, faculty, and staff who are qualified based on education, training, and experience; that it complies with all rules and regulations regarding equal opportunity hiring practices; that it consistently follows these rules and regulations during the hiring process; that the job descriptions reinforce the institution's mission and goals; that ethical guidelines are followed for all personnel matters; and that security and confidentiality are guaranteed for all personnel records. Additionally, Standard III.A requires that required degrees by employees be obtained from colleges operating under recognized U.S. accrediting agencies, and that all employees are effectively evaluated on a periodic basis. One key component of this Standard is in regards to III.A.6, which states that those involved with student learning should be evaluated to determine the extent to which they are involved in using the results of student learning outcomes assessment to improve teaching and learning.

### Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard

- Ensure that all human resources planning is integrated with your college's program review and evaluation processes and relies on data, such as achievement data and student learning outcomes data.
- Review your college's policy on recruitment and hiring on a regular basis to ensure high levels of faculty engagement in hiring committees, in the determination of desired qualifications for faculty positions, and in the determination of desired qualifications for administrative positions that will work directly with faculty.
- Ensure that your job descriptions are updated and consistent with negotiated agreements between the college and the bargaining units.
- Establish a Senate committee to determine equivalency to minimum qualifications in order to ensure that faculty qualifications are primarily the responsibility of the senate.
- Create policy and procedures that give faculty a primary role for determining equivalency.
- Participate in college planning committees that address human resource needs including the processes for all employee evaluations and the integrity of the confidentiality of records and employee information.
- Work closely with the bargaining unit to regularly review tenure review and evaluation materials and processes to ensure professional and academic standards are the focus of evaluation.
- Monitor, through college budget and finance committees or human resource planning committees, the Faculty Obligation Number (FON) and discuss goals for meeting and surpassing the FON with college administration
- Participate in the creation and revision of policies and procedures.

- Be aware of potential violations of policies, procedures or college declarations regarding ethical behavior and notify local senate leaders or, if necessary, statewide senate leadership.
- Actively participate in the planning of professional development opportunities for faculty and advocate for sufficient resources to be made available to support comprehensive faculty professional development.

## **Physical Resources**

This Standard asks that colleges demonstrate that safety and security are paramount in all locations on a campus; that the institution plans, builds, upgrades, and maintains buildings and infrastructure in order to meet the college's mission and goals and to ensure that a high quality of education is maintained; that the physical resources are evaluated on a regular basis; and that long-range financial plans are developed to ensure that the college is financially able to grow into the foreseeable future by considering the total cost of ownership for all resources.

### **Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard**

- Ensure that all physical resource planning is integrated with your college's program review and evaluation processes and relies on data, such as achievement and learning outcomes data.
- Participate in your college committees that have as a focus creating and maintaining a safe and stable learning environment.
- Participate in the creation of facilities and physical resource short-term and long-term planning documents, such as facilities master plans, five-year capital improvement plans, and annual scheduled maintenance plans.

## **Technology Resources**

Technology resources includes the technology used in and around the classroom for student learning; the computers, printers, and enterprise programs used in offices and to manage the college's resources; and the cabling, servers, wireless portals, and other behind-the-scenes tools that enable all of the other technological resources to actually work in a 21st century environment. To this end, Standard III.C asks colleges to demonstrate that there are adequate and appropriate technological resources to manage an institution, to provide quality education, and to fulfill the college's mission. It also asks that colleges develop plans for the regular update and replacement of technology to maintain a high level of service; that the college provides appropriate training in the use of technological resources, for faculty, staff, administration, and students; and that the college has policies and procedures to ensure that technological resources to ensure that all on campus are using these tools appropriately.

### **Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard**

- Ensure that all technology resource planning is integrated with your college's program review and evaluation processes and relies on data, such as achievement and student learning outcomes data.
- Establish a Senate committee to determine classroom and instructional technology needs, different than the technology needed for college operations, which are essential for effective teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and will support student success.
- Participate and advocate for effective practices for the regular assessment and replacement of classroom and instructional technology.
- Participate in the creation of technology resource short-term and long-term planning documents, such as a master technology plan or plans for the development and improvement of distance education.
- Actively participate in the planning of professional development opportunities regarding the use of classroom and instructional technology for on ground and online instruction.

### **Financial Resources**

The financial resources Standard is divided into three parts: Planning, Fiscal Responsibility and Stability, and Liabilities. The Planning section focuses on ensuring that the college's planning will ensure that the necessary to support all programs and services at a college into the foreseeable future. It also states that your college's planning structures to the mission and goals of the institution, and that the college follows appropriate policies and guidelines when developing financial plans and budgets. Fiscal Responsibility and Stability includes accurate assessment of financial resources, the need for integrity in all aspects of financial planning and resource allocation, and the need for oversight in financial matters to ensure integrity in the process. As well, the college must have enough cash on hand to maintain stability in times of economic troubles. The Liabilities section focus on short-term and long-term financial solvency, particularly for future obligations like Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB). This section also calls for colleges to demonstrate that all short-term and long-term borrowing is conducted according to ethical and sound guidelines, with ample oversight, and that the appropriate staff at a college regularly evaluates student loan default rates, revenue streams, and other assets to ensure that all federal guidelines are being followed.

### **Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard**

- Ensure that all financial resource planning is integrated with your college's program review and evaluation processes and relies on data, such as achievement and student learning outcomes data.

- Participate in college budget or finance committees to ensure faculty voice is strong when developing the processes by which the college's financial documents and budget are developed and communicated throughout the college.
- Maintain open dialogue with the bargaining unit(s) to communicate shared interests and common goals while maintaining each organization's purview.
- Actively participate in efforts to evaluate budget-planning processes.

## **Standard IV: Leadership and Governance**

In the Accreditation Standards, Standard IV is broken into four parts: Decision Making Roles and Processes, Chief Executive Officers, Governing Boards, and Multi-College Districts or Systems. Effective leadership is essential to the creation of a productive and supportive learning environment for students to achieve their academic goals. This standard requires the institution to review its governance structures to determine how effectively their processes support students and the faculty, administrators, and classified professionals who serve them, including the Governing Board of a college. At its heart is the notion that all employees and elected officials are working cooperatively and collaboratively for the good of the institution as a whole. This standard also covers multi-college districts and focuses on the governance and management of multi-college districts.

### **Decision Making Roles and Processes**

This section of Standard IV emphasizes that the structure of decision-making must be defined in the policies of the college and followed and that the roles of faculty, staff, and administrators are clearly articulated and respected. The language encourages broad participation and innovation from all employees of the college in striving toward excellence. This Standard calls for an evaluation of a college's governance structures, processes, and practices and, for multi-college districts, sets expectations for how these institutions delineate the roles of each college within its systems and how its policies for resource allocation, governance, and planning provide adequate support for all colleges within the district.

### **Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard**

- Ensure that board policies and procedures that outline decision-making structures are clear and reflect the practice of the college.
- Establish timelines and schedules for the evaluation of policies and procedures related to leadership and governance in order to ensure effectiveness and accuracy.
- Engage your campus leadership groups, including student leadership organizations, in discussions of college morale and overall attitudes towards student success, employee advancement, constituent group relations, and constituent group involvement in planning and governance.

- Establish a policy with your college's Governing Board or Board of Trustees that codifies the 10 + 1 agreement between your college or district and your local Academic Senate.
- Establish practices that support documentation of constituent group engagement in decision-making such as detailed minutes of meetings of college-wide planning and governance committees which identify attendees by constituent group.
- Communicate the actions of your leadership and governance committees to the college regularly and clearly.
- Establish practices for evaluating how well constituent groups feel they are able to engage in decision-making such as surveys or governance committee retreats, document the results of that evaluation, and use the results to make improvements to processes and policies.

### **Chief Executive Officers**

This section of Standard IV defines the role of the president, superintendent, or chief executive. The section ensures that one individual is empowered by the Board of Trustees to actively supervise employees' implementation of collegial processes, adherence to regulatory requirements, and engagement with the community. This Standard sets expectations for the CEO's advancement of the college's mission and implementation of effective planning and decision-making practices. The Chief Executive Officer has a unique role in the process to earn or reaffirm accreditation and he or she should be knowledgeable about the process and all college efforts to comply with Eligibility Requirements and Standards.

### **Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard**

- Hire and train an effective chief executive for the college.
- Regularly evaluate and document the decision making structure through the established college processes to the chief executive.
- Document the mechanism by which the college evaluates its decision-making structure and provides recommendations to the chief executive for change.
- With the college chief executive or district executive, actively engage in board training sessions, particularly with respect to the role of faculty in the college decision making processes.
- Include a flowchart that illustrates college decision-making
- Document how the CEO communicates decisions to the college regarding decision-making, accreditation, and all other aspects of institutional quality and effectiveness.
- Ensure that the CEO is actively presented with and understands college performance data including student achievement data, student learning outcomes data, institution set standards data, data regarding the connections between strategic planning and budget allocation.

- Actively involve the CEO in establishing processes for integrating these essential data metrics into planning processes.

## **Governing Board**

Though the pendulum is swinging, in recent years actions taken by college boards of trustees or individual members of boards have led to recommendations for colleges and, in some cases, even sanctions. While that tide has seemed to turn, this section of Standard IV sets clear expectations that the board of trustees must comply with its own policies, engage in board development training, and not interfere with administrative implementation of college procedures, provide that implementation does not violate board policy.

## **Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard**

- Ensure the board has a code of ethics and conflict of interest statements that are regularly reviewed.
- Establish a timeline and schedule for the board to review its own policies
- Document the Board's work to create policy that is appropriate for their role within the college's leadership infrastructure.
- Create and maintain policy and procedures for selecting and evaluating the Chief Executive Officer and carry out those procedures effectively and transparently.
- Regularly present to the Board data regarding student success and institutional effectiveness, including student learning outcomes data, institution set standards, financial information data, and student completion and achievement data.
- Keep the Board aware and informed regarding all efforts made in furtherance of the college's compliance with the Standards, Eligibility Requirements, Commission policies, and the college's accreditation status.
- Support the Board's efforts at self-evaluation and encourage frequent training and goal-setting opportunities such as a Board workshops, Board retreats, or interactions with campus leaders, in compliance with legal requirements under the Open Meetings Act.

## **Multi-College Districts or Systems**

This section of the Standards explicitly defines the expectations for colleges or centers operating in a district. The Commission recognizes that almost half of all member institutions are part of a multi-college district/system and this section develops the minimum standards expected for such entities. It is expected that colleges will identify how their individual college interacts within such a district and how district policies and procedures impact the attainment of their mission.

ACCJC has aligned the accreditation timelines for site-visits within a district such that all colleges in a multi-college district will be on the same cycle of evaluation.

### **Effective Practices for Meeting the Standard**

- Create a district-wide committee or communication mechanism between colleges to address district-wide concerns. Document the communication and outcome of any recommendations.
- Collaborate among colleges within the district regarding the writing of this section for each college's self-evaluation plan.
- Create a delineation of responsibility function map which documents and communicates the division of operational responsibilities between colleges within the system and the district.
- Evaluate the delineation of responsibility for effectiveness, including the primary and secondary entities and their responsibilities.
- Evaluate and document the resource allocation model for the district. Use data collected on the effectiveness of this process to make changes and improvements and document those changes.
- Evaluate and document the human resources plan for the district.
- Establish clear protocols for communication and sharing information between colleges within a district, especially communication and information related to integrated planning processes and budget allocations.
- Engage in regular assessment of your college's role in the district/system to ensure each college is given opportunity to receive district resources and to participate in districtwide planning in order to achieve their individual college's mission and meet educational goals for student achievement and learning.

## **XIV. Conclusion**

While the accreditation cycle has many moving parts and potential pitfalls, the emphasis for colleges should always be placed on accreditation as an opportunity to continuously improve its services to students and further the mission of student achievement and learning. Helping your college move away from a view of accreditation as a necessary evil solely to comply with regulation does a disservice to your college faculty and staff's ability to be innovative and work collaboratively in the shared mission of increasing opportunity and improving the lives of our students through quality educational experiences.

## Appendices & References

### References

The following articles and resource materials are referenced in the paper or provided for additional reference.

#### Rio Hondo Accreditation Survival Guide

This handbook is provided by Rio Hondo College to help students and staff understand the accreditation process and what to expect during a team visit.

“Behind the Green Curtain: The Accreditation Visit Unveiled, or Where do Those Accreditation Recommendations Come from Anyway?” (2008)

This Rostrum article, written by past accreditation Peer Evaluation Team members Janet Fulks of Bakersfield College and Richard Mahon of Riverside City College provides some insight into managing and preparing for a visit from an ACCJC Peer Evaluation Team. Rostrum articles can be found at [www.asccc.org](http://www.asccc.org).

“The ACCJC Visiting Team: Details, Details, Details” (2012)

This Rostrum article is written by former Accreditation Committee Chair Michelle Grimes-Hillman and offers more in-depth information on Peer Evaluation teams, especially the roles that faculty might play on a visiting team. Rostrum articles can be found at [www.asccc.org](http://www.asccc.org).

**Bio Data Form for ACCJC Evaluators**

**ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES**

Western Association of Schools and Colleges

**Bio Data Form for Evaluators**

(Please type or print)

(Mr.) (Ms.) (Dr.) Name \_\_\_\_\_ Gender  
M F

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Institution \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Position:**

Administration \_\_\_\_\_; Instructional Faculty \_\_\_\_\_; Student Support Services \_\_\_\_\_; Library/Learning Resources \_\_\_\_\_; Trustee \_\_\_\_\_

Describe your role \_\_\_\_\_

Business Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Business

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Home

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Business Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Home

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Professional Education:**

Earned Degree and State	Year	Institution	City
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**Professional Experience:**

Administrative Experience (\_\_\_\_ Yrs.)

Describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Teaching Experience (\_\_\_\_ Yrs.) Major Discipline/Field: \_\_\_\_\_ Related

Discipline/Field: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Support Services Experience (\_\_\_\_ Yrs.)

Describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Library/Learning Resources Experience (\_\_\_\_ Yrs)

Describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Trustee Experience (\_\_\_\_ Yrs.)

Describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Professional Experience (\_\_\_\_ Yrs.)

Describe: \_\_\_\_\_

(Grants, Research, etc.)

**Special Qualifications/Experience, check all that apply and describe.**

Fiscal Management \_\_\_\_\_; Facilities Management \_\_\_\_\_; Human Resources \_\_\_\_\_; Faculty Staff Development \_\_\_\_\_;

Student Learning Outcomes (Design and Assessment) \_\_\_\_\_; Program Review \_\_\_\_\_; Instructional Methodologies \_\_\_\_\_;

Educational Technology \_\_\_\_\_; Distance Education (Design and Assessment) \_\_\_\_\_; Institutional Planning/Evaluation \_\_\_\_\_;

Adult /Pre-Collegiate Education \_\_\_\_\_; Non-Credit \_\_\_\_\_

Describe \_\_\_\_\_

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**Other Qualifications/Experience**

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**Accreditation Experience**

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**Professional Awards/Affiliations**

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**Ethnicity (optional)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

You may attach a resumé if available

**Please return this form to:**

**Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges  
10 Commercial Blvd., Suite 204, Novato, CA 94949  
Tel: 415-506-0234 Fax: 415-506-0238**