



**ACCREDITING
COMMISSION
for COMMUNITY and
JUNIOR COLLEGES**

*Western Association
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Date: January 24, 2014
Memo to: Chief Executive Officers, Accreditation Liaison Officers
From: Krista Johns, JD *KRJ*
Subject: January 2014 Commission Action on Policies

We request that you publicize the information in this memo at your institution. Please note that comment is invited from the field on the first reading policies listed below in section 1. Information about how to submit comment is also included there.

The Policy Committee is a standing committee of the Commission. Through Commission processes, the Policy Committee oversees the ongoing review and updating of Commission policy. Commission procedures require that proposed institutional policy changes and/or new policies be considered by the Commission in a two-meeting process. At the first meeting, new policies/policy changes are discussed and modifications are made as appropriate. Policies approved by the Commission for first reading are then circulated to ACCJC accredited institutions via email, and to other interested parties via online posting, for review and comment before presentation at the next Commission meeting for second reading and adoption.

When changes are needed in order to align with federal regulations or guidelines, these changes must be made expeditiously; they may be made by the Commission without the normal first reading/second reading process. If such changes are made by Commission action between regular meetings, then the changes are reported to the field at the next Commission meeting. Actions of this nature were reported at the January 2014 Commission meeting and are noted here.

Changes to existing policies are noted in italic and strikethrough. New policies are all bold italic. As a part of the ongoing policy review process, terminology has been changed in all reviewed policies as necessary to align with current usage of terms in the *Manual for Institutional Self Evaluation*.

The institutional policies and operational policies of the Commission are published annually in the *Accreditation Reference Handbook (ARH)* along with Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards. The ARH is sent to each member institution and is also available online at www.accjc.org.

1. First Reading Policies: At its January 2014 meeting, the Commission considered and approved five institutional policies for first reading. The policies approved for first reading include:

- **Policy and Procedures for Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-College/Multi-Unit Districts or Systems**

The proposed revision is to eliminate a section related to team reports and recommendations that is more accurately addressed elsewhere in policy and procedure dealing generally with teams.

- **Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credits**

The work on this policy was primarily to move regulations citations to footnotes, to increase readability of the policy. The Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credits contains a definition of “program,” which is clarified in the proposed revision. The proposed revision also specifies that general education and, if offered, pre-collegiate preparatory courses of study are defined as programs of the institution. There were some additional changes made in October, 2013, to include references for baccalaureate degrees.

- **Policy on Complaints Against the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges**

There had been no recent application of this policy prior to 2013, but during the past year there were two complaints against the ACCJC under this policy. During the processing of those complaints, it was determined the policy would be enhanced by a fuller explanation of the complaint process. The policies of other regional accreditors were used as reference points in revising the Commission’s policy. The Policy Committee also felt it would benefit readers to know of other processes available to raise questions or concerns related to the accreditation standards, processes, or actions on institutions.

- **Policy on Closing an Institution**

This policy was revised to provide for flexibility in the current requirement of a Closure Report for all institutions placed on the sanction of Show Cause. With the revision, institutions ordered on Show Cause *may be* required to complete a Closure Plan, or may be required to develop a preliminary closure plan, or make other preparations for closure. Other revisions were made to the policy in October, to clarify language and provide that Closure Plans are reviewed as substantive changes by the Committee on Substantive Change.

- **Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions**

This policy was revised to eliminate the requirement for a two-year period of time to pass before an institution can proceed with seeking accreditation upon denial of candidacy or initial accreditation. Instead, the requirement before reapplying is now specified as completion of a new self evaluation process and submittal of an Institutional Self Evaluation Report. Additional revisions made in October clarified language concerning the application of the two-year rule in relation to Commission actions on institutions.

The policies considered for first reading as well as the adopted policies and organizational documents were attached to an electronic version of this correspondence emailed to Chief Executive Officers and Accreditation Liaison Officers. The policies can also be found online at www.accjc.org under ‘Recent Commission Actions,’ ‘Actions on Policy.’

Comments may be made in written, FAX, or email format and sent to one of the following addresses:

- Email: kjohns@accjc.org
- FAX: 415-506-0238
- Mail: ACCJC
10 Commercial Boulevard, Suite 204
Novato, CA 94949

The Commission invites comment on these important policy matters through April 15, 2014.

2. **Adopted Policies:** Information about the new policy and the two revised policies listed below was circulated to member institutions and posted on accjc.org in June 2013. Comment on the policies was invited through October 15, 2013; however, the Commission received no comments on these policies. Following the comment period, some final edits were made as is the normal practice by the Policy Committee. Changes were also made as needed to align the policies with federal regulations and guidelines.

- **Policy on Monitoring Institutional Performance**

The new Policy on Monitoring Institutional Performance highlights the periodic (annual) monitoring of key indicators as required by USDE regulations. This area of accreditation practice and reporting by colleges will be more transparent to member institutions and interested others with the creation of a stand-alone policy on the subject. Additional language was added to this policy in October to align with federal regulations concerning monitoring activities of accrediting agencies.

- **Policy on Direct Assessment of Learning (formerly Policy on Credit for Prior Experiential Learning in Undergraduate Programs)**

In the course of its ongoing review of Commission policies, the committee determined this policy had become out of date since its last revision in 2009. There has been a great deal of movement on this subject over the past several years, and the U.S. Department of Education recently clarified its expectations related to direct assessment programs, which may include prior experiential learning. The policy has been renamed and revised with these factors in mind.

It should be noted that several other Commission policies also address direct assessment programs, including the Policy on Substantive Change, Policy on Award of Credit, and Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credits.

- **Policy on the Rights and Responsibilities of the Commission and Member Institutions**

During a regular review of the Policy on Rights and Responsibilities of the Commission and Member Institutions, it was determined that a separate section on third party comment would be helpful to the member institutions and to the public. The section pulls materials that were

previously found in several other policies and records them together in this section. Other revisions were made in October to align with federal regulations and guidelines.

- 3. Operational Policy:** The Commission considered and adopted revisions to one operational policy. Operational policies are not circulated to the field for comment prior to final approval. Upon approval, they are included in the Commission's report on Recent Commission Actions on Policy, and are posted online in the *Accreditation Reference Handbook*. The operational policy reviewed and approved at the January 2014 Commission meeting is:

- **Policy on Access to Commission Meetings**

Revisions to this policy clarify language concerning access to Commission meetings and insert as a part of the public session a period for public comment.

- 4. Organizational Document:** The following Commission operational document was amended in October 2013 and again in January 2014 in accordance with Bylaws. It is presented for public information in this report.

- **ACCJC Bylaws—Report on Action Taken**

The ACCJC Bylaws were amended in October 2013 and again in January 2014 in accordance with the Bylaws. These amendments were made to align the Bylaws with federal regulations and guidelines: clarified scope statement for the baccalaureate degree, deletion of representatives on the Commission from other WASC accrediting agencies, and insertion of the definition of public members. There was also clean-up of inconsistent language and terms remaining from an earlier version of the Bylaws.

- 5. Edits to Policy and Changes for Alignment with Regulations:** The following Commission policies were revised or edited in October 2013 to align with federal regulations and guidelines. They are included for public information in this report.

Edits to correct inputting errors, grammar, and punctuation may be completed at any time and are effective when made. Edits to improve readability and clarity without altering the meaning of policy language, and edits required for full compliance with federal or state regulations, become effective upon adoption by the Commission between regular meetings or upon approval of the Policy Committee's report at a regular Commission meeting and posting of the changes on the ACCJC website.

The following policies were edited or revised in October, 2013, in response to USDE analysis in connection with the ACCJC recognition review. Changes were made to address language in policy as to enforcement of the two-year rule, notifications to other accreditors and to governmental agencies, recommendations to meet standards and to improve effectiveness, baccalaureate degree programs, and team make-up; however, the policy language changes did not necessitate any changes in ACCJC practice.

- **Policy on Commission Good Practice in Relations with Member Institutions**
- **Policy on Public Disclosure and Confidentiality in the Accreditation Process**
- **Policy on Relations with Government Agencies**
- **Policy on Relations with Accrediting Agencies**

The changes made to language in policy that, in part, also impacted ACCJC practice, included substantive change and avoidance of a possible appearance of conflict.

- **Policy on Conflict of Interest for Commissioners, Evaluation Team Members, Consultants, Administrative Staff, and Other Commission Representatives**
- **Policy on Substantive Change**

6. **Removal of Policy for Alignment with Regulations:** The following Commission policies were eliminated in October 2013 to align with federal regulations and guidelines. They are included for public information in this report.

- **Policy and Procedures for Joint Accreditation Process between ACCJC and ACSCU of WASC**
- **Policies and Procedures for Joint Accreditation Process Between ACCJC and ACS of WASC**
- **Coordinating Guidelines for the WASC Accrediting Commissions**

The Commission welcomes your thoughts on ACCJC policy matters.