



# Digest

Digest means an item that has been through internal review of the Chancellor's Office and the review entities. The item now has form and substance, and is officially "entered into Consultation." The Council reviews the item and provides advice to the Chancellor.

**Title:** Task Force on Accreditation

**Date:** February 18, 2016

**Contact:** Pamela D. Walker  
Vice Chancellor, Educational Services

## Background

The 2015 Task Force on Accreditation was created to evaluate the current state of accreditation for the 113 colleges in the California Community College system and to identify and recommend a course of action to best serve colleges today and in the future.

Members of the task force represented a broad range of key stakeholders from the community college system, including the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC), Chief Instructional Officers (CIOs), Chief Student Services Offices (CSSOs), elected Boards of Trustees, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), Los Angeles College Faculty Guild, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 1521, and Faculty Association of California Community Colleges (FACCC), and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO).

The 2015 Task Force on Accreditation conducted a comprehensive review of numerous reports, resolutions and recommendations that called for reform, but documented little change. Members of the task force reached consensus that the current accreditor for the California Community Colleges had lost credibility with the system. The task force identified ideal attributes that should be expected in an accreditor in the changing landscape of public higher education and concluded the current accreditor does not meet those expectations, calling for a new model of accreditation.

On November 16, 2015, the Board of Governors accepted the report and stated its intent that a new model for an accrediting agency should be established. The Board of Governor's directed the Chancellor, working through the system's established consultation processes, to bring to the March 2016 Board of Governors meeting:

1. **A recommendation for action to establish a new model for an accrediting agency; and**
2. **An implementation plan, along with timeline.**

The Chancellor reconvened the 2015 Task Force with augmented membership as the 2016 Accreditation Implementation Task Force to undertake this charge.

In addition to the recommendations of the 2015 task force and the direction of the Board of Governors, the ongoing status and viability of the system's current accreditor

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has recently come under further question. On December 17, 2015, the National Advisory Commission for Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) reviewed the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) progress toward compliance with federal standards and found that progress to be insufficient. As a result, NACIQI denied ACCJC's request for an expanded scope in serving as an accreditor for baccalaureate degree programs, a function expected to be necessary to the community college's ability to meet future workforce needs, and recommended that ACCJC be granted six months to work toward compliance.

On January 4, 2016, the United States Department of Education issued an order rejecting an ACCJC appeal and upheld the previous findings from NACIQI and the U.S. Department of Education that ACCJC is noncompliant with requirements for federal recognition as an accrediting agency. The January 4 letter allowed the ACCJC to continue as a recognized accreditor for 12 months pending further review of its compliance deficiencies.

Given these facts and circumstances, the Accreditation Implementation Task Force finds that a continued relationship between the California Community College System and ACCJC in its current form is not in the best interest of the system's colleges and students. The California Community College System requires a responsive, credible structure for accreditation that more effectively meets current and future needs, provides stability to the system's colleges in terms of accreditation status, reflects the collegial culture and values of its members, and ultimately joins the accreditation structure of the community colleges with that of the other segments of higher education.

Thus, the Accreditation Implementation Task Force recommends the following course of action to the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges:

1. On behalf of the system's institutions, the Chancellor's Office should enter into an agreement with a regional accreditor that better aligns the accrediting structure for the California Community Colleges with that of other segments of higher education. The agreement should allow for the full transition of California's 113 community colleges to this new regional accrediting agency in no more than six years.
2. The Chancellor's Office should work with both ACCJC and its new accreditor to define specific transition steps to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education in order to ensure that every college has a clear and continuous accreditation process throughout the transition. This detailed transition plan should be presented to the Board of Governors for approval by June 2016.

Such a transition, based on the experience of other institutions that have made a similar change, could be structured as follows:

- A. A college maintains its current status, terms, and cycle for accreditation.
  - B. At its first natural juncture for accreditation (comprehensive site visit, mid-term report, etc.) the college presents its Self-Study/Report in full accordance with the existing ACCJC standards to the new accrediting body.
  - C. The new accrediting body assumes responsibility to review the institution in accordance with the previous accreditor's standards and provide feedback, which may include commendations and recommendations.
  - D. The new accrediting body provides a crosswalk document highlighting the relationship and alignment of the pre-existing standards and the standards of the new accrediting body.
  - E. The new accrediting body issues a set period of time to the college before the next accreditation review and clarifies that at that time the college will be accountable to fulfill the new standards.
3. Following Board of Governors approval of the transition plan, the Chancellor's Office should seek formal accommodations with both ACCJC and the new accreditor, effective July 1, 2016, to ensure that orderly progress toward alignment with a new accreditor begins with the 2016-17 academic year.
  4. For ACCJC to fill the role of transitional accreditor, given the current uncertainties at the state and federal level, it must operate under new leadership with specific and significant structural and operational changes and use the authority of a Special Administrator or Administrators to provide ongoing collaboration between ACCJC and the Chancellor's Office. This administrator or group of administrators should be appointed by the Board of Governors to begin service no later than July 1, 2016.
  5. Under the direction of Board of Governors and in collaboration with the ACCJC, the Special Administrator or Administrators would ensure that the ACCJC comply with all federal requirements for a recognized accreditor while reconstituting the agency to move toward the ideal attributes articulated in the [2015 Task Force Report](#).

This overall process would address both the intermediate goals of protecting the current accreditation status of the system's colleges ensuring ACCJC's viability as a regional accreditor during the transition period, as well, as the ultimate goal of higher education accreditation membership for the California Community Colleges.