

External Review Committee Report

March 2001

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Accrediting Commission for
Community and Junior Colleges

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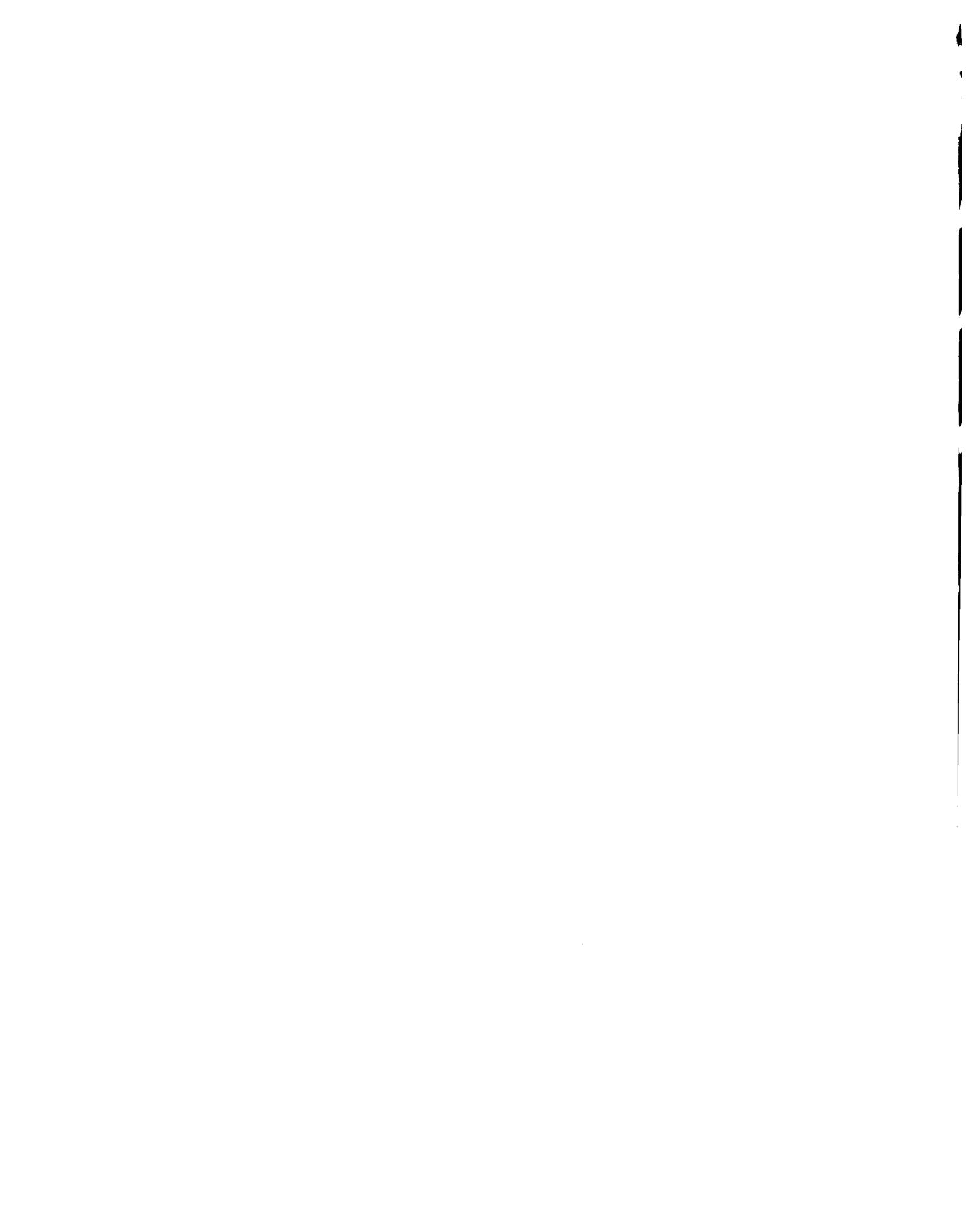


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Charge

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) embarked upon "Project Renewal: Evaluation Plan for ACCJC" in spring of 2000. To accomplish the project, a seven-member External Review Committee (ERC) was convened by Dr. David Wolf, Executive Director, in July 2000. The charge to the ERC was "to bring the various perspectives of its members to bear on all aspects of Commission operations." Project Renewal suggested that the team's work be informed by (1) analysis of the proposed institutional survey and ethnographic interviews, (2) attendance at workshops for team chairs and members, (3) observation of and participation in team visits, (4) study and observation of the Commission's work, and (5) extensive review of recent literature regarding the quality of accreditation. The team was asked to review all Commission documents, policies, and processes. To carry out its charge and respond to the Project Renewal suggested work plan, the ERC developed a purpose and process for its review, which resulted in a set of nine purpose statements or criteria for evaluation.

Findings

The ERC concluded that the ACCJC meets or exceeds all nine purposes; nonetheless, in the spirit of quality improvement the team also made recommendations for improvements and enhancements to the work of the Commission. Member institutions highly respect and value the work of the Commission. The Commission is viewed as a resource of best practices and help for institutions wishing to make change; however, there is a desire on the part of member institutions to expand the leadership role of the Commission. These expectations can only be met by providing additional revenue for the organization.

The ERC found that the ACCJC accepted and seriously responded to recommendations of the 1994 External Review Committee. Additional findings include:

1. **The Commission operates usefully and effectively.** The surveys, training workshops, interviews, team visit observations, and office audit all confirm that this purpose is fully met. Almost without exception, key people within higher education institutions understand and appreciate the accreditation process and the role and performance of the Commission and its staff. The Commission could be a more valuable resource for member institutions if the budget and staffing were increased.

2. **The Commission positively impacts and improves the quality of the accreditation process through its activities.** From training to guidebooks, from workshops to staff responses, every activity of the Commission was seen as assisting colleges with the accreditation process and resultant institutional improvement of quality. Commissioners were clear that their decisions were intended to help colleges.

3. **The Commission helps institutions improve quality through the Standards, Self Study, and Team Reports.** Overwhelmingly respondents to the structured

questionnaire used in *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2* were positive about the effects of the Standards, Self Study, and Team Reports on institutional quality. ERC observers at team visits were impressed by the positive and appreciative response of colleges to the recommendations of the visiting team. Clarity and appropriateness of the Standards, value of the Self Study, and accuracy of the Team Reports were all rated highly by institutions.

4. The Commission makes decisions that are fair (consistent) and meaningful (valuable). The 1994 External Review Committee reported a perception “on the part of outsiders that the Commission is reluctant to take negative actions, even when such actions appear to be well deserved.” The 2001 External Review Committee found that this perception may exist to some extent but that it is not prevalent. Where it does exist, more effort to publicize the purpose and process of accreditation can ameliorate the situation. The accreditation team reports are viewed by most as providing a balanced assessment of their colleges strengths and weaknesses and that teams are made up of objective people. Interviews with presidents of institutions that received sanctions felt the action was fair and helpful. In their deliberations, commissioners take the matter of fairness and equity very seriously.

5. The Commission sets standards that are clear, appropriate, consistent, and sufficient to measure and communicate quality and accountability. Nearly two-thirds of respondents in *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2* considered the standards to be very appropriate and that the current standards are very clearly stated. The area of institutional effectiveness measures was cited as needing improvement by approximately 50% of respondents. The ERC reviewed all of the standards from a contextual reference; the comments and suggestions for revision will be given to the five Project Renewal Task Forces established for the review and revision of standards. Unlike other regional accrediting bodies, the ACCJC regularly reviews its standards so that they measure and communicate both quality and accountability.

6. The Commission responds adequately to issues and tensions surrounding accreditation. Clearly the staff is knowledgeable about issues and tensions surrounding accreditation as documented in publications and conference presentations. The ACCJC has a strong reputation among national accreditation leaders and member institutions for being a leader in addressing accreditation concerns. Commission members support staff in its role of advocacy on accreditation matters and encourage the Executive Director to participate in meetings with other regional accrediting associations. Chapter II of the 2001 ERC Report expands upon the complexities surrounding accreditation. The staff is commended for its leadership in addressing the external complexities and pressures on accreditation.

7. The Commission uses its accumulated information/data to assist member institutions facilitate change. Without question, the Commission is recognized as playing an important role in facilitating change among its constituents. The member institutions value the various publications of the ACCJC for the guidance and direction they provide, and the Assessment Institute is a very popular resource for college staff development and expertise in measuring effectiveness. Staff is viewed as being responsive to all requests for

assistance. The majority of colleges would like to see the ACCJC develop more systems that link institutions with sources of information about best practices and mechanisms to facilitate change.

8. The Commission achieves a balance between being the evaluator of institutionally determined quality vs. being the impetus for institutional change. The Commission is primarily an evaluator of quality as described in the standards. The evidence demonstrates that the Commission's procedures are heavily weighted in favor of "evaluator of institutionally determined quality." This emphasis is further supported by recommendations being diagnostic rather than prescriptive. There is, however, much sentiment among institutions that the Commission increase its role as leader, catalyst, and resource for change.

9. The Commission demonstrates leadership to its member institutions by providing information pertinent to changing educational conditions and future trends. The Commission has responsibility to develop and maintain a set of standards that establishes criteria for assuring quality and for encouraging institutional improvement, which requires a set of activities that extend beyond compliance. At present, the Commission helps institutions improve effectiveness through the Assessment Institutes, articles in the quarterly newsletters, presentations at professional conferences, support for the creation of the Community College Leadership Development Institute (CCLDI), and the adoption of various policy statements and principles of good practice. As noted in other purpose synopses, member institutions desire ACCJC to take a proactive role in promoting change. One way to do this would be to provide a series of Best Practices on the website with referral information on related resources. Using the Assessment Institute as a model, conferences on quality issues would be helpful to member institutions.

Areas for further study The External Review Committee addressed three areas of particular concern for ACCJC; they are Distance Learning, Technical Support, and Alternate Approach to Accreditation.

The growth and complexities of Distance Learning require special consideration as the standards are reviewed. The ACCJC prepared a set of Guidelines on Distance Learning to assist interested parties in addressing accountability and quality issues. However, the current standards related to Distance Learning are somewhat narrow in focus and need to have higher visibility throughout all appropriate standards.

Although the 1994 External Review Report recommended the use of a Management Information Systems (MIS) grid for common data collection, its implementation is flawed for a variety of reasons. The 2001 External Review Report suggests mechanisms for improving the collection of data to support preparation of the Self Study by all member institutions in the region.

The in-depth assessment of an Alternate Approach to Accreditation concluded that there is flexibility in the current procedures for an institution to try new models. At this time the

2001 External Review Report does not recommend a major move toward an alternate approach but rather the topic be revisited in the future.

Conclusion

The ERC is unanimous in its positive assessment of the ACCJC operations. It notes in particular that the reputation and quality of the Commission is due in large measure to the quality work, diligence, and competence of the staff, notwithstanding the commitment of the commissioners.

The ERC encourages the Commission to be equally vigilant in its oversight of both accountability and improvement of community and junior colleges.

COMMENDATION

The Executive Director, Associate Director, and Assistant Director are commended for their knowledge and leadership in addressing and influencing national issues surrounding accreditation and for their availability and strategic communication which provide help in resolving institutional tensions related to accreditation.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations and suggestions of the External Review Committee, based upon the extensive study of the policies, processes, and activities of ACCJC, fall into three major themes or categories: Increased Funding; Extended and/or Enhanced Components in the Accreditation Process; and Improved Assessment Systems, Data, and Outcome Identification/Measurement.

I. Increased Funding

In order to sustain current levels of service to the field and to respond to important related opportunities, the ACCJC needs additional and consistent funding. Clearly, there is an immediate need to increase staffing to meet the expectations for reports and the logistics required to carry out the functions of the Commission and to support improvement and expansion of services desired by member institutions; such as, an annual conference on quality issues and increased Commission participation in conferences and meetings in the field. Increased staffing would allow greater involvement in the Self Study and Team Visit, which would improve consistency and quality of reports. Also increased funding would allow for enhancement of the website as a resource to member institutions and provide greater visibility for ACCJC. (See Purpose 1 and Purpose 7.)

RECOMMENDATION

Appoint a committee, which includes appropriate expertise and reflects the diversity of ACCJC constituents, to review the relevancy, adequacy, and methodology of the fee

structure to insure fiscal health, sufficient staff, and to provide the financial means for sustained excellence/improvement in the accreditation process.

II. Enhanced and Extended Components in the Accreditation Process

The conclusion of the External Review Committee is that the ACCJC performs its operation and leadership functions at an exceptionally high level, particularly considering the levels of financing and staffing. The Commission has taken steps to respond to needs of member institutions. Members could not expect more; however, there are additional services and improvements that are desired.

RECOMMENDATION

Use Project Renewal, including the External Review Committee Report, for strategic planning. To that end, consider appropriate improvements to the accreditation process, set priorities for their implementation, and estimate costs to provide additional services or enhancements. Identified improvements and enhancements, which are elaborated on in the Purpose Statements, include:

Improvements

- 1. Review the training regimen, including the use of technology. Consider additional use of technology in the accreditation process and for communication about the process.**
- 2. Utilize the results of the Task Forces (5), Survey on Standards, and the ERC Review of standards to make the standards more outcomes oriented. Integrate policy with the standards statements. Add suggested questions to the standards to aid self study and visiting teams in institutional evaluation. Add distance learning more prominently to the standards.**
- 3. Add to the institutional annual report questions that identify areas where the institution might be assisted, review the content of the annual institutional report so it is more focused on progress and change, and make it a more relevant report in the accreditation process for both the member institution and the ACCJC.**
- 4. When appropriate, use the flexibility available to extend the duration of the mid term and interim visits.**
- 5. Consider adding a new action category, such as, "Expression of Concern," that would precede or replace "Warning."**
- 6. Add to the handbook a Statement of Confidentiality that may be distributed to the media.**
- 7. Make the Assessment Institute and other conferences self-supporting.**

Enhancements

- 1. Include best practices and bibliographical resources on the website.**

2. **Use the Assessment Institute as a model for additional conferences on quality improvement issues.**
3. **Increase staff participation in visits and conferences.**
4. **Provide an Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) handbook, training, and annual conference.**
5. **Develop a handbook for multi-college district self study and evaluation by team members. Provide training in use of the handbook. Integrate district/system office self study and team reports into the Commission decision-making process.**
6. **Provide training for Board members and team chairs regarding the role of the Board in accreditation, especially in multi-college districts. (The 1994 External Review Report recommended, "The Commission should create mechanisms to better assure that governing boards are substantively involved in the accreditation process.")**
7. **Encourage the Commission and member institutions to make accreditation processes, reports, and actions more public. (The 1994 ERC stressed the need for public accountability and steps have been taken to communicate with the public.)**

III. Improved assessment systems, data, and outcome identification/measurement

To improve the quality of accreditation Self Study Reports, there is a need for institutions to rely more heavily on data for documentation. The 1994 External Review Report recommended, "A uniform 'template' (or common data format) should be developed for the reporting of basic data required by the accreditation process." The "Responses to the Recommendations from the 1994 External Review Committee" identifies actions taken by staff in this regard, but also notes that compiling institutional data and creating benchmarks are challenges given the diversity of the membership and the level of staffing.

RECOMMENDATION

Increase the use of institutional assessment systems leading to improved effectiveness. Review data sources to ensure they are appropriate for accreditation accountability and available to all member institutions the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Note Chapter on Technical Support.

IV. Alternate Approach to Accreditation

The 1994 External Review Committee recommended "The Commission systematically should experiment with the accreditation process." The 2001 ERC considered the Baldrige Award Criteria as an alternative system in-depth and does not recommend a change or extensive experimentation at this time. The ACCJC policy and practice provides an option for a special study based upon institutional request. This mechanism is adequate for experimentation. (See Chapter VI on Alternate Approach.) The staff is knowledgeable of changes being made in the process by other regional associations and collects data on special

studies, such as, use of a re-engineering model. As these new approaches are tested and refined, this matter should be revisited. (See Chapter VI, Alternative Approach to Accreditation, Conclusion, page 87.)



I. THE EXTERNAL REVIEW PROCESS AND REPORT

In March 2000, Dr. David Wolf, Executive Director of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), created the External Review Committee (ERC), including experts in quality assurance, as a component of the Project Renewal Evaluation Plan authorized by the Commission. The initial meeting of the External Review Committee was held July 10, 2000, with subsequent monthly meetings through February 2001, except December. The team is comprised of the following members:

Dr. Lois A. Callahan, Chair
Chancellor Emerita, San Mateo County Community College District

Scott R. Loring
Past Chairman, President and CEO, Heald Colleges

Dr. Angela Meixell
Provost, Windward Community College, Hawaii

Dr. Bill Piland
Professor of Post Secondary Education
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Contributing Member:
Alma Aguilar
Professor of Political Science, Southwestern College

Editorial Reviewer:
Dr. Carmen Maldonado-Decker
Professor of English & Humanities, Fullerton College

Staff to the Committee:
Dr. David B. Wolf, Executive Director
Dr. Gari Browning, Associate Director
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

The paper "Project Renewal: Evaluation Plan for the ACCJC" suggested that the team's work be informed by (1) analysis of the proposed institutional survey and ethnographic interview, (2) attendance at workshops for team chairs and members, (3) observation of and

participation in team visits, (4) study and observation of the Commission's work, and (5) extensive review of recent literature regarding the quality of accreditation. The team was also asked to review all Commission documents, policies, and processes. In addition, the ERC was asked to provide information in the following areas:

- A. Institutional attention to self improvement
- B. Efficiency of Commission processes
- C. Contextual review of standards

Executive Director Wolf informed the Chair, "The External Review Committee's mandate is to bring the various perspectives of its seven members to bear on all aspects of Commission operations." In the first communication to the whole committee, Dr. Wolf identified the specific role of the External Review Committee "to examine the effectiveness and usefulness of accreditation standards and processes." He said specifically that the Commission seeks thoughtful commentary on the important aspects of its operations, and specific recommendations for improvement.

At the first meeting, the "1994 External Review Report" was carefully reviewed. At the second meeting the Executive Director provided a follow-up report entitled, "Responses to the Recommendations from the 1994 External Review Committee." Subsequently he also provided a report entitled, "The Current Context for Regional Accreditation." Both of these papers are included in the 2001 External Review Report.

The team established a purpose and process for its review, which resulted in a set of criteria for examining the effectiveness and usefulness of the standards and processes of the Commission. The External Review Committee deliberated and agreed upon the following purpose and criteria for use in its evaluation.

The 2001 External Review Committee determined its purpose to be assessment of whether or not the Commission:

1. Operates usefully and effectively.
2. Impacts positively and improves the quality of the accreditation process through its activities.
3. Helps member institutions improve quality through the Standards, Self Study, and Team Reports.
4. Makes decisions that are fair and meaningful.
5. Sets standards that are clear, appropriate, consistent, and sufficient to measure and communicate quality and accountability.
6. Responds adequately to issues and tensions surrounding accreditation.
7. Uses its accumulated information/data to assist member institutions facilitate change.
8. Achieves a balance between being the evaluator of institutionally determined quality vs. being the impetus for institutional change.
9. Provides leadership to its member institutions regarding information pertinent to changing educational conditions and future trends.

The ERC designed its study to evaluate whether or not the Commission meets the nine evaluation criteria stated in the purpose of the review, which is distinct and separate from the ACCJC Purpose Statement (See Appendix A). To make a comprehensive assessment of the Commission's achievement of the review criteria, team members conducted the following activities:

Visits to the central office to review documents, policies, handbooks, and processes, including the operating budget. (4)

Observations of the Commission at work (3)

Observation of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Board meeting

Participation in training sessions for team chairs, assistants and members (3)

Participation in midterm and regular team visits (3)

Attendance at campus Self Study assistance and orientation sessions (2)

Attendance at Assessment Institute

Participation in Hawaii executive staff debriefing

Presentation of analysis and review of surveys (Ethnographic Interviews, Standards Survey, and *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*)

Interviewed Commission members and national professional leaders in the field of accreditation (18 questions)

Review of Commission Self Evaluation

Interviewed four CEOs at Institutions under sanction

Review of the Responses to the 1994 External Review

Review of the literature

Assessment of the current standards

Discussion regarding issues surrounding accreditation

All information and data gathered from the study activities were discussed by the full ERC. Written reports and documentation of the above-listed ERC activities are available in the ACCJC office. Individual members were assigned to each criterion for the purpose of in-depth assessment and preparation of a draft evaluation statement which was reviewed by a second committee member and submitted to the entire committee for feedback and consensus.

The report of the 2001 External Review Committee includes commentary, assessment of criteria Nos. 1-9 above, and recommendations for areas of improvement and enhancement. The term "Commission" refers to the ACCJC itself and staff representation of its policies and activities.

The ERC is exceedingly grateful for the support provided by the ACCJC Executive Director and Associate Director throughout the entire process. The ERC is also indebted to Dr. Carmen Maldonado Decker, Professor, Fullerton College and former Commissioner, for reviewing the final draft of the 2001 Report.



II. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT OF ACCREDITATION

A report from the Executive Director

As the Commission itself, the External Review Committee, the Editorial Board, and the Standards Task Forces and others conduct the work of Project Renewal, the current network of forces impacting upon regional accreditors generally, and the ACCJC in particular, should be kept clearly in mind. The purpose of this paper, which has been modified and extended in response to comment, is to outline these forces, organizing them in a useful manner. The ultimate intent is to develop an outline which will both inform those participating in this most important effort, and ultimately help serve as an important reference to determine the extent to which the Project has recognized the salient forces shaping quality in higher education today.

FRAMEWORK

The complexity of issues facing regional accreditors is increasing. When the ACCJC last undertook a comprehensive review, the major contextual themes had to do with federal regulation, increasing pressure for outcome measures, globalization, distance learning, and public accountability. All of these issues continue but have become more elaborate. In addition, there are specific issues that today spur change in accreditation directly that did not exist in the mid-1990's. For purposes of discussion, the context for accreditation at the beginning of the 21st century is organized around those issues that emanate from higher education institutions, those that emanate from the government and nationally based organizations, and those that emerge from the accreditors themselves.

INSTITUTION-BASED CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

The Learning Paradigm and the Competency Movement: "Learning centeredness" can be considered the defining issue of these times. It has taken center stage in most strategic discussions of institutional (and programmatic) accreditation. While discussion about moving collegiate focus from teaching to learning is not a new idea, colleges have typically been slow to operationalize such a shift. A big part of the reason for this is that an emphasis on learning strongly implies the assessment of learned competencies. Indeed, in its purest form, these competencies displace "seat time" as a figure of merit in defining the requirements for certifications, including the degree. Adjustments like these are very complex and the accreditation and quality assurance issues associated with them are many.

With the advancement of the "Learning Paradigm" has come increased emphasis on the assessment of the learning that takes place as a result of particular institutional efforts. Some success has been achieved in the advancement of these measures at the course level, but this is less the case at the program (major) and degree level (note also the discussion on Effectiveness and Accountability, below). Additional measurement problems are created when an institution employs measures of "competency" in assessing learning, as opposed to grades for seat time. Comparison or conversion of measures of achievement between "competency" and "credit hour" systems has yet to be commonly accepted.

The assessment of “prior learning” is a related matter. Enhancing systems which evaluate the entering students level of advancement and preparedness for instruction in a particular program (particularly some vocational programs) is a matter of some currency. Given increasing numbers of more mature students, returning to college to obtain rather specific learning goals, it is likely to be of even greater importance in coming years.

Effectiveness and Accountability: With the release of the ACCJC Standards of 1996, effectiveness received new attention. Our standards joined other forces calling for accountability through the improved specification of institutional objectives and especially learning outcomes for students. Colleges have clearly made good faith efforts to respond to these pressures though no institution can be said to have done so in a fully adequate manner. There is much yet to be done on developing the state of this art. While the locus of pressure for accountability continues to emanate from sources external to the institutions (the states, the federal government, student interest groups), the institutions themselves are increasingly engaged internally in substantial responses. Colleges are now asking much more sophisticated questions pertaining to measures and assessment, and the accrediting community should be playing an active role to assist.

Strategically, the initial emphasis on institutional effectiveness has focused on building the capacity to assess institutional performance. Some institutions are now ready to establish performance bench marks with the intent to “raise the bar” over time. The Commission needs to be prepared to work with institutions that reflect a very wide range of sophistication, but lend more emphasis to those institutions that have developed the capacity and now are using this capacity to define specific effectiveness goals.

Distance Education: Throughout the nation traditionally organized institutions have diversified the methods they employ to deliver educational programs. The technology-based diversification of instructional delivery that began with instructional television has been mightily impacted by the world wide web and the Internet. While television is still a very popular delivery method, the computer-based devices are by far the fastest growing element. Even as the computer has captured the imagination of students and faculty, its use in instructional delivery has raised a number of new questions regarding quality assurance. Assuming the effectiveness of computer-based delivery systems, the necessity for appropriate instructional and student support services delivered at a distance arises. As well, student readiness for use of higher forms of technology must also be determined. Distance education raises other quality issues which will be discussed below.

Virtual Libraries and Information Literacy: The nature of information storage and access is changing rapidly in our institutions. For most students and faculty the training necessary to conduct electronic information searches and retrieve the information sought is now essential. Establishing institutional expectations in this regard and providing appropriate training opportunities is an institutional quality issue.

Faculty Roles: The impact of instructional technology on campus (as distinct from distance education but including distance education) is leading, in many cases, to a redefinition of the role(s) of faculty. While this has been most clearly dramatized by some of the “new providers” (e.g., Western Governors University, Jones International University) many of our traditional institutions are re-contouring faculty responsibilities in similar ways. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as “unbundling” of traditional faculty roles and establishes specialties such as academic advising, program design, course development, instructional delivery and assessment; circumstances now exist where persons considered faculty spend all of their time in one of these specialties. Clearly, these changes have implications for accreditation standards in a number of dimensions.

Other matters have to do with part time faculty. One has to do with simply the proportion of institutional instruction that is supplied by part time faculty. The second matter has to do with the equity of support provided to part time as opposed to full time faculty (office space, computers, development opportunities, etc.). A third dimension relates to unbundling; in some cases institutions may be defining their full time faculty core in a unique manner and employing significant numbers or exclusively adjunct personnel to fulfill some faculty responsibilities. All of these matters can have quality implications.

Student Attendance Patterns: The transfer of student credits has become a more significant issue in recent years. No doubt in part due to resource limitations in higher education, course availability for students has made timely degree completion more difficult and for community college students work obligations are commonly an additional personal scheduling issue. As a result, students are more commonly taking credits from more than one institution as they seek to complete degrees. This has made more significant the transfer procedures that institutions employ when deciding whether to receive credit that a student has earned elsewhere. Also noted should be pressure from nationally accredited institutions who have expressed, with increasing energy, their concern that regionally accredited institutions heavily emphasize regional accreditation when accepting credit earned elsewhere. Equity to transferring students is a matter deserving additional attention.

Major change in occupational settings requires, in many cases, individuals to return to student status from time to time during their careers. Community colleges seem to be particularly well suited to meet these needs, even for persons with baccalaureate or advanced degrees. Both attention to the preparation of students for lifelong learning and providing appropriate pedagogy and support services may be a quality issue in many institutions.

Student Diversity/Affirmative Action: The ACCJC has clear expectations with regard to diversity issues. Historically, institutions aligned affirmative action plans with some of these diversity matters. In recent years formal affirmative action systems have waned in significance, somewhat heightening the prominence of accreditation standards on this issue. Revisiting diversity in the standards will be an important but sensitive undertaking.

Efficiency Issues: Especially in public education, increases in enrollment are anticipated over the foreseeable future but proportionate resources are not likely to be available. Thus,

attempts to make educational service delivery more efficient are of great interest. One measure in this regard has been the desire of the four-year segments of education to concentrate remedial education elsewhere, presumably in the community college. Another attempt at increased efficiency involves the sharing of educational facilities in the form of "higher education centers." These facilities typically provide classroom and instructional support capacity for more than one higher education provider (frequently at the baccalaureate level) and are commonly located on a community college campus and/or managed by a community college. Third, evidence of concerns for efficiency is the increased pressure for system-wide articulation agreements to ease the transfer of students between community colleges and four-year institutions.

Technology: Previous mention has been made of technological matters as they arise in distance education and virtual libraries; however, technology is now a ubiquitous force throughout our colleges. This has impacted college policy and organizational structure. It is making new fiscal claims and requiring complex planning, both to take maximum advantage of new developments and to anticipate obsolescence.

Computer systems are becoming larger and much more complex. The necessity to undertake major system conversions from time-to-time can create circumstances that jeopardize institutional operations of every sort (administrative and instructional). Protecting the quality of institutional operations vulnerable to system conversion problems is a very practical issue of these times.

System complexity and regular system upgrades (and occasional major system changes) increases the need for training. This extends to faculty, staff, and students. The technology training required of the major campus constituencies may be different with regard to substance and delivery.

Where colleges are making major commitments to classroom technology, conventional faculty workload formulas may have to be revisited and issues of course and materials ownership may need to be clarified. Especially where asynchronous learning systems are involved (and especially at a distance), new issues of academic honesty and ethics now must be addressed.

Outsourcing: Contracting with vendors for items such as food and bookstore services has been a common practice in colleges for a long time. Now, a different sort of outsourcing is emerging and it is closer to the core operations of our institutions. Specifically, the provision of "portal," "platform," and instructional support services are now more commonly the subject of contracts. All of these services directly relate to the delivery of instruction, and thus failure on the part of a vendor could have a crucial impact on a student's experience. As colleges seek to achieve additional efficiencies, there is an attractiveness of new vendor relationships (especially in the area of student support services) that have so far not appeared in wide practice.

New Providers: We have noted that distance delivery technology has permitted traditional institutions to reach new student markets as well as serve their traditional clientele more conveniently. This technology has also spawned "new providers." These new entities are of several types and pose a number of significant challenges for accreditors.

Some new providers are not accredited organizations but can provide curriculum, frequently of excellent quality, directly to the student. In some cases, accredited institutions find delivery agreements with these providers to be advantageous. This is not a new phenomenon, but the extent to which accredited institutions are entering into such agreements is expanding rapidly.

A second type of new provider is the "virtual college." This organization is not traditional in that there is no campus to which a student could commute. Rather, all offerings and support services are provided at a distance. Some virtual colleges seek regional accreditation. While we have some initial experience (Western Governors University and the related InterRegional Accrediting Committee) with this kind of institution, there is still much to be learned about both appropriate standards and procedures in dealing with them.

A third type of new provider is the "virtual consortium." These are typically groups of accredited institutions who cooperate in delivering a broader variety of course and degree work than any single member could supply individually. To the extent that the degrees offered have been typically through the individual accredited entities, these consortia have not posed major accreditation challenges. However, recent discussions at the national level indicate that at least some of these organizations that do not grant a degree in their own name would nonetheless desire a means to discuss and certify the quality of their operations, and regional accreditors would be natural partners in this regard. Furthermore, at least one consortium offers a degree in the name of the consortium. Appropriate criteria and processes will very likely have to be developed for both such circumstances.

Time to Degree: As noted earlier, student course-taking profiles are complex and varied. In an environment of increased course-taking demand and of resource scarcity, the structure of course availability will be a continuing challenge. The ability of students to obtain the educational elements they need when they need them is likely to be increasingly important and thus a more significant institutional quality indicator.

Carnegie Unit (or Whatever): Relating to some of the new delivery modes discussed above and much experimentation in course structures is the viability of the Carnegie Unit (one unit equals one hour per week of lecture with three hours of out of class study for 17--or is it 16 or 18--weeks). In practice, one finds a great variability in the interpretation of the Carnegie Unit. Should measures of competency displace the credit hour or exist next to it, important questions regarding equivalencies and transfer conversion must be solved. These certainly represent instructional quality assurance challenges.

Custom Training: Community colleges have for many decades engaged in special vocational programs designed for particular employers. Increasingly, this programming has been done

under contract. While this phenomenon does not represent much that is new, it does suggest that added emphasis be given to institutional curriculum control and approval processes to guard against undue influence by purchasing parties.

International Education: The marketing of course work to foreign nationals is not a new issue. This very frequently appears as on-campus programs for other than American citizens. It has also taken the form of contractually specified programs for foreign nationals delivered overseas by American accredited institutions. Institutions now have the ability to market distance learning course work just about anywhere in the world. The ability to fulfill accreditation standards when supporting these various types of programs is raising a variety of difficult issues.

NATIONAL AND FEDERALLY BASED ISSUES

New USDOE Regulations: With the signing of the Higher Education Act of 1998, discussions began which have resulted in a new set of implementing regulations pertaining to federally recognized accrediting agencies. There are many changes in the new regulations (which went into effect in July 2000). Some simplified accreditation (the elimination of State Postsecondary Review Entities, the elimination of the "unannounced visit"), some added new emphasis (making learning outcomes a more significant priority in accreditation standards), and some new matters were added (requiring attention to litigation in which an institution might be engaged, gathering of specific data on all institutions and stating how this data is used by accreditors, specific attention to quality in distance education offerings). All federally recognized accreditors are revisiting their policies and procedures in light of these changes and will have to demonstrate compliance with them at the time of their next federal review (the ACCJC is scheduled to submit its next report in May 2002).

CHEA Recognition: The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) has recently developed its recognition procedures. These will require participation in both eligibility and comprehensive review phases. The first accrediting agencies are just now participating in eligibility reviews. The ACCJC is scheduled for review in fall 2002. CHEA recognition will also require a careful review of our practices and will be greatly assisted by our Project Renewal efforts.

National Initiatives: The U.S. Department of Education is sponsoring two distance education projects of special interest to accreditors. The Distance Education Demonstration project is experimenting with different ways in which federal financial aid can be provided to students through institutions that primarily deliver instruction through distance methods. At the present time, federal regulations do not permit federal financial aid through institutions that provide 50 percent or more of their instruction at a distance. The Learning Anytime Anywhere Project offers federal support to a wide variety of distance education experiments. Some of these have to do with specific technologies, some have to do with organizational arrangements internal to a traditional institution, some have to do with new organizational forms including consortia. From this project will come new possibilities and information and no doubt new accreditation challenges.

The PEW Charitable Trust has, for several years, focused considerable attention on regional accreditation. They have funded major standards and process revision experiments with WASC-Senior, and North Central, and Southern Commissions (they have undertaken a smaller project with New England) and have just funded a final project with all eight regional commissions at this time. The more precise outcomes of these initiatives are discussed below. Suffice to note here that these experiments have fostered significant departure from traditional accreditation practices and are "opening up" important possibilities.

ACCREDITATION-BASED ISSUES

Increased Interregional Cooperation: The eight higher education regional commissions have for many years met periodically to discuss matters of mutual concern. As recently as eight or nine years ago the necessity to meet proved very limited. With the Amendments to the Higher Education Act in 1992 and the ensuing demise of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA), this changed somewhat. The fashioning of a COPA replacement (eventually this became the Council for Higher Education Accreditation) brought accreditors together around this single issue. By 1996 the desirability of a formal organization to facilitate gatherings of the eight higher education commissions was discussed, and an initial retreat of all of the staffs of these commissions was conducted that summer. The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) was formally established in 1998 (consisting of the Chairs and Executive Directors of the eight commissions) and the frequency of meetings and the number and complexity of issues addressed by this group has been increasing over time. Having recently established common accreditation policy and procedures for institutions that have physical operations in more than one region, C-RAC is now working on common protocols for the review of distance education. Such matters as developing consistent protocols regarding assessment of student learning and recognizing accreditors in foreign countries could be on the C-RAC agenda in the future. Though the exact content of that agenda is not clear at this time, the likelihood of significant continuing cross-regional cooperation is considerable.

Technology as Employed by Accreditors: Even as technology is impacting educational institutions, so it is a matter that both makes more possible and requires resources and training for accreditors. Technology could impact the ACCJC in many ways; several examples have been under discussion by staff:

1. Making wider use of the website as a means of obtaining information from member institutions and perhaps others. The web has the potential to make both routine report submission and perhaps special surveys very efficient.
2. Making use of the website as a training tool. We have just launched a first evaluation team member refresher course on the web. This is a simple text-based effort, but offerings that include streaming video and perhaps web exchange with a staff member are possible.
3. Electronic data storage. We have been working on this for some time, and we are storing some self study and team report text in electronic form presently. In the future we would like to convert as much of our institutional files to electronic form as possible.

4. Data base consolidation. Relational data base software now make possible the consolidation of all the data that is routinely handled by our office. This has the potential to greatly simplify the maintenance of the information we use regularly (mostly the evaluator data base and various mailing lists).
5. Automation of evaluation team formation processes. This has been done with varying degrees of success by other commissions. It has the potential to both speed the formation and repair of teams and promote a more thoughtful use of our evaluator resources.
6. Commissioner text delivery. The time may not be far off when, rather than supply Commissioners with hard copy in preparation for meetings, the text could be provided either through a lap top computer and a CD or DVD or some similar system.

Some of these changes are probably feasible now, and some will await further technical and pricing improvements. Given the rate of new possibilities provided by technology, other useful ideas will certainly present themselves. Prudently adopting these opportunities will require careful analysis.

Extended Services: In general regional accreditors are working more closely with member institutions than ever before. More extensive interaction in gathering and disseminating information from institutions, and offering self study and other report preparation assistance are conventional ways in which service is being extended. However, more sophisticated types of consultation in such areas as learning outcomes measurement and bench-marking are under consideration by some commissions. Providing accreditation services to non-American institutions is another service that some are already providing. These additional services are, in many cases, intended to be a source of additional revenues.

Competition: While no significant case has emerged yet, new accrediting organizations can be created at any time to meet needs that are not being filled or not being properly filled. The current array of federally recognized regional, national, and specialized accrediting bodies has been stable for many years. Some, for example, have suggested that virtual institutions would likely warrant an accreditation agency contoured to their type of institution. Others have mentioned the possibility of accreditors from other nations doing work in the United States.

Public Disclosure: Most federally recognized accreditors have taken steps over the last several years to provide more public access to accreditation information (the ACCJC has done so as well). Self studies, interim reports from institutions, evaluation team reports, and action letters continue to be considered privileged documents by most accreditors. In the future there will likely be continued calls for increased "transparency," and finding a healthy balance between providing candid information widely while permitting institutions the opportunity to discuss problems in a manner that results in improvement will require some creativity.

Alternative Quality Assurance/Improvement Systems: Accreditation is an evolving art form. The focus of accreditation standards has changed over time (to institutional resources was

added processes and then outcomes). Now accreditation processes as well as standards are being scrutinized, and interesting new approaches have been developed and are being implemented. The North Central Association is encouraging its members to consider employing a new "Academic Quality Improvement Project" which is built around Baldrige Award type criteria and processes. The WASC Senior College Commission has adopted new more streamlined standards and a process that stems from "academic audit" practices. Both of these well funded and highly publicized efforts feature a strong emphasis on measuring student learning, organizational improvement, and more continuous contact between the institution and the commission. There is much to be learned from these and other efforts at reform and advancement. There is an interest on the part of several ACCJC member institutions in alternative models, particularly Baldrige type review.

CONCLUSIONS

Project Renewal is underway at a time in which much change is in the wind. Some of the contextual issues would have clear implications for change in existing ACCJC standards and practices. Others suggest significant possibilities. We find ourselves at a moment which would appear to be able to sustain change. The challenge now will be to find the appropriate actions that will both sustain the strong reputation of the Commission as a quality assurance agent, and provide leadership for institutional improvement by continuing to purposefully challenge member institutions.



III. EVALUATION OF PURPOSE STATEMENTS

PURPOSE 1

The Commission operates usefully and effectively.

BACKGROUND:

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges exists for quality assurance, to make sure that institutions meet minimum quality standards; to encourage and support institutional improvement; and to assure institutional integrity, making sure that the institution does what it says it will do and what it claims to do; in short, quality assurance, institutional improvement, and institutional integrity.

ACCJC accredits 138 member institutions. These include 7 Hawaii public institutions, 2 Hawaii private institutions, 6 West Pacific Islands public institutions, 107 California state public institutions, 14 California private institutions, and 2 other public institutions in California.

In a typical year the Commission's five-member staff will coordinate 25 comprehensive institutional reviews and 15 follow-up, on-site activities. The staff prepares all of the materials and documents needed for Commission meetings. The staff has also developed handbooks that are used by the institutions and teams. Each year the staff conducts numerous training workshops for those involved in the self study and evaluation processes.

In addition to an annual retreat, the Commission holds two meetings per year. The first part of the meeting is an open session during which the Commission operates as a board of directors and considers reports from organizations, discusses and acts upon matters such as eligibility requirements, standards and policies, and conducts its financial business. In the second part of its meeting, the closed session, the Commission discusses all business that pertains to institutional accreditation actions.

It is clear upon reviewing and observing these activities that the Commission does operate usefully and effectively.

EVIDENCE:

1. *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*

When asked about accreditation and Commission attributes, respondents ranked them all very high. For example, 99% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the orientation provided by the Commission to visiting team members was useful. Ninety-eight percent agreed that the handbooks provide effective guidance to colleges completing self

study reports. And 99% agreed or strongly agreed that the Accrediting Commission staff support, including on-site assistance, phone consultations, and email communications, was helpful. Ninety-seven percent agreed or strongly agreed that the orientation provided to colleges preparing self study reports was useful. And the author of, *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*, indicated that, "Respondents were happiest with Commission support."

2. Site Visit Observations by External Review Committee Members

Many of the members of the External Review Committee went as observers to the various workshops and presentations of Commission staff members. Without exception, their reports indicated the high value of these activities to the participants from the individual campuses. All activities were carefully planned and professionally executed. At the conclusion of each activity questionnaires were handed out regarding the value of the workshop, presentation, etc. The feedback from the questionnaires was then used to fine-tune upcoming activities. Thus, all activities of Commission staff are under constant review and evaluation in order to improve their effectiveness. As a result, workshops and presentations continue to get high ratings for usefulness, effectiveness, and satisfaction.

3. Team Training Workshop Evaluations

Statistics from the questionnaires were kept from the spring of 1998 through the fall of 2000. The workshops always received solid, positive ratings.

4. Self Study Workshop Evaluations

For these workshops, statistics were kept from the fall of 1998 through the fall of 2000. Once again participants rated the workshops very positively.

5. Team Chair Workshop Evaluation

In a recent evaluation of the Team Chair Workshop for the year 2000-2001, participants evaluated the workshop overall just under "excellent." In written comments, there were many positive statements about the format of the workshop, the content of the workshop, the materials provided, and the exercises.

6. Ethnographic Interviews

The ethnographic interviewers found that generally in the field the Commission has an excellent reputation. Both Commission staff and programmatic aspects of the Commission received high reviews. At the same time evidence was collected to pinpoint where specific aspects of the accreditation process could be improved. These appeared most often in the following seven areas: "Standards, Public information and public relations, Models, Team and/or staff visits, Commission decisions, Follow-up, and Training."

7. Interviews with Hawaii's Community Colleges

Five provosts and one vice chancellor from five of Hawaii's community colleges were interviewed using the same questions that were developed for the Commissioner interviews. All agreed that the Commission operates usefully and effectively. The Commission and its staff provided, "fast, efficient, and accurate information." The composition of the visiting team and the coordination of logistics were considered "exemplary." They felt the handbook and guide for preparation for the self study were very useful. They rated the staff as professional, timely, and supportive.

8. Interviews of Commissioners

During interviews with Commissioners by members of the External Review Committee, all of Commissioners indicated that the Commission does operate usefully and effectively. Although some people may automatically feel that Commissioners' views would naturally be biased, it was clear from the evidence that Commissioners are in excellent positions to be able to observe and evaluate the results of their actions and efforts. The Commissioners hold deep, positive convictions about education and were very honest and forthright in their answers. Without exception, they take their jobs very seriously and put in an inordinate amount of work to make sure that their decisions are accurate and fair. They are very sincere in wanting their efforts to make a positive contribution to quality higher education.

9. Operational Review

Information gathered from several visits to the commission office in Santa Rosa showed that operations currently run adequately. Both facilities and equipment meet present needs. However, there is a pressing call for additional staff to provide appropriate services for member institutions. There is also concern that future Commission budgets could soon struggle with the need for additional office space to accommodate this staff as well as the requirement to keep pace with ever changing technology upgrades. Since there is a three-year budget cycle, with constant fees, it is difficult for the Commission to pass on the accelerating costs of doing business.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

Although the Commission and its staff almost always received high marks, people who are participating in this review were also willing to indicate areas where there could be improvement. Remarks were balanced in that respondents recognized the high quality of personnel and work of the Commission but at the same time gave carefully thought out responses on how a very solid operation could still be improved in some areas. They were willing, truthful participants in the process of continual improvement.

CONCLUSIONS:

Clearly, the Commission operates usefully and effectively. Almost without exception, key

people within higher education institutions understand and appreciate the accreditation process and the role and performance of the Commission and its staff. Overall, the Commission, its staff, and the accreditation process are viewed very positively. However, there are still areas that can be improved upon and strengthened. Those areas and suggestions for improvement are found throughout this study.

The budgeting process needs to be addressed to provide adequate and consistent funds for good operations. Many times improvement efforts need increased financial resources. Staff is currently stretched to an extraordinary level and that can have a very negative impact in the long run. While the Commission is to be commended for its careful expenditure of funds, it should not have to struggle to make budget driven decisions. Operating usefully and effectively should include access to appropriate office space and equipment and sufficient and adequately compensated staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Increase staffing to meet the expectations for the reports and logistics required to carry out the functions of the Commission and to support improvement and expansion of services to member institutions.

Appoint a committee, which includes appropriate expertise and reflects the diversity of ACCJC constituents, to review the relevancy, adequacy, and methodology of the fee structure to ensure fiscal health and to provide the financial means for continuing excellence in the accreditation process.

PURPOSE 2

The Commission positively impacts and improves the quality of the accreditation process through its activities.

BACKGROUND:

The Accrediting Commission may often be described as an external peer review agency; however, in reality, the Commission has always provided a broad range of services to its member institutions. Through standards, handbooks, institutional and individual training, the Commission provides all the tools necessary for member institutions to conduct successful and productive self-reviews.

In addition to providing manuals for every aspect of the accreditation process (self study and report development, chairs, and evaluators), the Commission has a website that provides a wealth of information. Through the website one can access accreditation standards, policies, handbooks, and even an online, a self-paced training course for evaluators.

On-site training is offered to colleges who are about to begin the self study process. Training is mandatory for new evaluator team members, subsidized for repeat members if they need a refresher, and required again when Commission standards have been revised. Team chairs receive intensive training that they are required to repeat with each assignment.

In addition to group training sessions and published materials, Commission staff make themselves available to help member institutions at any point in the accreditation process.

EVIDENCE:

1. *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*

The survey showed that most respondents agree the Commission's orientations (97%), handbooks (98%), website (97%), and staff support (99%) are "useful" or "helpful" in the accreditation process (Table 1, 2000 Accreditation Survey Results). In the survey, and various other sources of feedback, those institutions that had self study training were particularly convinced of the value of Commission services toward their accreditation processes.

2. Observations of Self Study Workshops

External Review Committee members observed Self Study Workshops for seven colleges that were about to begin the process. After attending all of the sessions and informally interviewing participants, they observed the training to be "very beneficial and worthwhile." One commented afterwards, "the Commission should be commended for its support and assistance to institutions."

3. Observation of Team Chair Training Session

An External Review Committee member observed the 2000 Team Chair Training session and found that chairs were given a handbook that was extensive in content, with samples of best practices. They observed that the participants appeared to take the training very seriously, even though many were experienced chairs.

4. Commissioner Interviews

Members of the External Review Committee interviewed ACCJC Commissioners and national accreditation professionals. In all instances the respondents indicated that the Commission improves the quality of the accreditation process through its activities. This is consistent with the responses to the *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*, and the Ethnographic Interviews.

5. Commissioner Self-Evaluations

In the self-evaluations performed by the Commissioners, some of the highest ratings were in the area of "has identified stakeholders and understands their needs and perspectives." It is clear that Commissioners take pride in the way that "The Commission provides its membership with effective leadership and direction on accreditation issues" (1.25 on a 1 to 4, 1=highest scale.) And "The Commission provides appropriate guidance to institutions as they prepare self studies and other reports" (1.25.)

6. Ethnographic Interviews and Individual College Interviews

Ethnographic Interviews were performed at three colleges representing the spectrum of ACCJC accredited institutions. In addition, members of the External Review Committee interviewed representatives of five Hawaii colleges that had just undergone review, and two colleges that had received sanctions. The interviews indicated that most felt that the Commission's activities were helpful in improving their self study and accreditation processes. In particular, training sessions, orientations, sample self studies, handbooks, and standards were noted as helpful. The video, however, came up more than once as needing revision. One of the useful "training" experiences noted by many in the various surveys is the experience of serving as a member on a visiting team.

7. Office Audit

Members of the External Review Committee visited the Commission office to review all reports, written processes, operations, and internal evaluations. Included were the institutional annual reports.

8. Observation of Interim Visits

Members of the External Review Committee observed two interim visits and reviewed documents from an number of others. The observers felt that one case would have benefited from additional time.

9. Bibliographic Materials

Members of the External Review Committee reviewed an extensive bibliographic collection of materials. There were multiple comments indicating that Commission materials have been continuing to improve in their usefulness. The process of constant evaluation and change is commended, and it is desirable that it be continued.

10.

A member of the External Review Committee interviewed representatives from five Hawaii colleges, all of whom had recently completed an accreditation cycle. They were unanimous in agreeing that the Commission helps institutions to improve quality. One commented, "The standards provide a vehicle for objectivity and uniformity in evaluating colleges, particularly those in a system."

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

Just as accredited institutions are asked to conduct an in-depth study on a regular basis, the Commission leads by example. It is vigilant in evaluating and adapting all of its activities for constant improvement. For example, participants at every training session are asked to provide feedback for quality improvement. Training sessions are provided to institutions that will be undergoing accreditation, team chairs and team assistants, and team members. An orientation and a mentor are provided for new Commissioners. Every five to six years, the Commission establishes a process for major external and internal review of the Commission, including the handbook and standards for the self study, and operations.

CONCLUSIONS:

The External Review Committee found significant evidence that the Commission, through its staff and services, positively impacts and improves the quality of the accreditation process. From training to guidebooks, from workshops to individual staff responses, every activity of the Commission's work is directed at assisting colleges with accreditation processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Commission should consider the following improvements and enhancements to the visit and review process.

Improvements

- **integrate policy references within the standards.**
- **clarify the role of the accreditation liaison officers, and provide them with training and a handbook.**
- **create a mechanism to familiarize board members with their role in accreditation.**

Enhancements

- **expand institutional annual reports to include significant innovations, best practices, and identification of areas where the institution is seeking assistance from the Commission.**
- **review and update the videos used in training.**
- **extend the time for midterm and interim visits to 1.5 or 2 days when appropriate.**

PURPOSE 3

The Commission helps institutions improve quality through the Standards, Self Study, and Team Reports.

BACKGROUND:

The External Review Committee sought to assess the effectiveness of institutional improvement as it relates to the quality of the Standards, the process of the Self Study, and the ensuing Team Reports. The Committee reviewed many documents, interviewed Commissioners, and observed both midterm and comprehensive team visits to colleges.

Purpose 3 focuses more closely on the concept of “helps institutions improve quality” as the standard of performance than the general nature and systems of the Standards, Self Study, or Team Reports themselves. For example, there is a separate “Standards Assessment Survey” that addresses respondents’ opinions on specific sub-parts of the standards.

EVIDENCE:

1. *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*

The survey responses regarding the standards produced positive agreement between 90 to 95% for “clarity” (Table 7b) and “comprehensiveness” (Table 7c). As regards institutional quality improvement, the survey indicated that the process is effective in “maintaining quality” with a 96% agreement (Table 1). As regards usefulness of the accreditation process for quality improvement (Table 3), there were ranges of responses in 24 categories that reflect an uneven benefit. This range is reflected in a high useful percentage of 93% for “Reviewing/updating college mission and goals” to a low percentage of 40% for “Developing measures of effectiveness that are useful at the program level”. Table 3 – *Accreditation Impact*, delineates areas where the usefulness of accreditation in the quality improvement is not effective or only moderately effective in specific areas. However, there was a 97% agreement that the process “identified important issues”, which colleges need to address, and a 94% agreement that the process “stimulates institutional improvement” and 96% agreement that it is “valuable to the college”. Table 4 – *Accreditation Response* indicates that 88% of the 633 respondents “moved to address the findings in recommendations to their institutions”. Table 6 – *Value of the Process*, finds that 94% felt that it “stimulates institutional improvement” and 94% agree, “The Commission’s accreditation processes should be integrated into the ongoing improvement systems of the institution” (Table 8a). Finally, 85% of the respondents felt that accreditation should focus on quality improvement regarding “an institution’s basic operating capacity to serve its students and require minimal levels of performance” as well as “the achievement of each institution’s unique mission as demonstrated through student outcomes, e.g., grades, transfer, jobs, and demonstrated ability to think critically” (Table 8f).

2. Commissioner Interviews

These interviews reflected a strong belief that the Commission's work was a substantial impetus for quality improvement. Some areas of concern, such as the **standards** themselves, are being presently addressed. The specifics of the comments will serve as a guideline of respondents' concerns to be addressed in discussion by the members of the Commission.

3. Ethnographic Interviews

These 38 interviews confirmed that member institutions value the accreditation process. Question 17 asked how effectively the Commission's services, processes, and materials assisted self-improvement. On the whole, responses reflected an appreciation of relevant impact on quality improvement.

4. Observation of Team Visit

The team visit observation used the college's self study and other school documents as their basis for analysis, observation, and evaluation. The chair directed the team members to focus on responses to previous recommendations and to validate the college's self assessment and conclusions using the **standards** as the benchmark of quality. The team was well prepared, professional, and knowledgeable and carried out its efforts in a collegial manner. The observer's conclusion was that this process carried out by the visiting team is at the heart of accreditation effectiveness and leads to substantial quality improvement.

5. Observation of Midterm Visits

Members of the External Review Committee observed two midterm visits by the Commission Teams. Their reports focused on progress made from recommendations received during the comprehensive visit. It was clear in both instances that there was substantial evidence of the Commission providing help in quality improvement. In one instance the observer related that the college "implied that the recommendations of the Comprehensive Team Visit were helpful in improving the college's processes". In another report the observer stated, "It was evident that campus members had put a great deal of work and effort into the Midterm report. Thirty exhibits were prepared and readily available for the visiting team. It was clear that all key members of the campus took the accreditation process and this visit very seriously. They cared for their campus, were concerned about the issues, and wanted to see improvement in all areas that were identified during the initial visit of the accreditation team several years earlier."

After reviewing other midterm reports wherein institutional planning recommendations were made, it is apparent that planning and evaluation methodologies are being given very serious consideration and that this heightened awareness is a result of quality improvement assessment and recommendations through the Commission's work. As one institution wrote,

“the midterm report provides discipline, focus, and follow-up to observe tangible improvement. We now systematically and regularly examine ourselves in all facets.”

6. Midterm Report Summaries

As a matter of policy, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges requires of its members a mandatory Midterm Report in the third year of the six-year evaluation cycle. Midterm reports are progress reports on the institution's responses to the team recommendations, their self-identified plans, and any focus which the Commission may request.

The most recent report (January 13, 2000) provided information that showed a strong indication of effort toward quality improvement as a result of the accreditation team visit and recommendations. The reports showed that colleges were “responding earnestly to recommendations and making substantive progress”. While the improvement progress varied from institution to institution, the reports consistently confirmed that the Commission and the process helped colleges with quality improvement.

The report also indicated that some teams continued to “issue very excessively detailed recommendations”. This criticism is a valuable self-analysis finding that underlines the Commission's mission and self-regulation awareness.

The Commission Action Summary for the past 3 years indicates a moderate reduction in institutions placed on Warning & Probation and a corresponding increase in Reaffirmation with or without Stipulation. These statistical percentages offer preliminary indications that the Commission is helping colleges with quality improvement.

7. Evaluations of Team Chairs

These evaluations provide grading and commentary on the team chairs by the people that compose the visiting teams to the colleges. The most recent (fall 2000) report indicates that of 106 grades, 93 or 87% fell in the “A” category with 9 or 9% in the “B” category. Among the six criteria for grading there is ample evidence of team leadership that stresses fairness and integrity of assessment, which would allow for institutions to recognize the objective effort to improve college quality.

8. ACCJC Commission Meeting Observation

The observer related that, “Institutional representatives from one college clearly affirmed that the team report served as a spark for immediate change” and “another institution was referred to as having been resuscitated by the persistent action of the Commission.”

9. Responses to Previous Recommendations

Every recommendation from the External Review Committee's Report of 1994 concerns quality improvement for the Commission to better accomplish its function. Indeed, the major theme of accreditation, along with quality assessment, is quality improvement. However, there are no specific recommendations from the 1994 report pertaining to "helping institutions with quality improvement" vis a vis the Standards, Self Study, and Team Reports. Related concerns that are still in the process of being addressed include:

- A. Lack of Board involvement in the self study and accreditation process
- B. Need to experiment with the alternative accreditation concepts
- C. Assessing distinctly different processes for compliance and improvement

As to the previous External Review Recommendations, the responses included in the ACCJC Staff Report of September 13, 2000, show significant acceptance and understanding of the challenges presented as well as considerable progress in addressing those recommendations.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

The foregoing evidence provides a comprehensive and appropriate picture of the positive impact that the accreditation process has on helping institutions improve quality through the Standards, Self Study, and Team Visits. While there are areas identified in the Survey and in the Interviews that require emphasis and attention, the Commission fulfills its mission quite capably and to the substantial benefit of its members. The Commission should continue to be responsive to the member institutions' requests and opinions as well as appropriate external research, proposals, or suggestions that would improve the process.

Careful consideration of *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*, Table 3 – *Accreditation Impact*, should provide the Commission with specific subjects to review for potential focus. The Commission would be able to decide which topics should be prioritized for improved results and to determine what budget and other resources are available for such focus.

CONCLUSIONS:

The Commission is to be commended for the quality of its effort and the corresponding results. The overwhelming judgment of the institutional constituents as reflected in *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*, other reviewed data, and anecdotal evidence implies that the Commission is successful in fulfilling its core mission of institutional improvement through the accreditation process.

RECOMMENDATION:

Complete the development of the Handbook for multi-college evaluation and provide training for team members and team chairs for these types of institutions, including attention to the role of the Board.

PURPOSE 4

The Commission makes decisions that are fair (consistent) and meaningful (valuable).

BACKGROUND:

The 1994 External Review Team reported a perception “on the part of outsiders that the Commission is reluctant to take negative actions, even when such actions appear to be well deserved.” (*Creating Itself Anew: ACCJC Faces the Future*). That perception may still exist, but to a much smaller extent. To ameliorate the problem, the Commission is making an effort to better publicize the actions that are taken. Without compromising confidentiality it is possible to let the community know that various types of actions with sanctions are frequently taken.

Among “insiders”, that is Commissioners, representatives from institutions, and others close to accreditation processes, the perception seems to be that the Commission makes decisions that are fair (consistent) and meaningful (valuable).

EVIDENCE:

1. *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*

The survey entitled *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2* showed that 72% of respondents believe that the Commission takes negative action when warranted, 19% believe that it sometimes does, and 8% believe that it rarely or never does. Relative to other outcomes from the survey, these percentages are low, indicating that some respondents do not trust the process. The survey also showed, however, that 88% of respondents found that accreditation team reports provided a balanced assessment of their college’s strengths and weaknesses, and 87% responded that accreditation teams are made up of “objective people”. (Table 2, *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*.)

2. Ethnographic Interviews

Ethnographic Interviews were performed at three colleges representing the spectrum of ACCJC accredited institutions. Most respondents were positive in their comments about the “appropriateness” of the recommendations and Commission action. At one college where there had been serious sanctions, several respondents indicated that the Commission “waited too long to act”. Most others, however, reported the sanctions to be appropriate and helpful.

3. Individual Institution Interviews

One member of the External Review Team interviewed representatives of two institutions that had recently received sanctions. At both institutions, respondents stated that the Commission had been “fair”; both also expressed some concern that their institutional models had not been clearly understood. Another External Review Team member observed a

second follow-up visit and asked campus representatives whether the team recommendations had been fair and helpful. The response was a definite and unanimous, "Yes".

4. Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) Survey Report

In a July 1999, Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) "Letter from the President", results are summarized of a survey of more than 1,000 adults. One of the questions addressed "What kinds of standards does accreditation require?" The "Letter" indicates that "a large majority of the public believes that institutions must meet moderate (34 %) or high (55 %) standards to receive accreditation." This would indicate that the general adult public finds accreditation to be a meaningful process.

5. Commissioner Interviews

Members of the External Review Committee interviewed ACCJC Commissioners and national accreditation professionals. Commissioners were asked whether decisions made were fair and equitable. Most Commissioners agreed that the decisions made are fair and equitable, "including taking negative action when warranted." Several Commissioners described the effort that is made to assure that fairness. (Commissioner Review Responses, Appendix B). Some concern was expressed about equity of decisions over time and the definition of terms. Another concern related to the influence of team chairs and report quality on decision-making.

6. Recently Reviewed Institutions

A member of the External Review Committee interviewed representatives of five Hawaii colleges that had recently undergone review. All affirmed that the Commission made "fair and justifiable" decisions. One respondent had served on a team that had made a negative recommendation and felt it had been fair and appropriate. Another mentioned awareness of a variety of lesser actions, such as follow up visits, and said that in all cases he thought it had been clear why the action was taken. It was noted that most actions echo the Self Studies. At least one college had an experience where a strong recommendation had resulted in positive change.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

Commissioners take the mandate of equity quite seriously and work very hard to make fair and justifiable decisions. They also look at "meaningfulness" to the subject institution, seeking to take actions that will have maximum positive impact. This may sometimes create a difficult choice between equity and appropriateness. As one Commissioner said, "The Commission really struggles to be fair. In areas where there is latitude, they try to decide which sanction would be the most helpful." (Commissioner Review Responses, Appendix B)

The Commission abides by a Conflict of Interest policy that specifically provides guidelines for fairness and avoidance of conflict of interest.

“Since 1996-97, the Commission has published an annual report which quantifies and presents Commission actions” (Responses to the Recommendations of the 1994 ERC, ACCJC Staff, 7/2000). This goes to a broad mailing list to inform member institutions and the public. The Commission developed a “Statement of Accredited Status” for member institutions to use to inform their public. It is expected that this increased notice will continue to assure acceptance of the credibility and equity of the accreditation process.

CONCLUSIONS:

There is strong indication that the Commission makes decisions that are fair and meaningful. The Commission takes this mandate very seriously and puts much effort into its accomplishment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Provide Commissioners with written tools to assist in assessing consistency in decision-making.

Review and possibly revise the levels of sanction and their terminology.

Integrate District/System Self Studies and Team Reports into Commission decision-making processes.

PURPOSE 5

The Commission sets standards that are clear, appropriate, consistent, and sufficient to measure and communicate quality and accountability.

BACKGROUND:

The External Review Committee sought to assess two sets of questions that need to be addressed with regard to this purpose. First, is the assessment of the standards themselves. Are they clear, consistent (both internally and externally), and appropriate to measure quality and accountability? Second, who or what are the audience(s) to whom the standards are intended to communicate quality and accountability and do they do so effectively?

EVIDENCE:

Data and other information researched to assess this goal included: (1) the Accreditation standards; (2) the Accreditation Survey; (3) the ACCJC website; (4) the California Assessment Institute; and (5) the MIS Matrix.

1. Accreditation Standards

The current accreditation standards are contained in the ACCJC *Handbook of Accreditation and Policy Manual*. For the most part, the standards are clearly stated, although some of them could benefit from editorial refinement. Others would benefit from a more comprehensive framing to provide a more balanced perspective. (See Appendix F for a more detailed review of the standards.) Examples are provided below:

Standard One – could benefit from wording addressing the outcomes it hopes to achieve, both at the institutional and learner levels.

Standard Two – could benefit from language in statement 1 (or in a newly added statement) that includes the responsibilities and obligations of the institution to its students, faculty, and administrators to balance the statement of responsibilities and obligations of students.

Standard Three – could benefit from sharpening the language to better communicate that clear criteria should be developed to guide research and evaluation of the extent to which the institutional mission is being achieved and that evaluation is used to improve programs, services, and practices/policies.

Standard Four – could benefit from additional language assuring that criteria have been developed for certifying that students have achieved learning outcomes for degree and certificate programs (B.3); and that students completing the general education program demonstrate the designated competencies (C.4). The standard as currently worded implies that it addresses collegiate-level courses that lead to designated competencies only, yet the subsequent text addresses both credit and non-credit courses (D.6). Higher education generally does not consider non-credit courses to be collegiate level. Refinements should be made to the language to indicate that all

courses offered, both collegiate (credit) and non-collegiate (non-credit, developmental, remedial) should lead to student acquisition of designated competencies.

Standard Five – is quite clear.

Standard Six – is quite clear.

Standard Seven – is clear but perhaps somewhat awkwardly worded. It might be more concisely stated without losing any of its intent.

Standard Eight – is quite clear.

Standard Nine – is clearly stated and understandable. In the enumerated text that follows, the standard may benefit from clarification that financial control mechanisms should be incorporated, not just created (B.1).

Standard Ten – is clearly stated. The enumerated sections that follow the standard, however, would benefit from editing to reflect the dual existence of single college governing boards and multi-college district governing boards (which are typical in the California Community Colleges).

2. Accreditation Survey

Sixty-one to seventy-two percent of respondents to the survey evaluating the ACCJC indicated that current standards are “very appropriate” for assessing quality, particularly the quality of educational programs (Table 7A). More than half of all respondents (50% to 66%, Table 7B) felt that current standards are very clearly stated. Standard Three (Institutional Effectiveness) was reported to be the least clearly stated standard with only 50% rating it as very clearly stated. Over 50% of respondents indicated that the current standards are comprehensive in their coverage of quality related areas of institutional performance (Table 7C). However, only 46% indicated that current standards are very comprehensive in coverage of institutional effectiveness measures and only 49% felt that way about coverage of governance and administration matters.

3. ACCJC Website

The ACCJC website is well designed and contains very useful information on not only the standards themselves but also (1) Commission policies designed to insure quality and spur quality improvements; (2) the Commission’s commitment to communicate to the general public accreditation actions and “enhance confidence in institutions of higher education”; (3) Commission principles that encourage institutions to disclose more information about their effectiveness; and (4) a listing of all institutions accredited by the Commission, including the initial date of institutional accreditation, the date of most recent accreditation action, and the next scheduled date for accreditation review. The website is both comprehensive and informative to all who choose to access the information contained there.

4. California Assessment Institute

Through fall of 2000, there have been seven separate California Assessment Institutes attended by hundreds of participants representing a broad cross-section of the colleges that have received accreditation by the Commission. ACCJC involvement in this institute stems from Commission staff recognition of the importance of helping institutions understand the value of using data to address issues of institutional accountability. The Assessment Institute contributes to building a momentum among colleges to proactively work at improving their institutional capacity to assess learner outcomes and to elevate the priority assigned to assessing what happens with the students who enroll in the courses offered by the college. In addition, the Assessment Institute has been used as a means of helping colleges improve the manner in which they communicate with various publics about what they attempt and actually achieve with students.

5. MIS Matrix

The Commission attempts to provide helpful information and supplementary materials to assist member institutions to better understand and apply the standards to assess and improve institutional quality. The Management Information System (MIS) matrix, entitled *Reports for Accreditation and Accountability*, is a document prepared and distributed by ACCJC staff to colleges as an aid to those preparing for an accreditation visit or who were interested in focusing campus attention on issues of institutional accountability. The matrix provides a template with which institutions can bring data to bear in answering key questions about institutional performance and student outcomes. The matrix contains 64 data elements routinely collected by most community colleges that are then matched to various components of the current ten accreditation standards used by ACCJC. The data elements are derived from data routinely contained in the Management Information System of the California Community Colleges, as well as data required to be submitted to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) as part of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

The aforementioned evidence provides a fairly comprehensive illustration of the extent to which the Commission seeks to be clear in expressing the standards that are used to assess institutional quality and to use every available means to clarify understanding among member institutions. Feedback from member institutions suggests that there is broad agreement that the Commission has been effective in this regard. There is less compelling evidence that audiences outside of the member institutions fully understand the purposes of accreditation or the standards that are used to assess quality. This observation is not due to inattention by the Commission. Rather it results from the mystery associated with the confidentiality requirements the Commission imposes on itself. To partially address this fact, the Commission has adopted principles that urge member institutions to disclose information about its effectiveness to their various publics.

CONCLUSIONS:

The Commission has been open to critical self examination and revision of its standards and services to member institutions, as needed, to assure that standards are both clear and appropriate for assessing institutional quality and for promoting improvement. To the extent that resources permit, Commission staff have been open to offering additional services to member institutions to improve understanding and application of Accreditation standards. As a result of feedback from member institutions and the observations of the External Review Committee members, revisions to the wording of some of the standards are warranted to clarify the manner in which they should be interpreted in the current educational environment that has elevated the priority of accountability and use of technology to extend quality teaching and learning opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Underscore the prevalence of technology as a tool for improving both teaching and learning as appropriate in all standards. (See Appendix G, "Distance Learning," Conclusion, page 162)

Review the MIS Matrix and consider replacing it with a comparable matrix that relies primarily on data contained in the IPEDS system such that its utility would be more apparent to non-California institutions. (See Chapter V, "Technical Support," Conclusion, page 81)

Increase public communication of Accreditation standards and Commission meetings and actions.

Enhance use of the ACCJC website as an informational resource, including addition of references for best practices and bibliographic references for various topics pertaining to current educational conditions and future trends. (See Appendix G, "Distance Learning," Conclusion, page 162)

PURPOSE 6

The Commission responds adequately to issues and tensions surrounding accreditation.

BACKGROUND:

As a component of the ERC Report, Dr. David Wolf, Executive Director, prepared a paper on "Overview and Context of Accreditation," which extensively addresses the issues and tensions surrounding accreditation (See Chapter II). The contextual themes identified in 1993 continue to exist, but they have become more elaborate. In addition, there are new issues of the 21st Century. The paper elaborates on these institutional issues, which include The Learning Paradigm and Competency Movement, Effectiveness and Accountability, Distance Education, Virtual Libraries and Informational Literacy, Faculty Roles, Student Attendance Patterns, Student Diversity/Affirmative Action, Efficiency, Technology, Outsourcing, New Providers, Time to Degree, Carnegie Unit, Custom Training, and International Education. He further identifies and describes national and federally based issues, such as, New USDOE Regulations, CHEA Recognition, and National Initiatives. Other accreditation-based issues are explained as Increased Interregional Cooperation, Technology as Employed by Accreditors, Extended Services, Competition, Public Disclosure, and Alternative Quality Assurance/Improvement System. There is also governmental pressure to incorporate a function of monitoring regulations into the process.

On the national scene there is concern that the current emphasis on student learning could become a single lens for accreditation and diminish the assessment of quality on a broad base. Jane Wellman in "Accreditors Have to See Past 'Learning Outcomes'" argues that academic freedom, institutional commitment to the public interest and other important aspects historically evaluated through the governance standard in the traditional process should not be sidestepped. She also suggests that in the new model of accreditation, once an institution is accredited as long as it is showing effort it will be almost impossible to deny accreditation. Dr. Judith Watkins, former Associate Executive Director of ACCJC, has noted a dynamic tension between two roles of accreditation: certification that an institution meets accepted standards and quality improvement. The general public at large does not fully understand the role of accreditation in setting forth a set of standards for quality assurance by which institutions are measured to be "accredited" and the use of the accreditation process for encouraging quality improvement.

EVIDENCE:

1. Commission Publications and Conference Presentations

In the April 2000 "Accreditation NOTES" published by the ACCJC, Dr. Gari Browning, Associate Director, lists fourteen major changes facing institutions, all related to quality issues surrounding accreditation. She identifies the appearance of new structural forms of higher education and notes that "traditional" institutions are incorporating new approaches to respond to issues identified in Chapter II.

2. “The Eligibility Brochure: Requirements for Accreditation”

“The Eligibility Brochure: Requirements for Accreditation” spells out the core characteristics of an accredited institution and the Commission’s expectations of institutions to be considered for membership.

The staff frequently make presentations about the accreditation process and the issues surrounding it at various conferences. For example, Dr. Wolf was a major presenter at the Northern California CEO Conference in March 2000. Staff presentations at various Statewide and regional conferences are well attended; they have been particularly effective at the Assessment Institutes.

3. Standards

In carrying out its functions, the Commission has established a “Code of Good Practice,” both for its relations with institutions it serves and with regard to its internal organization and procedures. Every institution seeking and receiving Commission recognition is expected to abide by the standards and policies of the Commission as stated in the *ACCJC Handbook of Accreditation and Policy Manual, 1996 Edition*.

The addition of Standard Three made explicit the shift that was taking place in higher education requiring greater accountability for student learning outcomes and the concomitant emphasis on learning in addition to teaching. Through sponsorship of the Assessment Institutes and presentation of specific requirements of the Commission at these Institutes, staff introduced a greater focus on the necessity for and evaluation of institutional evidence in the self study and team training workshops. When invited, staff also make presentations on assessment and other quality issues at individual institutions. The now common use by self study participants and teams of the term “culture of evidence” was generated by staff leadership.

4. Commission Retreats and Interregional Meetings

Commissioner interviews revealed that they see issues and tensions in three areas: threats to fulfillment of their mandate, issues related to the perceived need to change, and attention to issues brought to the Commission by participants regarding participants and the process. The interviews with Commissioners specifically noted that their retreats provide opportunity to spend time on issues, such as, distance learning, quality and public policy. The ACCJC Distance Learning Guidelines prepared for the Commission and others by staff is an example of a leadership effort to stay ahead of the curve and influence the discussion.

The ACCJC Executive Director is an active participant and influence in interregional discussions surrounding issues according to national leader interviews. The Commission Self-Evaluation Results gave a 1.56 rating (1 being Strongly Agree) to the statement, “Commission interaction with other commissions is useful.”

5. Relations with Governmental Bodies

The Commission has sought recognition and periodically seeks renewal of recognition by the Secretary of Education in order that member institutions achieve and maintain eligibility to participate in programs such as HEA Title IV financial aid. In the event of clear evidence of Title IV fraud and abuse is obtained by the Commission, that information is forwarded to the Department of Education. The Commission notifies the Department of Education and relevant state agencies of all actions immediately following the meeting at which action is taken. The Commission maintains regular communication with the Department of Education and relevant state agencies. It responds to inquiries from government agencies and forwards response to complaints about institutions that have been routed to the Commission by those agencies. It also notifies institutions and asks them to respond if the Department of Education communicates complaints or allegations of fraud and abuse to the Commission.

6. Institutional Support

As documented by interviews with CEOs at institutions that have received sanctions, the Executive Director is known to be available and helpful when institutional tension arises during the accreditation process or because of Commission actions. Other interviews identified that the Commission provides both technical support and continued monitoring as needed as well as operates ethically and with fairness. In interviews with Commissioners and national leaders, there were compliments for the high level of professional demeanor, leadership, and for the work of the Executive Director and staff. One national leader noted that there is a long history of synergy between the Commission and the member colleges.

When deliberating or acting upon matters that concern specific individuals or institutions, the Commission meets in Executive Session and invites representatives to be present and participate. In all cases of negative action, the Commission will give the institution written reasons for its decision. The Executive Director attempts to reach agreement with the institution on a public statement to be used by both parties. However, the Commission reserves final authority in event of an impasse.

7. *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*

As noted in Purpose 4, an issue with regard to accreditation is whether or not the Commission takes negative action when warranted. As with the 1993 survey, the perception that the Commission takes negative actions when warranted is viewed differently among groups. Of a total 460 respondents to this issue on the 2000 structured questionnaire (Q2g) by employee category, those who checked "Always" ranged from a perfect 100% by CBOs to a 73% by CEOs to a low 66% among faculty. Of total responses, 72% responded "Always." (In general, CBO ratings were higher than other employee groups.) The Commission Self-evaluation Results on the statement "The Commission takes negative

actions when warranted” were a 1.75 rating (1 being Strongly Agree), which may indicate slight concern on the part of some Commissioners.

Another issue is the role of the Commission in change. The responses to the structured questionnaire indicate that the Commission is considered an important participant in discussions related to change. When asked if the Commission should participate in forums discussing and addressing trends, issues, and future directions for higher education, 74% indicated this should be a high priority; 61% of respondents thought a high priority should be Commission focus on being an advocate for, springboard for, and partner in change (2b). Sixty-one percent of total respondents “Strongly Agree” that the accreditation process identifies important issues, which colleges need to address. Seventy-four percent give high priority to Commission participation in forums discussing and addressing trends, issues, and future directions for higher education (5a). Clearly, respondents believe strongly that accreditation should focus on moving higher education into the future. The Commissioner Self-Evaluation Results of a 2 (1 being Extremely High Priority) on the statement, “ACCJC should focus on being an advocate for, spring board for, and partner in change” shows concurrence with the field on the role of the Commission in change.

With regard to communication, responses to the statement, “The Accreditation Commission staff support including onsite assistance, phone consultation, and email communication is helpful” (Q1e) was 99% agree. Ninety-seven percent indicated “Always” to the statement “The Accrediting Commission clearly communicates its decision to the institution.” In 4a, “The Accrediting Commission should increase stakeholder understanding of its mission and work,” 76% gave this statement a high priority. In 4b, “The Accrediting Commission should develop new systems of communication to better engage and inform member institutions and other stakeholders,” 70 percent gave this statement a high priority.

With regard to separating the institutional accountability and quality improvement aspects of accreditation, 51% of 552 respondents gave this item (1i) a low priority.

8. Interviews with Commissioners

The feeling of the Commissioners, based upon individual interviews, is that the Commission does respond adequately. One Commissioner said, “In our litigious society, the Commission must always be careful about the issues and tensions surrounding its action.” Commissioners felt the Commission responds adequately within the limits of confidentiality and without micro-managing. Most Commissioners agreed with this thought, “When key issues are brought to the attention of the Commission, they look at everything related to the issue and try to make fair and justifiable decisions on how best to respond to the issue.”

9. Interviews with National Accreditation Leaders

Interviewees verified that the Commission puts a lot of responsibility on the Executive Director in this regard; for example, dealing with new administrations and regulations. One

leader indicated the Commission is trying to respond to broad issues like evidence of learning outcomes, dealing with new providers and public accountability. She indicated that most folks do not want to move into the new arenas but that is not so with ACCJC.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

The ACCJC has gained a strong reputation for being a leader in addressing issues and tensions, and the Commission is extremely supportive of the Executive Director and staff in this role. Although the Commission has a variety of publications and constantly communicates about accreditation matters, a well thought out educational campaign might help the general public better understand the purpose, process, and actions of accreditation as carried out by the ACCJC and other accrediting bodies. The practice of jointly preparing news releases with member institutions on accreditation is a first step. Member institutions rely on ACCJC staff for assistance in resolving tensions.

CONCLUSIONS:

Clearly, staff is knowledgeable about issues and tensions surrounding accreditation as documented in publications and conference presentations. Not only do they identify the issues and tensions, they are prepared to be an influence upon them. Staff willingly and purposefully assist member institutions in resolving tensions arising from accreditation matters. Commission members participate in discussion and development of response to issues and tensions. The Commission has a history of confronting emerging issues, including federal attempts to make incursions into the process, through written and oral statements.

COMMENDATION:

The Executive Director, Associate Director, and Assistant Director are commended for their knowledge and leadership in addressing and influencing national issues surrounding accreditation and for their availability and strategic communication in resolving institutional tensions related to accreditation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

None

PURPOSE 7

The Commission uses its accumulated information/data to assist member institutions facilitate change.

BACKGROUND:

The External Review Committee sought to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the Commission regarding the timely transfer of information and data to member institutions to assist them to facilitate change. Data and other information researched to assess this goal included: 1) *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*, 2) the ACCJC website, 3) Institutional Self Study Workshops, 4) the Assessment Institute, 5) Phone help and referral, 6) Annual Report/Newsletter – “Accreditation Notes”, 7) Standards Review.

EVIDENCE:

1. *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*

The survey indicates in Table 1 – *Accreditation/Commission Attributes* that 98% feel that “Commission handbooks provide effective guidance to colleges completing the self study”. Another 97% state that the “Commission website is helpful”, 99% indicate that “Commission staff support, including on-site assistance, phone consultations, and email communication is helpful”. And 90% note, “the Assessment Institute is helpful in focusing institutional attention on measuring student learning”. In Table 8a – *Transformation of the Accreditation Process*, 88% of the respondents agreed, “the Commission should inventory best accreditation practices, innovative initiatives and benchmarks, and should share these items with the colleges”, and 84% felt “the Commission should develop systems that link institutions with sources of information about best practices”. Table 8e reflects that 72% of respondents felt that, “Accreditation systems should serve as a catalyst and support for change, innovation, improvement, and experimentation” was a priority.

2. ACCJC Website

The ACCJC (Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges) website is located at www.accjc.org, or it can be accessed through the WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) website at www.wascweb.org. This electronic resource provides information on the purpose and the process of accreditation, the ACCJC staff, the Commissioners, a list of ACCJC Accredited Institutions and relevant data on almost every aspect of self study, evaluation, and assessment. It also provides online training to keep experienced evaluators current.

3. Institutional Self Study Workshops

These workshops are conducted by the ACCJC staff to assist and to inform campus personnel as they prepare for the institution's self study process. Led by Darlene Pacheco, the Commission provides ample information concerning accreditation background: the purpose, the report, the team visit, and the entire process. Questions are fielded and clarification provided. This is one of the more routine services provided by the ACCJC and one of the most important.

4. The Assessment Institute

Concerns for the quality of undergraduate education have given rise to a significant national movement to assess student outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Assessment is really quite unique to each institution. These informational institutes provide an opportunity for attendees to benefit from speakers and material that address areas of assessment that may be problematic for colleges. Attendees are offered an opportunity to explore what assessment is, what outcomes are, and how assessment can be used to improve programs and institutions. Colleges are encouraged to develop a campus culture that emphasizes the accrual and analysis of evidence as an important value in its day-to-day activities. Through fall of 2000, there have been seven separate California Assessment Institutes attended by 1085 participants representing 284 colleges. One of the external review observers noted that the Assessment Institute...“contributes to building a momentum among community colleges to proactively work at improving their institutional capacity to assess learner outcomes and to elevate the priority assigned to assessing what happens with the students who enroll in the courses offered by the college.”

5. Phone Help and Referral

Two of the strong and appreciated traits of the Commission staff are the effort provided and the results produced for member institutions. The Executive Director considers the ACCJC to be a “service agency,” and the past practice was to have staff time allocated to allow for a rotating response to phone and email requests. A more recent and improved innovation is the assignment of professional staff to specific colleges so a relationship of trust, comfort, and understanding can be developed. The staff strives to respond to inquiries within a day's timeframe. Commission staff efforts are focused on providing information, data, forms and manuals, and answers to questions and concerns, along with help within the concept of “shared problems/shared solutions.”

6. Annual Report/Newsletter

The Annual Report provides an extremely comprehensive recap of the year's Commission proceedings including messages from the Chair and the Executive Director, institutional actions taken, the annual budget, and relevant operational undertakings.

“Accreditation Notes” is published and distributed quarterly. This communication provides member institutions with data and articles pertaining to current accreditation practices. It serves as one of the ACCJC tools to develop institutional awareness regarding quality improvement and potential changes in accreditation methodologies and processes to that end.

7. Standards Review

The standards are reviewed on a six-year basis to assess quality, clarity, and relevancy. Project Renewal has created five task forces that are responsible for the review and recommendations for specific standards. There was a Standards Survey conducted to poll the ACCJC membership. The External Review Committee offered suggestions and recommendations. Substantial review is in progress.

8. Interviews with Hawaii Colleges

A member of the External Review Committee interviewed representatives from five Hawaii colleges, all of whom had recently completed an accreditation cycle. They expressed that Hawaii and Pacific island colleges would welcome increased sharing of “best practices and models.” One suggestion was a periodic report that covers trends and issues emerging from the self studies and how institutions are coping with those issues.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

The Commission is recognized as playing an important role in facilitating change for its constituents. Their ability to address many issues and concerns put them in a position to provide key advice and information to facilitate quality improvement. An excellent example of the responsiveness to facilitate change is the role the Commission played in developing Assessment Institutes for its constituents.

With the strong conviction that colleges must internally make the decisions to change as it fits their mission and quality achievement, the Commission nevertheless provides substantial information, data, and guidance to assist positive improvement opportunity.

CONCLUSIONS:

There is ample evidence that the Commission makes great effort in providing information and data to its member institutions. However, there is minimal information for member institutions to access regarding best practices or other quality improvement methodologies or systems. Judging by the response to the survey as shown above and the strong interest of need related in the ethnographic interviews, the implementation of this resource would be an excellent opportunity for ACCJC to serve its constituents.

Due to resource constraints, both in personnel and assets, performance is impacted as with any organization. If budget resources were to increase as a result of member institutions

valuing additional and more comprehensive data, information, best practices, and solutions, then the Commission knows how to respond. It is clear that the Commission has and will continue to serve as a valuable catalyst for institutional improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Conduct operations that will make the Commission more visible to their members and the public. (See Appendix G, “Distance Learning,” Conclusion, page 162)

PURPOSE 8

The Commission achieves a balance between being the evaluator of institutionally determined quality vs. being the impetus for institutional change.

BACKGROUND:

The External Review Committee sought to ascertain the Commission's role in "quality assurance" and "quality improvement". Data and information that guided the Committee's work to make this determination included a review of standards, team reports, midterm reports, accreditation survey, and Commissioner interviews.

For decades the focus of most accreditation activities has been on quality assurance. While this accreditation role remains paramount, more emphasis is being placed on quality improvement emanating from the accreditation process. The Commission strives to achieve a balance between these two major accreditation functions.

EVIDENCE:

1. Standards Review

The ten standards that guide the Commission's accreditation decisions were reviewed by the External Review Committee. Committee members assessed each standard. While specific suggestions were made regarding each standard, it was determined that the standards provided the framework for the Commission to assure and improve quality. The standards are especially effective in determining quality.

2. Team Reports

A review of team reports demonstrated that visitation teams used the standards when assessing an institution's self study. Observations, conclusions, and recommendations made by teams were predicated on the standards. Each recommendation made by the visitation team was directly linked to an appropriate standard. These recommendations upheld the quality assurance role of accreditation and, in a general sense, provided direction for institutional change.

3. Midterm Reports

Overwhelmingly, midterm reports reflect the directions indicated in team report recommendations. The specificity of midterm reports varies in details of how recommendations were addressed. Primarily, the impact of team recommendations is reflected in the ways institutions identify quality improvement initiatives. In those infrequent cases when an institution has not adequately addressed improvement initiatives, the Commission, in its review of midterm reports, takes appropriate actions to encourage an institution to change.

4. *Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2*

Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2, the accreditation survey report, provided abundant evidence that the accreditation process is meeting its quality assurance responsibilities. Fully, 89% of respondents agreed that the process “provides quality assurance to the public.” Another 90% agreed that the process “certifies the institutions are meeting their educational objective.” The ten standards were assessed as “very appropriate” for “assessing quality” by over 60% of respondents. Finally, 85% gave “high priority” to the statement that “accreditation should focus on quality assurance.”

The exact same percentage (85) reported a “high priority” response for the statement “accreditation should focus on quality improvement.” The quality improvement role is viewed as important as the quality assurance role of accreditation. Further analysis, however, shows slightly less support for the impetus for change. For example, 72% of responses showed a “high priority” for “accreditation systems would serve as catalyst and support for change, innovation, improvement, and experimentation.” Finally, 62% of survey completers gave a “high priority” to the statement “the Commission should focus on being an advocate for, springboard for and partner in change.”

5. Commissioner Interviews

Commissioners recognize the balance between determining quality and being the impetus for institutional change and they are comfortable with the balance. However, some Commissioners were less clear about the impetus for change role. A few Commissioners indicated that colleges might focus on the process rather than the end result, when responding to accreditation team recommendations.

GENERAL OBSERVATION:

A review of the evidence illustrates the strength of the Commission’s long-standing commitment to the evaluation of institutionally determined quality. The quality assurance role is strongly reflected in all of the pieces of evidence utilized to support this purpose statement.

There is substantial evidence that the Commission is fulfilling its role as being the impetus for institutional change. The evidence supporting the quality improvement role, however, is not quite as compelling as evidence for the quality assurance function. Commission processes and actions have, according to the evidence, led to change and improvement in the overwhelming majority of institutions.

CONCLUSIONS:

The Commission has made substantial progress since its last review in striking a balance between quality assurance and quality improvement. The Commission is functioning more and more as an impetus for change for its member institutions. Some improvements in this area, however, are warranted.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Consider modifying the accreditation approach to better assist institutions in their planning processes leading to institutional change and improvement. For example:

- **Strengthen the effectiveness of standards by focusing them on outcomes**
- **Provide advice and assistance on institutional planning**
- **Support conferences, best practices, and information sharing among institutions.**

PURPOSE 9

The Commission demonstrates leadership to its member institutions by providing information pertinent to changing educational conditions and future trends.

BACKGROUND:

The Commission has a responsibility to develop and maintain a set of standards that establishes criteria for assuring quality and for encouraging institutional improvement. Encouraging institutional improvement requires a set of activities that extend beyond compliance with a set of standards. It involves recognition that higher education institutions serve a student clientele and community that is in a constant state of change. The ACCJC is one of three commissions comprising the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) and has specific responsibility for community colleges. Community colleges, more so than their university counterparts, are designed to be responsive to the postsecondary educational, career, and technical education needs of the communities in which they are located. Such responsiveness must also preserve the basic core of quality in institutional operations and program offerings. Monitoring educational conditions and future trends provides valuable information to institutional planning processes so as to permit orderly change.

The External Review Committee sought evidence of the extent to which the Commission seeks to provide a service to its member institutions by providing leadership and information leading to early identification of educational conditions and trends that could, or should, have an impact on institutional planning and operations.

EVIDENCE:

Available evidence reviewed in relation to this function includes: attendance and evaluation of the California Assessment Institute (CAI); quarterly newsletters; participation and presentation at professional conferences; collaboration with Community College Leadership Development Institute (CCLDI); bibliography of readings; and policy and context statements of national issues pertaining to accreditation (e.g., principles of good practice in electronically-delivered courses, etc.). A brief synopsis of this evidence is provided below.

1. California Assessment Institute

The Assessment Institute is an outgrowth of an emphasis on institutional accountability, particularly student learning outcomes, that has been increasing at local, state, and national levels. This emphasis overlapped a two-year public dialog among WASC Commissions and member institutions about ways to direct greater attention to student achievement among the quality standards used by the Commission to assess institutions. The Commission willingly joined community college researchers in organizing and sponsoring a continuing series of institutes that focused on using empirical data to document student learning and to improve

instruction. The Assessment Institute has become an effective way of assisting college personnel to use empirical data effectively as a part of a strategy to develop a “culture of evidence” on ways the college seeks to promote student learning and achievement. To date, seven Assessment Institutes have been held throughout the state, attracting larger numbers of individuals and institutional teams to each institute. (see Purpose 7)

2. Quarterly Newsletters

Once a quarter, the Commission publishes and distributes a newsletter to member institutions. Typically, each newsletter will include an article from Commission staff members sharing information and ideas they have learned while interacting with their counterparts in other regions, or a reprint of an article from an expert in higher education on a topic relevant to member institutions.

3. Professional Conferences

Commission staff have sought to maximize their ability to reach personnel of member institutions by attending, and frequently making presentations at, professional conferences, seminars, and institutes. By attending professional gatherings, Commission staff expose themselves to the most prominent ideas, policies, and practices in higher education. In turn, they are able to share this knowledge with member institutions, providing an informational resource that might otherwise not been available to them, or at least not in as timely a fashion. As resources permit, Commission staff have sought to meet periodically with their counterparts involved in accreditation activities, conferences sponsored by the Community College League of California (CCLC), the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC), conferences sponsored by the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE), and meetings with state and federal government officials. Member institutions are very supportive of these activities as reflected in the accreditation survey. Seventy-four percent of the respondents on the survey indicated that having Commission staff participate in forums discussing trends, issues, and future directions for higher education is a high or extremely high priority (Table 8e). Eighty-eight percent of respondents indicated that the Commission should maintain links to information on best practices (Table 8b).

4. Community College Leadership Development Institute (CCLDI)

Creation of the CCLDI stems from growing recognition that the leadership of member institutions will need to be substantially replenished over the next decade. The demand for additional leadership is both quantitative (in response to enrollment increases, resignations, and retirements) and qualitative, in terms of the knowledge and skills needed to be effective as an instructional leader and site administrator. A survey of accredited institutions of higher education within California revealed little focus in the state’s academic program offerings on the development of community college leadership. Given these findings, Commission staff agreed to assist community college chief executive officers in developing new program capacity to address this unmet need.

5. Bibliography of Readings

Commission staff maintain an array of articles, reports, and other publication listings that are made available to member institutions upon their request. External Review Committee members read a number of these references covering such topics as: alternative accrediting models and processes; principles of good practice in the delivery of distance education; institutional accountability; and federal policy options pertaining to alteration of the prohibition from participation in federal financial aid programs by institutions offering a substantial portion of required coursework entirely at a distance. Committee members report these readings to be quite informative.

6. Policy and Context Statements

The Commission has, over time, adopted a series of policy statements and principles to communicate to member institutions and the general public its posture related to emerging educational conditions and trends and the ways in which the Commission incorporates them in its review process. For instance, the Commission has adopted “principles of good practice in electronically-delivered courses” recommended by the Western Consortium on Educational Telecommunications (WCET), an affiliate of WICHE, in response to the growing ubiquity of technology use in higher education. All such principles and policy statements are included in the accreditation handbook provided to member and prospective member institutions and are readily available to the general public on the Commission’s web page.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

The aforementioned evidence clearly demonstrates that the Commission actively seeks to provide leadership to member institutions by remaining alert to educational conditions and emerging trends of import. Commission staff uses its resources as efficiently as possible to share new information with member institutions and the general public without overwhelming them with huge amounts of printed materials. In addition, several External Review Committee members have cited the knowledge and responsiveness of Commission staff as an informational resource that should not be overlooked. They have been quite responsive to committee member requests for information and assistance in understanding broad educational issues as well as nuances of the accreditation process itself. At the same time, it must be noted that human and fiscal resource limitations have limited the ability of the Commission to communicate more broadly the educational conditions and trends of which it has knowledge. The high level of priority given to this function by survey respondents indicate that ways should be sought to expand Commission capacity in this area.

CONCLUSIONS:

The Commission is fortunate to have attracted such a capable and dedicated staff. They have been diligent in their efforts to balance the responsibility for evaluating and assessing institutional quality with the responsibility to provide leadership and encouragement for institutional improvement. Their knowledge of key issues in education and their willingness to share that information with member institutions is commendable. However, given the rapidity of change in the educational environment, even more effort will be required in this area. The External Review Committee offers the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Seek the resources and host an annual conference on quality issues and attract major education stakeholders and consumers beyond member institutions (e.g., state oversight and regulatory agencies).

Seek external fiscal support to maintain Commission involvement in focused institutes, such as the California Assessment Institute and the CCLDI.

RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMENDATION

The Executive Director, Associate Director, and Assistant Director are commended for their knowledge and leadership in addressing and influencing national issues surrounding accreditation and for their availability and strategic communication which provide help in resolving institutional tensions related to accreditation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose 1

Increase staffing to meet the expectations for the reports and logistics required to carry out the functions of the Commission and to support improvement and expansion of services to member institutions.

Appoint a committee, which includes appropriate expertise and reflects the diversity of ACCJC constituents, to review the relevancy, adequacy, and methodology of the fee structure to ensure fiscal health and to provide the financial means for continuing excellence in the accreditation process.

Purpose 2

The Commission should consider the following improvements and enhancements to the visit and review process.

Improvements

- **integrate policy references within the standards.**
- **clarify the role of the accreditation liaison officers, and provide them with training and a handbook.**
- **create a mechanism to familiarize board members with their role in accreditation.**

Enhancements

- **expand institutional annual reports to include significant innovations, best practices, and identification of areas where the institution is seeking assistance from the Commission.**
- **review and update the videos used in training.**
- **extend the time for midterm and interim visits to 1.5 or 2 days when appropriate.**

Purpose 3

Complete the development of the Handbook for multi-college evaluation and provide training for team members and team chairs for these types of institutions, including attention to the role of the Board.

Purpose 4

Provide Commissioners with written tools to assist in assessing consistency in decision-making.

Review and possibly revise the levels of sanction and their terminology.

Integrate District/System Self Studies and Team Reports into Commission decision-making processes.

Purpose 5

Underscore the prevalence of technology as a tool for improving both teaching and learning as appropriate in all standards. (See Appendix G, “Distance Learning,” Conclusion, page 162)

Review the MIS Matrix and consider replacing it with a comparable matrix that relies primarily on data contained in the IPEDS system such that its utility would be more apparent to non-California institutions. (See Chapter V, “Technical Support,” Conclusion page 86)

Increase public communication of Accreditation standards and Commission meetings and actions.

Enhance use of the ACCJC website as an informational resource, including addition of references for best practices and bibliographic references for various topics pertaining to current educational conditions and future trends. (See Appendix G, “Distance Learning,” Conclusion, page 162)

Purpose 6

None

Purpose 7

Conduct operations that will make the Commission more visible to their members and the public. (See Appendix G, “Distance Learning,” Conclusion, page 162)

Purpose 8

Consider modifying the accreditation approach to better assist institutions in their planning processes leading to institutional change and improvement. For example.

- **Strengthen the effectiveness of standards by focusing them on outcomes**
- **Provide advice and assistance on institutional planning**
- **Support conferences, best practices, and information sharing among institutions.**

Purpose 9

Seek the resources and host an annual conference on quality issues and attract major education stakeholders and consumers beyond member institutions (e.g., state oversight and regulatory agencies).

Seek external fiscal support to maintain Commission involvement in focused institutes, such as the California Assessment Institute and the CCLDI.

IV. RESPONSES TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 1994 EXTERNAL REVIEW COMMITTEE A Report from ACCJC Staff

In 1994, the seven-member External Review Committee, selected for their expertise and independent judgment, wrote a report based on a review process developed by the committee. Committee members gathered information through a variety of means, including

- Interviews of policy makers and professionals of the committee's choice
- Direct observation of all types of training sessions
- Careful review of all training materials
- Direct observation of team visits to institutions
- Testimony from team chairs
- Direct observation and evaluation of Commission meetings, including review of agendas, summaries of actions, and Commission reports
- Evaluation of committee meetings and executive sessions
- Review of all documents, policies, and processes
- Direct observation of the work of the Commission, staff, and volunteers in meetings, workshops, and visits
- Attendance at related meetings: WASC, CPEC
- Review of higher education accreditation literature
- Review of the work of the previous external review group

The process yielded twelve recommendations in three areas:

- Past and Present Processes: The Current Context of Accreditation
- Public Accountability: Measuring and Reporting Outcomes
- The Capacity to Deal with Emerging Needs.

Although the External Review contains a long list of commendations, the list of concerns is presented in each area to provide context for their recommendations. This report represents steps taken by the Commission (in italics) to respond to those recommendations.

Past and Present Processes: The Current Context of Accreditation

The findings of the External Review are largely positive concerning established accreditation procedures, but the report lists the following concerns:

- The usefulness of accreditation is highly dependent on the extent to which it becomes an integral part of an institution's regular, ongoing process of orderly and accurate data accumulation, planning, and self assessment. The quality of this integration is quite uneven among the numerous and varied colleges which comprise the ACCJC membership.
- The accreditation process works better on some issues and institutions than on others. Specifically, peer review is seen to be more useful in improving planning and evaluation in both academic and student service programs than the more difficult areas of student and staff diversity, resource allocation, and staff quality.

- The accreditation structure is not as effective as it should be in involving governing boards in the process. This is a particularly serious shortcoming in some, especially larger, multi-campus districts.
- Good as the use of standards is, especially in providing a common basis for helping to assure quality among a highly varied group of institutions, over reliance on these standards—especially any tendency to give equal weight to all—can inhibit the ability of institutions to retain flexibility in defining their missions.
- There is a need to experiment with innovations in the accreditation process which are not readily achieved due to over reliance on evaluation by the standards.
- ACCJC and its process are too parochial, i.e., biased too much toward California, the public sector, and the customs and practices of the western region.

Recommendations:

1. A uniform “template” (or common data format) should be developed for the reporting of basic, institutional data required by the accreditation process.

Descriptive Summary:

The intent of this recommendation was to build even and consistent data on institutions for the Commission to use in reporting on public colleges. Beginning with the inception of the new Standards in 1996, Commission staff met with staff from the California Community College Chancellor’s Office to understand better what data were already being collected electronically from the colleges in that system. The goal was to assist colleges in using the data to address accreditation issues by arraying the available data around the ten 1996 Standards. A template of data types (the Management Information Systems [MIS] grid), especially applicable to the California public community colleges, was developed and made available to those colleges in 1997-98 through the California Community College Chancellor’s Office.

ACCJC collects information from its member institutions through an annual report. The report asks for data on program changes, new locations, programs and agreements for non-US nationals in foreign countries, and contracts with other schools or agencies. Required are data on fiscal issues including year-end operating balance, results of independent audits, and the college’s student loan default rate. Plans for significant institutional changes and distance learning offerings are also addressed in the survey. These data are reported in aggregate to the Commission in public session, providing an accounting of general institutional health.

Under the sponsorship of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the Common Data Project recently concluded. Its purpose was to collect information relevant to regional and other accreditors such that reporting by institutions could be made most efficient. One major conclusion from this project encouraged accreditors to employ data which institutions are required to submit to the federal IPEDS survey, reducing duplicative data development burdens.

Evaluation:

Given the diversity of our membership, devising useful benchmarks is a challenge. Compiling institutional data and creating benchmarks are also staffing issues for ACCJC. Partly because

of these difficulties, the Commission has not developed a template or benchmarks in response to this recommendation.

In the last three years, data relevant to accreditation has been available through the California Community College Chancellor's Office to the 51 California public colleges evaluated during that period. We do not know how many of those colleges have availed themselves of those data, nor how many have found the data useful in the accreditation process. Nor does the Commission use these data for reporting purposes. Making clear how to apply the data to the standards, not just identifying which standards relate to which elements, is crucial in achieving meaningful application. As our processes are now, they do not give this direction.

Beyond providing clear data application guidelines to colleges for use in their self studies, using the Chancellor's Office data elements has proved problematic. Issues ACCJC has identified include availability of data to member institutions not part of the California public system and currency of the data due to the time span required to obtain the data, develop a self study, and undergo an evaluation visit.

The annual report provides timely and consistent information on all of our institutions on a regular basis. A supplement to the report has proved useful in collecting detailed data on distance learning courses, and therefore could be augmented to collect basic data on institutional health and concerns specific to accreditation.

Planning Agenda:

In establishing benchmarks, ACCJC will first consider their usefulness in helping institutions support their assertions regarding learning outcomes with more than anecdotal evidence. To identify data elements and establish benchmarks, ACCJC plans to review what other regional accreditors are compiling and how they are using the collected data. Information from institutions that have established core indicators of their effectiveness will also be collected and carefully considered.

To evaluate the applicability of the Chancellor's Office data to accreditation purposes, the Commission will determine the number of colleges engaged in self studies which reference these data and the extent to which they find them helpful. The Commission will also ascertain which elements would be helpful to the remaining thirteen public community colleges in Hawaii and the Pacific and whether a similar data matrix should be set up for them. Consideration should be given to providing private institutions with a generalized matrix of clearly defined data elements, organized as they would apply to the accreditation standards. Providing the matrix may allow the Commission to require all of its member institutions to include the same data as part of the statistical description required in the self study.

Using the annual report to collect a modest amount of institutional data from all member colleges in a consistent form will be explored. These data would center around enrollment, budgets, and employees, for instance, and would provide some measure of institutional health to the public and to the institutions themselves. The form of these data could take its lead from

common accreditation practices, such as those established by CHEA. Employing the annual report in this extended fashion will commence in spring 2001.

Once data elements have been selected and benchmarks established, ACCJC intends to provide information to institutions on how to relate the data to their processes for institutional improvement. Our processes and training will include guidance on how to apply the data to the standards.

Documentation:

MIS grid

Sample Institutional Annual Report

CHEA Common Data Project Report

2. A high priority should be placed on ways to facilitate the flexibility of institutions to define and redefine their mission within the context of the uniform standards adopted by the Commission.

Descriptive Summary:

As the 1996 Standards were developed, care was taken to ensure their applicability to all types of member institutions, and members from all types of ACCJC institutions were included in the standards review task forces (i.e., small and large California public colleges, multi-college and single college districts, and private institutions). The resulting Standard 1, solely devoted to institutional mission, was established. That standard is designed to accommodate the wide range of institutions in ACCJC membership including Hawaii and Pacific Island colleges, private colleges, specialized colleges such as the College of Oceanering, and rural and urban colleges.

Evaluation:

We have seen some modification of missions under Standard 1, e.g., Cerro Coso College (a small public college) and Brooks College (a private specialized college), which suggests that the standard is operating as it was intended. Team reports often indicate that colleges are reviewing and revising their mission statements regularly. As further evidence, a wide variety of institutional types seek candidacy through ACCJC, including small religious colleges, small private technical colleges, and public institutions.

Planning Agenda:

All accreditation standards, including this one on institutional mission, will be reviewed by a task force with inclusive membership. Where there are overarching system missions, such as for the California public colleges, they will be accommodated. The standard review process will commence in 2000-01, and new standards will be released in fall 2002.

Documentation:

Standard 1

3. Visiting teams should include members from other regions, four year institutions, and/or high schools.

Descriptive Summary:

The intent of this recommendation was to provide broader perspective and to take advantage of successful practices in other regions, states, and segments. The Commission has not responded to this recommendation in a wholesale fashion. Instead, we have used a variety of evaluators depending on circumstances. For instance, the spring 2000 team that evaluated Heald Colleges included a member provided by the Northwest Regional Commission evaluator pool to assist with the college's branch campus in Portland, Oregon. The Deep Springs College evaluation team included a member provided by the WASC Senior Commission. The team sent to the College of the Marshall Islands, which has a program in teacher education, included a teacher training specialist from WASC Senior. In fall 2000, a team with membership from both ACCJC and WASC Senior will evaluate Northern Marianas College, which is seeking to offer a single Bachelor's degree program. Since 1997, we have been inviting a Hawaii member to participate on most teams that go to a non-Hawaii colleges to provide diversity as intended in the recommendation. We have also included individuals from the Schools Commissions on our teams and have supplied evaluators from our own pool to participate in evaluations for that Commission, WASC Senior, and other occupational accrediting agencies. Notably two of our evaluators participated with their counterparts on a ten-person team which visited Western Governor's University in spring, 2000.

In further response to the intent of this recommendation, Commissioners and Commission staff have participated in a wide variety of interregional activities over the last three years, including Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) conferences and meetings, Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) membership, interregional retreats, and the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). These organizations provide the opportunity for extensive idea exchange. Interregional retreats are expressly designed to foster such exchange. The Executive Director attended commission meetings at the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and New England Association of Schools and Colleges and visited the offices of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, sitting in with staff to discuss procedures of interest to us. He has also attended WASC Senior and WASC Schools Commission meetings. Additionally, Commission staff have participated on committees of and made presentations to these organizations:

CHEA Task Force on Common Data, Assistant Director

Interregional Retreat Planning Committee, Assistant Director

CHEA Statement on Transfer and the Public Interest, Former Commission Chair and Executive Director (See CHEA committee roster.)

Creation of general national policies on branch campuses and distance learning, C-RAC, Executive Director

Current C-RAC Chair, Executive Director

INQAAHE, Executive Director

North Central Association "Academic Quality Improvement Project" Design Task Force, Executive Director

*North Central Association, Task Force on the Baccalaureate Degree in the Community
College, Executive Director*

The ACCJC has joined all of the other seven higher education regional commissions in sponsoring a proposal to the Pew Foundation that is focused on developing better tools for assisting institutions to focus upon and measure learning outcomes. This \$500,000 has been funded and is newly underway.

Evaluation:

According to team chairs, including evaluators from other commissions and other states in the region on evaluation teams has at least provided the opportunity for greater diversity of perspective in the evaluation process. Persons who have participated from these commissions and locations have commented on the desirability of being included in these activities, the primary reason being the channel for the exchange of accreditation experience, and the opportunity to connect with professionals with similar interests. These advances come with a price tag, both with respect to some direct expenses absorbed by the institution, and indirect costs which impact the Commission budget.

Increased communication with other agencies has provided the opportunity to develop cross-regional and cross-segmental policies with these agencies. ACCJC has also been able to share operational policies, database technology, and new approaches to accreditation with other agencies in a fashion that has been mutually beneficial. The Pew funded project promises not only to enhance the contact among the eight regional commissions, but also develop common information and tools to enhance the pursuit of best practices in the use of student learning outcomes.

Planning Agenda:

Interaction between ACCJC and other regional agencies will continue to enhance communication on issues that cut across agendas such as distance learning, institutional consortia, increased and more effective use of learning outcome measures, the appropriate accreditation response to for-profit subsidiaries of affiliates of accredited institutions, and increased offering of four-year degrees by historically two-year colleges. We will seek opportunities to diversify accreditation teams as appropriate for individual institutions, recognizing the direct and indirect costs involved.

Documentation:

*CHEA Committee on Transfer and the Public Interest
Pew Grant: Regional Accreditation and Building Capacity to Examine Student Learning*

4. The Commission systematically should experiment with the accreditation process.

Descriptive Summary:

Several ACCJC institutions have undertaken non-traditional accreditation review processes in recent years. In fall 1996, Santa Barbara City College used a "re-engineering" model for its self study. The college found that this unusual self study format helped them develop their own

systems while satisfying their accreditation evaluation. Heald Colleges employed an unusual accreditation process, described briefly in #3 above, for its fifteen separate locations, with one out of the region. In fall 1998, Mt. San Antonio College organized its self study around the seven Baldrige Award Criteria. A special team was composed and provided a modest amount of specialized training. Mt. SAC used the work done for accreditation in seeking quality awards from other agencies. In response to the new Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-college/multi-unit Districts or Systems, the Commission is conducting two pilot studies in the 2000-01 year involving a special consultant. The anticipated result is a handbook to assist multi-college districts with the accreditation process. We used a variation of this new policy for the Hawaii colleges for the second time in fall 2000, reviewing them in a fashion designed for their circumstances.

Several larger and more fiscally able accreditation agencies have experimented extensively with new approaches to the accreditation process. As part of Project Renewal, the Commission seeks to capitalize on these efforts by examining them for features which might be of benefit to our membership. In response to interest from a small number of institutions, the Executive Director attended an Academic Quality Improvement Program workshop sponsored by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA). As part of Project Renewal, a group has been composed to explore the feasibility of offering a Baldrige-like accreditation option to our institutions. This alternate approach could be based on the Baldrige Award Criteria as it has been modified by NCA in its Academic Quality Improvement Project (A-QIP). Under consideration is the notion expressed in current Editorial Board discussions of allowing institutions which have met a certain threshold of achievement on standards in previous evaluations to more easily participate in an alternate approach of their choosing.

Evaluation:

Commission experiments with other accreditation models have been successful from both the institutions' and the Commission's perspectives. However, the proposal to develop a Baldrige-like alternative has not yet spurred broad interest among member institutions. Results of the recent survey to institutions and team members has identified a small number of colleges with such an interest, and a cohort of similar size that has an interest in some other non-traditional approach.

Planning agenda:

The Commission staff will continue to monitor the alternative approaches developed by the North Central and WASC Senior Commissions and remain receptive to the possibility of constructing a Baldrige-like option for interested institutions. The Commission remains open to negotiating special comprehensive studies and visits as institutions find this attractive; one non-traditional self study is currently in completion (Riverside City College), and two entities were approved for special self study (Santa Barbara City College, Contra Costa CCD District Office). Project Renewal may result in self study processes which encourage institutions to employ frameworks of their choosing (including Baldrige-based designs) to express institutional improvement plans. We also plan to fully implement the Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-college/multi-unit Districts or Systems and handbook.

Documentation:

Letter from William Feddersen

Peter MacDougall's comments in Commission meeting minutes

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

Mt. San Antonio College 1997-98 Special Self Study: Integrating Accreditation Standards within Baldrige Educational Quality Criteria

Santa Barbara City College, institutional Self-Study for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, October 1996

A-QIP folder

5. Standards ought not to be weighted equally, and self studies and evaluations by visiting teams should reflect the greater importance of specific standards as determined by the Commission.

Descriptive Summary:

ACCJC Standards 3 and 4 taken together relate to outcomes—this is what we are stressing in our evaluations and communications, and what the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) advises accreditors to emphasize. In our training sessions, extra time is spent on these standards. Since 1997, the Assessment Institute has directed its attendees to the issues that correspond to these standards. At the same time, as we espouse and practice, our teams are evaluating institutions in the contexts of their own missions and purposes, a practice which emphasizes standards according to the college's unique needs.

The Commission has recognized distance learning, assessment of student learning outcomes, and institutional planning as critical standards issues for the future. More overt treatment of distance learning in the standards is already receiving much thought. Thus far, we have developed a Distance Learning handbook and evaluated our standards from two perspectives: subparts that already address distance learning and subparts where focus on distance learning is needed. A distance learning expert has also been included as a member of the current External Review Committee.

Evaluation:

As a practical matter, standards on institutional effectiveness, faculty and staff, educational programs, and governance have received more attention than other standards, as evidenced by the fact that they prompt the most recommendations. Teams emphasize standards in a fashion that matches their recommendations.

Commission training and exchange of information with other accrediting agencies have prepared us to make appropriate changes in our standards to meet distance learning needs. Working with the Western Cooperative for Educational Technology (WCET) and C-RAC for distance learning guidelines has proved particularly helpful.

Planning agenda:

Training efforts will need revision to give greater emphasis to distance learning. Assessment of learning outcomes will also need to remain a focus in our revised standards, as will institutional planning grounded in research. The Commission will explore the possibility of supporting training in institutional planning. Emphasis will be continued in chair and team member training on contouring the use of standards to the mission and issues facing the focal institution.

Documentation:

*California Assessment Institutes Attendance Summary
Team Recommendations to Institutions*

6. The Commission should create mechanisms to better assure that governing boards are substantively involved in the accreditation process.

Descriptive Summary:

Typically, board involvement in accreditation is significant in single college districts. However, in multi-college districts and systems, such is not the case. In order to increase trustee understanding and involvement in accreditation, Commission staff have made numerous presentations for boards or at which board members have been present. In June 2000 in Pasadena, the Executive Director made such a presentation at California Community College Trustees (CCCT), a professional trustee gathering, and former Executive Director John Peterson made a presentation to trustees at the College of Micronesia last May. A new policy, Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-college/multi-unit Districts or Systems, has focused attention on the issue, and all but the newest multi-college districts have moved to simultaneous site visits to encourage district and board involvement in accreditation. ACCJC is the only agency that routinely includes trustees on comprehensive teams. Additionally, self study training urges that the board be informed throughout the development of the self study and that trustees be included as members on standard committees where appropriate.

Evaluation:

In the last three years, we have noticed a marked decline in the number of recommendations in Standard 10, Governance & Administration, from 15% to 9% of all recommendations. Recommendations addressing boards of trustees have almost disappeared. Certainly, improvements in collegial governance processes have contributed to the decline, but it is also likely that in the process of addressing accreditation recommendations with which they had a direct connection, better informed boards and ones that are more involved in the accreditation process have resulted.

While the results are very preliminary, early indications from the pilot project of multi-college districts which required central offices to produce self studies has seemed to draw these boards more directly into the accreditation process. The fact that in almost all cases colleges in multi-college districts are now evaluated at the same time may also provide greater board focus on accreditation in these districts.

Planning Agenda:

Board involvement in accreditation will be evaluated in multi-college districts in the two districts piloting the new policy. Training based on the handbook to assist multi-college districts with the accreditation process may result. (See # 4 above.) Team training will give greater attention to helping members understand the role of the board.

Documentation:

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

Trustee Presentations

Public Accountability: Measuring and Reporting Outcomes

The need for attention to public accountability was stressed in the External Review. The report reflected deep concern that the dual-purpose accreditation system was “out of balance.” The report states,

One aim, that of meeting the needs of institutions to strengthen programs and improve service to students, is working well. But the other, the obligation of accreditation to build public confidence by keeping the public well informed on the quality and effectiveness of collegiate institutions, is not being met. It is imperative for the future of accreditation that the process correct this imbalance, that it be more concerned with and reflective of its public accountability obligation. There is a real public concern about the condition of higher education, its cost, its accessibility, the time required to complete degrees, etc.

In addition:

- A perception exists on the part of outsiders that the Commission is reluctant to take negative actions, even when such actions appear to be well deserved.
- The accreditation process does an inadequate job of measuring and reporting quantifiable student outcomes.
- The Commission inadequately describes its processes and findings to the general public.

Recommendations:

7. ACCJC should make distinctly different processes of (a) the inspection of colleges for purposes of compliance with federal financial aid regulations, and (b) evaluation by regional accrediting agencies for purposes of institutional improvement and public quality assurance.

Descriptive Summary:

In the interim since this recommendation was made, the USDOE has revised its requirements for accrediting agencies. Agencies are no longer required to have direct involvement in student loan default rate management. The newly revised requirements for accreditation regarding financial aid do not dictate unannounced compliance visits. Additionally, we are no longer required to collect plans from institutions participating in federal financial aid whose student loan default rate exceeds 20%. In response to the tightening of federal financial aid requirements at the institutional level, a number of ACCJC member institutions have withdrawn from federal financial aid programs. Today approximately 21% of ACCJC member institutions do not participate in these programs, thus further reducing pressure to create a separate compliance process.

In evaluating institutions for the purpose of public quality assurance, an improvement has been made: All actions are now public.

Evaluation:

The impetus to separate the accreditation process into the two purposes described in the recommendation has been reduced. Our primary focus remains quality assurance and institutional improvement.

Planning Agenda:

None

Documentation:

*ACCJC member institutions not participating in federal financial aid programs
Policy and Procedures on Public Disclosure*

8. At least one-third of the Commission membership should consist of representatives of the public.

Descriptive Summary:

In July 1997, the WASC constitution was changed to increase the number of public members. In July 1998, the ACCJC Commission was expanded from seventeen to nineteen members in order to include two additional public members. That addition brought the total public membership on the Commission to five, increasing from 18% to 26% the public proportion of membership. Only the New England Commission has a proportion of public membership equal to ACCJC's, with all other regional accrediting commissions having more modest public representation.

Evaluation:

Public members have served on key Commission committees and have brought valuable perspectives to Commission discussions and decisions consistently. As testimony to the contributions and value of these members on the Commission, a public member was elected as vice chairperson of the Commission for the first time and now serves as Commission chair.

Planning Agenda:

None

Documentation:

Commission roster

9. The Commission should seek private grants with which to sponsor, at the campus level, pilot experiments to develop the application of outcome measures of institutional performance.

Descriptive Summary:

ACCJC, in conjunction with the California Community College Chancellor's Office and the Research and Planning Group, has co-sponsored semiannual Assessment Institutes for the last three years. These institutes are funded through the Chancellor's Office, and volunteers shoulder the responsibility for leadership and organization of the institutes. The purpose of the institutes has been to better equip member institutions to address assessment of student learning outcomes and to develop measurement of institutional effectiveness based on those outcomes.

In 2000, under the sponsorship of all of the C-RAC commissions, a proposal was developed which would result in several products designed to assist commissions and institutions in promoting the improved use of learning outcomes in the quest for improved institutional performance. In December 2000, the Pew Foundation funded this project to the extent of \$500,000, and as of early 2001 initial work is underway.

Evaluation:

Over the course of six institutes, teams from 119 colleges have participated in the Assessment Institutes. One hundred four (104) of those colleges, 87%, have participated more than once, typically sending different groups of individuals each time. Evaluations of these institutes have been overwhelmingly positive. Concern for stability in funding and leadership for the Assessment Institutes has been expressed, but those involved are committed to helping institutions with these issues. Evidence as to the effect of these institutes on the development and application of learning outcomes is anecdotal, gleaned from reviewing team reports, but indications are that some colleges are beginning to develop effective student learning measures. It is difficult to know exactly how to attribute this progress. Partnership for Excellence, an effort to tie funding to outcomes in the California Community College system, has compelled these colleges to report student outcomes including transfer rates, numbers of degrees and certificates, and completion rates in various types of courses. Certainly these requirements have raised the awareness about those types of learning outcomes among that segment of our institutions.

The Pew grant, whose products are expected to result over the next two years, has the promise of developing a set of principles to be used by accreditors and institutions which will assist in the development of a focus on student learning. As well, a major compilation of best practices in the measurement of learning and related program outcomes is anticipated. In the process of developing these aids, there is likely to result a more thorough understanding across regional

commissions of learning outcome issues, and improved channels for working together to resolve problem areas.

Planning Agenda:

Groups sponsoring the Assessment Institutes, including ACCJC, are discussing alternative organizational models, intend to add institutional planning to institute topics, and have submitted a grant proposal to produce a primer on assessment for use by institutions. A means of measuring the extent to which these institutes influence institutions to develop outcome measures will be devised.

The ACCJC will participate fully in the C-RAC activities associated with the Pew grant, and will appropriately involve member institutions in the development of anticipated products and the dissemination of them.

Documentation:

California Assessment Institutes Attendance Summary

Pew Grant: Regional Accreditation and Building Capacity to Examine Student Learning

10. The Commission should implement procedures for much wider public notification of its actions, including public access to reports and documents on which its actions are based.

Descriptive Summary:

Prior to each Commission meeting, all member institutions and other interested parties such as representatives of the USDOE, other accrediting agencies, Directors of Admissions for California State University and the University of Hawaii, the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC), the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), the California Student Aid Commission, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the College Board, the Community College League of California (CCLC), and the League for Innovation receive a preliminary agenda. After each Commission meeting, ACCJC notifies all member institutions of the actions taken. In addition, each institution receives an action letter from the Commission shortly after each meeting where an action was taken affecting that institution. All actions are likewise published in the newsletter disseminated immediately following the meeting. The number of newsletters was increased from two to four in 1997-98 to inform a broad audience of the actions taken by the Commission and to discuss other accreditation issues of public interest. Particularly to the point was an article on public disclosure appearing in the October 1998 issue. All policies, standards, handbooks, actions, and accreditation statuses are published and regularly updated on the ACCJC web page.

Self studies and team reports continue to be the property of the institution and are not distributed without permission of the institution. However, in June 1999, the Policy and Procedures on Public Disclosure was adopted which makes all accreditation actions matters of public record. Accreditation statuses of all member institutions are available in the WASC directory and on the ACCJC website, and the Commission provides the Statement of Accreditation Status (SAS) to inquirers. The SAS includes information on institutional legal status, affiliation, enrollment,

degrees offered, location, accreditation history and current status, and most recent Commission action.

Evaluation:

The Commission has addressed this recommendation to the extent current policy permits. These policies are consistent with every other regional commission at this time. Some measure of the adequacy of our efforts may be available from the results of the recent Project Renewal survey, which inquires about the clarity with which the Commission communicates its decisions to the institution and which asks for suggested improvements. The Commission and its policy committee are remaining alert to the complex issues surrounding public disclosure and have expressed intention to be as forthcoming with information to the public as generally accepted practice will permit.

Planning Agenda:

None

Documentation:

Newsletters

Sample ACCJC web page

Sample Statement of Accredited Status (SAS)

WASC Directory

Sample web page action list

Evaluating the Evaluators: Round 2 (Accreditation Survey and Results)

Policy and Procedures on Public Disclosure

11. The Commission should issue an annual report on the “state of the colleges.”

Descriptive Summary:

Since 1996-97 the Commission has published an annual report which quantifies and presents Commission actions, identifies and discusses current accreditation issues, outlines policy changes, lists Commission appointments, summarizes staff activities, and offers a fiscal statement from the agency. In addition, an analysis of comprehensive evaluation team reports is presented. The report is sent to district and college CEO’s, the Chancellors of the California Community Colleges and the University of Hawaii, the Community College League of California, the USDOE, the College Board, the President of the California Community College Academic Senate, the California Postsecondary Education Commission, the editor of the Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education, Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), the Faculty Association of California Community Colleges (FACCC), other accrediting agencies, and the Commissioners.

Evaluation:

The Commission has complied with the intent of the recommendation to provide a means of informing member institutions and the public on the accomplishments of the Commission over the preceding year, explaining Commission actions, and identifying exemplary practices. No formal evaluation of the reach of, or reader satisfaction with, the annual report has been

conducted. However, Commission staff have received both written and verbal comment on these reports and it has been quite positive. Singled out especially have been the analyses of problem areas identified through team recommendations and trends in college accreditation practice. Suggestions for improvement have included summaries of best practices discovered through accreditation review.

Planning Agenda:

Through the Evaluation and Planning Committee, the Commission will develop an annual evaluation and planning process that focuses attention on needed changes and key issues for the next year. Progress on recommendations resulting from Project Renewal should also be evaluated regularly and reported in the annual report.

Documentation:

Commission Annual Reports - 1996-1997

Commission Annual Reports - 1997-1998

Commission Annual Reports - 1998-1999

The Capacity to Deal with Emerging Needs

The External Review expressed concern that the Commission was not equipped to address the changing needs of accreditation. The report describes the group's concerns as follows:

Partly as a result of its burdensome workload, and partly as a result of the way it is organized, the Commission is not sufficiently analytical or reflective. By being so uniformly comprehensive in its evaluation of institutions, the Commission may lose its capability to consider in sufficient depth either the broader issues affecting the accreditation community or specific aspects of Commission operations which may need to be changed, especially in light of new circumstances. In addition:

- Despite the fact that over the past year the staff has provided the Commission with extensive information and analysis concerning the major developments now taking place, the Commission does not yet appear to be adequately prepared to carry out the kind of historic transition which the altered environment of accreditation now requires.
- The size of the Commission staff may not be sufficient to handle the substantially increased workload which the likely changes discussed in this report will require.

Recommendations:

12. Two new Commission committees should be formed, one focusing on policy, the other on process.

Descriptive Summary:

In June 1997, the Commission formed an ad hoc policy committee to create new policies and address revisions. In June 1998, that committee became a standing committee meeting on a regular basis. Regarding a committee on process, there have been two ad hoc committees dealing with particular processes. The first was the committee on Telecommunications and Electronic Data Storage, and the other researched and developed a process for Commission evaluation. The work of both of these committees has been largely adopted.

To maintain the capacity of the Commission to do its work, the position of Assistant Director was added in 1997. As a result, staff has been able to increase its efforts to document new and existing procedures. The products of these special efforts include annual revision and updating of the Team Chair Handbook, publication of a new Interim Visit Handbook, development of protocols for institutional representatives observing team visits, Commission Practices on Policy Review, and step-by-step instructions for institutions to achieve eligibility for accreditation. These procedural documents are reviewed by the Policy Committee as appropriate. Partly as a result of these efforts, the Commission has not found the need for improved and documented processes as urgent as the need for clear evaluation and planning. To that end, an Evaluation and Planning Committee was formed in June 1999. Review and improvement of processes may emerge from either the Evaluation and Planning Committee or the Policy Committee.

Evaluation:

The Policy Committee has proved to be an active and vital addition to Commission operation. It has taken a lead role on development and revision of policy and has provided guidance on distance learning to the Commission in preparation for revision of its standards. In giving careful consideration to the recommendation to form a committee focusing on process, the Commission recognizes that presently almost all Commissioners are serving on one or more standing committees. In attempting to use its human resources efficiently, it has formed ad hoc committees as needed and used staff to document procedures. The need for a standing committee to address processes has not emerged as a priority.

Planning Agenda:

Additional documentation of procedures is planned. A Substantive Change Manual is underway and will be issued within the year. The new Professional and Ethical Responsibilities of Commission Members policy, reviewed by the Commission for the first time in June 2000, will serve as a Commissioner job description and form the foundation of a Commissioner handbook. Project Renewal, the next ACCJC USDOE re-authorization, and the CHEA recognition process may prompt additional efforts at documenting procedures.

Documentation:

*Roster from Committee on Telecommunications and Electronic Data Storage
Commission minutes on Telecommunications and Electronic Data Storage Committee*

*Roster from Ad Hoc Committee on Commission Evaluation
Committee report from Ad Hoc Committee on Commission Evaluation*

TASK LIST DERIVED FROM PLANNING AGENDAS:

Planning Agenda 1:

- 1. In the development of benchmarks, first consider their usefulness in helping institutions support their assertions regarding learning outcomes.*
- 2. Review what other regional accreditors are compiling and how they are using the collected data.*
- 3. Seek and carefully consider information from institutions that have established core indicators of their effectiveness.*
- 4. Determine the number of colleges engaged in self studies which reference CCC Chancellor's Office MIS data and the extent to which they find these data helpful for accreditation.*
- 5. Ascertain which data elements would be helpful to the thirteen public community colleges in Hawaii and the Pacific and whether a similar data matrix should be set up for them.*
- 6. Consider providing private institutions with a generalized matrix of clearly defined data elements, organized as they would apply to the accreditation standards.*
- 7. Explore using the annual report to collect a modest amount of institutional data (enrollment, budgets, and employees) from all member colleges in a consistent form (IPEDS) to provide some measure of institutional health to the public and to the institutions themselves.*
- 8. Provide guidance to institutions on how to relate data to their processes for institutional improvement.*
- 9. Include guidance on how to apply data to the standards in ACCJC processes and training.*

Planning Agenda 2:

- 10. Review all accreditation standards, including the one on institutional mission, using task forces with inclusive membership.*

Planning Agenda 3:

- 11. Seek opportunities to diversify accreditation teams as appropriate for individual institutions.*

Planning Agenda 4:

- 12. Explore the possibility of constructing a Baldrige-like option to institutions seeking to advance the use of accreditation as a basis for improvement.*
- 13. Fully implement the Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-college/multi-unit Districts or Systems and handbook.*

Planning Agenda 5:

- 14. Revise training efforts to increase emphasis on distance learning over what is currently given.*

15. *Focus on assessment of learning outcomes and institutional planning grounded in research in our revised standards.*
16. *Explore supporting training in institutional planning.*

Planning Agenda 6:

17. *Evaluate Board involvement in accreditation in multi-college districts in the two districts piloting the new policy.*
18. *In team training, give greater attention to helping members understand the role of the Board.*

Planning Agenda 9:

19. *Discuss alternative organizational models for Assessment Institutes.*
20. *Add institutional planning to institute topics.*
21. *Measure the extent to which these institutes influence institutions to develop outcome measures.*

Planning Agenda 11:

22. *Develop an annual evaluation and planning process that focuses attention on needed changes and key issues for the next year.*
23. *Regularly evaluate progress on recommendations resulting from Project Renewal.*

Planning Agenda 12:

24. *Document ACCJC procedures.*
25. *Issue Substantive Change Manual within the year.*
26. *Employ the new Professional and Ethical Responsibilities of Commission Members policy as the foundation of a Commissioner handbook.*

V. TECHNICAL SUPPORT

BACKGROUND

The primary purpose of recognized accrediting bodies, including the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), is to assure that postsecondary educational institutions have the resources, are organized, and operate with integrity and quality. The primary mechanism through which accrediting commissions seek to assure quality is the adoption of a set of discrete standards that serve as a template for evaluating institutional operations. These standards are intended to assure that all institutions are evaluated according to a common set of criteria and hence are judged to have the capacity to provide high quality teaching and learning opportunities once granted accredited status.

State and federal governments have traditionally used accreditation status as an indicator that use of public funds to support student enrollment and sponsored research is an appropriate investment. In addition, accreditation has traditionally been a pre-requisite to engage faculty in discussions designed to articulate course content and equivalency between different institutions, a practice that directly benefits students in their effort to achieve the educational goals they have set for themselves.

A series of studies focused on educational institutions and the students they serve have been conducted over the past two decades. Some of these studies have focused on the economic return to individuals stratified by educational level and demographic characteristics of students. Others have focused on access, transfer, and degree/credential receipt of students by various demographic and socio-economic characteristics. More recently, policy and research interest has turned to evidence of what students have learned while enrolled in a college or university. A continuing concern about the amount of remedial education required by college students, growing use of distance education and accompanying suspicion that it is not of the same quality as face-to-face education, and the economic question of the cost of providing college education to a growing number of people has fueled the shift in policy and research interest.

III. Impact on Accreditation

The changing policy environment in which colleges and universities operate has presented new challenges to accrediting bodies and the institutions they accredit. The standards against which institutions are evaluated have traditionally been the foundation upon which quality judgments have been made. Increasingly, however, policy makers and members of the educational community themselves have begun to question whether accreditation standards are sufficient. They question whether the standards certify more than minimum standards of quality and whether they can actually serve as a catalyst for high quality and continuous improvement. They question if the standards can move institutions much beyond compliance behavior and documentation of institutional processes as they prepare for re-accreditation visits.

Certainly the capacity to deliver high quality teaching and learning opportunities does not automatically translate into actual delivery of high quality education. Collectively, current

accreditation standards do focus institutional attention upon whether an institution has assembled a high quality instructional staff, competent administrative officers, adopted a mission statement to guide the institution, established a series of policies designating the rights and responsibilities of students and employees, and the availability of sufficient fiscal resources to remain viable over time. Data are routinely collected, reported, and occasionally analyzed to provide both internal and external assurance of institutional performance in many of these areas. Many institutions have also developed, implemented, and periodically revised strategic plans to guide institutional performance. A key question that remains is whether the quality of an educational institution can be properly evaluated if the learning outcomes of the teaching-learning process are not systematically assessed.

IV. The ACCJC Response

The Commission has periodically reviewed its standards in response to comments from member institutions and emerging trends in postsecondary education to ensure that its standards remain viable and continue to serve as a good set of criteria for assessing institutional quality. The ACCJC has consistently provided technical training and assistance to review teams and campus personnel on how to interpret Commission standards and the type of evidence that might be presented in response to each standard. The 1994 External Review Committee included in its report a recommendation that “A ‘uniform template’ (or common data format) should be developed for the reporting of basic, institutional data required by the accreditation process.” The intent of this recommendation was to build even and consistent data on institutions to use in reporting on colleges.

To respond to this recommendation, the Commission staff developed a matrix matching various data elements with the standards to which they could apply. The data contained in the Management Information System (MIS) of the California Community Colleges was used as the basis for the matrix due to the comprehensiveness of the data contained in the MIS and the numbers of California Community Colleges among ACCJC member institutions. The MIS matrix, entitled Reports for Accreditation and Accountability, is a document that lists a series of data elements routinely collected by most community colleges, as well as data required to be submitted to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) as part of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The matrix contains 64 data elements that are organized under five broad topical areas. The topical areas include:

- Student Access
- Student Success
- Student Satisfaction [*no currently available information*]
- Staff Composition
- Fiscal Condition

The MIS matrix was prepared by ACCJC staff and distributed to colleges as an aid to those preparing for an accreditation visit or who were interested in focusing campus attention on issues of institutional accountability. The matrix provides a template with which institutions can bring data to bear in answering key questions about institutional performance and student outcomes.

While the MIS Matrix can, and has been useful to many colleges, it suffers from a number of weaknesses that are summarized below.

- California Community Colleges have received a significant state investment to develop and maintain a comprehensive set of data on institutional and student outcomes. Not all ACCJC member institutions have developed as sophisticated a data collection as California and hence the MIS Matrix is not particularly helpful to them.
- The data elements are not “neat fits” to the accreditation standards in all cases. Nonetheless, there are some relationships that can be easily inferred. For instance, 22 data elements are matched with the second component of Standard One: “The mission statement defines the students the institution intends to serve” The data elements matched to this standard would provide detailed demographic description of the students actually served but does not easily document whether the mission statement is sufficiently descriptive of the intended student population.
- The MIS matrix does not reflect the current emphasis on measuring learner outcomes. For instance, data elements that report unit load attempted in the Student Access domain are not balanced by a data element reporting unit load completed in the Student Success domain. The current emphasis on learner outcomes seems to dictate a balance of data on student access and student outcome measures with the same unit of analysis.

As stated in the ACCJC response to the 1994 External Review Committee report, it is important make clear how to apply the data, not just identifying which standards relate to which data elements, if the data are to be applied in any meaningful fashion. Commission staff recognize that these weaknesses must be addressed if they are to assist member institutions to use data to document their assertions about learner outcomes beyond presentation of anecdotal evidence.

Institutional Concerns

Postsecondary education institutions are being bombarded by a number of external mandates that challenge traditional measures of quality, fueled by what has come to be known as “the competency movement.” Nationally, the U.S. Department of Education has adopted regulations specifying data that must be reported annually under the Student Right to Know (SRK) Act. Among those new measures are data on average time-to-degree. To ensure comparability of data, institutions have been directed to utilize definitions of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). In fact, U.S. Department of Education-recognized accrediting bodies are also being required to incorporate IPEDS data as the common data collected during the accreditation process. Reflecting a similar concern for measures of learner outcomes, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) has issued reports on research studies focusing on ways in which accreditation processes might incorporate competency-based assessment.

At the state level, policy makers are concerned about the variation in achievement among identifiable groups of students enrolled in publicly supported colleges and universities. They, too, are asking for more measures of learner outcomes, explanations of why such variation exists, and information on what strategies exist to improve learner outcomes. In some cases, additional fiscal resources have been provided to support responsiveness to this concern. Not

surprisingly, such fiscal support has been accompanied by demands for evidence that the additional resources were used both effectively and efficiently. Private colleges do not escape such pressure simply because they receive little, if any, public support. They must provide tangible evidence to students and their parents that they receive value for the tuition they are asked to pay, if these institutions are to retain or expand their market share of college enrollment demand.

Internally, institutions also place pressure upon themselves to improve their capacity to measure effectiveness and to become more publicly accountable for their use of public funds. For instance, the California Community Colleges proposed a Partnership for Excellence (PFE) initiative that would exchange information on system and college performance across a set of mission-related area in exchange for increased state investment in community colleges. Other colleges and universities have increasingly embraced distance education as a means of serving larger numbers of students and/or improving the teaching-learning process. In doing so, intense debates have been sparked among faculty and policymakers about whether students can receive a comparable quality of education through distance education when not required to be physically immersed in the collegiate environment. If not careful, responding to all of these external and internal demands for evidence can result in a loss of institutional focus.

V. Purpose of Data Collection

It is important that institutions understand the purposes for which they collect and retain data. These purposes can be multiple but in all cases should be fully understood. The ordering of ACCJC standards suggest that institutions should begin with a clear consensus on the mission of the institution. What is the core business of the institution? Who is the institution intended to serve? The answers to these questions should shape not only the structure and operation of the institution but also define the ways in which it will know that it is achieving this mission. These, in turn, will define the comprehensiveness of the information system needed by the institution and whether the information system requires qualitative as well as quantitative data.

A data collection system may also be intended to serve the purpose of complying with local, state or federal requirements. This purpose should not define institutional data collection systems, however. Rather, this purpose should be examined to determine whether institutional data collection requires augmentation and, if so, in what ways. It should also be examined to determine ways to achieve compliance while minimizing redundancy and workload requirements.

Additional purposes of an information system may include (1) collecting data to improve efficiency and management of the institution; (2) improve institutional planning capacity to facilitate orderly change and adaptation to emerging trends; and (3) evaluate the extent to which the institution has successfully responded to student needs.

VI. Unit of Analysis

Purposes that are intended primarily to demonstrate compliance with external mandates may require less specificity than purposes that are intended to meet institutional improvement

purposes. For instance, data that reports the aggregate numbers of degrees and certificates issued annually may meet the needs of some external publics but provide no useful information to the institution in response to such questions as: (1) how long does it take students to earn their degree/certificate; (2) do different student cohorts take more time to attain degrees/certificates than other student cohorts; and (3) did students who failed to receive degrees or certificates still meet their educational objectives? Additional layers of complexity are added if the institution wants to know if various departments, programs, or services have different levels of success in helping students achieve their educational objectives. Arguably, efforts to answer these questions can contribute to increased institutional quality but require collection, retention, and analysis of data at the level of individual students.

VII. Organization and Cost of Information Systems

Developing and implementing a comprehensive information system can be both time consuming and costly but is an invaluable resource to institutions genuinely concerned about institutional quality. Fortunately, rapid advances in computer technology have cut equipment and software costs tremendously. Institutions now have the option of replacing “flat files” (files that require retention of duplicate data in multiple files) with relational files (files that require only one or two common data elements), which vastly expand the manner in which data from multiple databases can be combined to examine different questions while containing costs.

Additional costs that must be considered include (1) the personnel needed to both manage and maintain the information system; (2) staff that can train other campus personnel on how best to access and use data for various purposes; and (3) regular review and upgrade of hardware and software required by the information system. These costs are frequently offset by savings in personnel compensation and benefits, consultant costs, and enhanced productivity.

VIII. Observations

The ACCJC seeks to balance its responsibility for quality assurance with the role of encouraging quality improvement. It is a delicate balance that relies heavily on the confidence of member institutions that the Commission is acting in the institution’s best interest and is accurately interpreting the import of emerging trends in postsecondary education. It has appropriately acknowledged the criticism among some member institutions that existing standards are not entirely clear to those not comfortable with research-based evaluation and has sought to provide tools and training to help clarify how data can be used to document institutional quality.

The MIS Matrix was a useful first step to helping institutions bring data to bear in assessing institutional performance during the accreditation process. Modifications to this tool are warranted to enhance its utility to a greater proportion of member institutions. Feedback received from member institutions in a series of surveys and interviews conducted in conjunction with Project Renewal have provided valuable information that will aid Commission staff in providing more useful tools and training on ways to use data to document institutional performance in areas covered by each standard.

Commission co-sponsorship of the California Assessment Institute (CAI) is another example of the Commission attempting to provide a service to member institutions seeking help in learning to utilize research to assess institutional performance. According to feedback from participating colleges and individuals, the CAI has been well received and perceived to be of increasing benefit to colleges, particularly with respect to measuring student learning outcomes. The growing participation of faculty has also highlighted an area of research-based assessment that has been overlooked by many of the external demands for accountability and measures of learner outcomes: the value of qualitative data. The MIS Matrix does not contain data elements that address student satisfaction. Such data are not routinely collected and stored by institutions for a variety of reasons. Nor are such qualitative data easily represented numerically. Nonetheless, they provide valuable insight into whether learners perceive they have received a high quality education and ways in which their educational experiences might be improved.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on its review of data requirements member institutions face in providing empirical evidence of institutional performance as part of the accreditation process and the Commission's effort to provide appropriate services and support, the ERC offers the following recommendations.

- **The Commission should convene a data review team and charge it with developing a model that member institutions can use to manage institutional data. The model should address the following needs:**
 - **Use of common definitions for data elements, consistent with standards being adopted by regional and specialized accrediting bodies**
 - **Identification of data elements that may be desirable or required by accreditation standards, beyond those routinely reported in annual IPEDS submission, particularly for assessing learner outcomes, that also assures collection of consistent data on all member institutions**
 - **Development of a training outline to aid member institutions adopt, in whole or in part, the components of the information system model**
- **The Commission should assemble a database containing information on institutions that have already implemented effective information systems and contact information to secure additional information directly from the listed institutions. This data should be posted on its website and member institutions notified of its existence.**
- **The Commission should begin development of a data base on survey instruments, including both commercial and "home grown" instruments, that can be used for gathering qualitative data on various aspects of institutional performance, such as student satisfaction and campus climate. This database should be updated continually, posted on the Commission's website, and member institutions notified of its existence.**

VI. ALTERNATIVE ACCREDITATION MODEL

BACKGROUND

In an Accreditation Group meeting on May 25, 2000, some participants suggested the investigation of an alternative accreditation model, “a Baldrige-like approach”. They suggested that while this approach may not be applicable to all institutions, the traditional approach could be strengthened by results of an alternate approach.

The AQIP Approach

The alternative accreditation approach investigated for this report is the AQIP (Academic Quality Improvement Project) utilized by NCA (North Central Association). This approach is based on the ideas of CQI (Continuous Quality Improvement), which formed the core of TQM (Total Quality Management).

Additional Materials Reviewed

1. The Pocket Guide to the Baldrige Award Criteria
2. “Quality Improvement Advocates Praise Business-Related Evaluation Tool” by Ray Giles in *The News*, Community College League of California, Sacramento: CA, Summer, 1999.
3. Mt. San Antonio College 1997-98 Special Self Study: Integrating Accreditation Standards within Baldrige Educational Quality Criteria
4. Peter MacDougall’s Comments Regarding the Visit to Mt. San Antonio College
5. Santa Barbara City College, institutional Self Study for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, October, 1996
6. Letter from Deborah Sweitzer to David Wolf concerning “Notes from Accreditation Group Meeting of May 25, 2000”
7. “Accreditation in the Learning Paradigm” by Bob Barr and John Tagg.
8. “Implementing Academic Audits: Lessons Learned in Europe and Asia” by David Dill, May, 24, 1999
9. WASC Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities, *Handbook of Accreditation*, November, 2000

Guiding Values for AQIP

There are 10 values that guide the AQIP approach. These values include:

1. Focus
2. Involvement
3. Leadership
4. Learning
5. People

6. Collaboration
7. Agility
8. Foresight
9. Information
10. Integrity

It is believed that these values permeate colleges that have achieved a systematic approach to CQI. The focus of AQIP is said to be “student learning”.

Accreditation Processes

The backbone of the accreditation processes rests in an institution “articulating its goals with measurable precision so that its performance in achieving them can be consciously tracked. An institution will identify an approach and deployment of processes that helps it achieve its goals. It will measure the performance of these individual processes in order to improve their effectiveness.”

Specific steps in the accreditation process include:

- Step 1. Interest Exploration (Institution understands CQI and the AQIP and is ready to embark on a “quality journey”)
- Step 2. Comprehensive Self-Assessment (Conduct a quality based formative assessment with an outside perspective)
- Step 3. Collaborative Goal-Setting Workshop (Set challenging but realistic targets for quality improvement using Quality Criteria)
- Step 4. Institutional Quality Review (Analyze quality systems and measure progress against targets)
- Step 5. Annual Results Inventory (Filed along with an NCA Annual Report)
- Step 6. Repeat Steps 3 and 4 above every 3-5 years.
- Step 7. Formal Reaffirmation of Accreditation (No on-site visit or report required)

The Quality Criteria

This system substitutes “criteria” for “standards”. The “Criteria take a systemic view, defining and evaluating all of the processes in an institution as they relate to learning”. There are 9 Quality Criteria.

1. Helping Students Learn - Examines an institution’s processes for developing programs, delivering instruction, measuring student academic achievement, etc.

2. Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives – Analyzes processes that complement student learning and fulfill other portions of the institutional mission.
3. Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders Needs – Examines systems and processes for assessing needs.
4. Valuing People – Examines systems and processes for hiring and developing staff.
5. Leading and Communicating – Analyzes processes for communicating mission and establishing governance and decision making structures.
6. Supporting Institutional Operations – Analyzes processes for support services.
7. Measuring Effectiveness – Examines the information system employed to collect and use data.
8. Planning Continuous Improvement – Examines what an institution hopes to do with what it does.
9. Building Collaborative Relationships – Examines relationships and how they contribute to mission accomplishment.

Differences from Traditional Accrediting System

1. Interactions and reviews occur on a 3-5 year cycle.
2. Repeating cycle to foster CQI.
3. More costly.
4. No large report submitted.
5. No accreditation teams on campus
6. Periodic, planned peer assistance.
7. Emphasis is on CQI not Accreditation.
8. No big 7 year review or external team.

Additional Observations

All of the following materials focused on some aspect of an alternative accreditation system, either directly or indirectly. Following is a selective review of each document/item.

1. Pocket Guide

Q and As regarding Baldrige Criteria. Listing and explanation of the 7 criteria.

Business oriented publication that has little direct application to education. It is written for people in the private sector.

2. Quality Improvement Article in The News

Explains Mt. SAC's self study for accreditation that integrated traditional standards with quality criteria from Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for Educational Excellence. Focus of the piece is on "systems thinking". References the Continuous Quality Improvement Network for Community and Technical Colleges (CQIN). Among the comments in the piece are the ideas that the Baldrige criteria are all about "quality improvement" while accreditation standards are about "quality assurance". The two sets of criteria are vastly different with accreditation looking at "what is" and Baldrige looking at "results and outcomes". The Baldrige criteria require a level of organizational rigor that most institutions don't have.

3. Mt. SAC Self Study

This study was organized along the 7 criteria for the Baldrige awards. ACCJC standards were subsumed under the 7 criteria. This information is provided in a 2-page chart. There is a 7 page Introduction section that explains the organization of the self study. The College has a "Quality Improvement Steering Committee" which identified 9 critical systems that drive the College's Quality Improvement Processes.

The actual self study uses the 7 criteria as the overall organizing framework and places responses to accreditation standards within each of the criteria. The information in the report is similar to information that is submitted in other self studies. The presentation of the information is different.

4. Peter MacDougall's Comments

These comments were made in a conference call at the winter, 1999 ACCJC meeting. The comments emphasize the importance of meeting ACCJC Standards first, training the visitation team in Baldrige Criteria, and having a Baldrige evaluator review the standards.

5. Santa Barbara Self Study

This self study is focused on "Project Redesign". The report deals with the accreditation standards in a straightforward manner and then introduces a section "Redesign Case Study". The ACCJC standards are contained within the Redesign section, also. Project Redesign is based on the principles of continuous quality improvement (CQI) and reengineering.

The information in the report is similar to information that is submitted in other self studies. The presentation of the information is different in the Redesign Case Study section.

6. Letter from Debra Sweitzer

This letter addressed “Baldrige-like” alternative accreditation models. It contains a point-by-point listing of 20 issues regarding this topic. A few comments in the letter indicate that “the knowledge of the Baldrige criteria is generally low in the community colleges”, training of all participants is critical, and there should be a demonstration of “institutional readiness” before an alternative is attempted.

7. Barr and Tagg Article

This article identifies 5 “shoulds” for the accreditation process in terms of the “learning paradigm”.

Accreditation should:

1. Encourage institutional learning in colleges.
2. Encourage sophisticated learning feedback processes.
3. Examine institutional processes for their capacity and effectiveness in using feedback on student learning and student success.
4. Encourage institutions to identify and adapt innovations that improve student learning or student success.
5. Promote the local development and ownership of a culture of evidence about student learning at colleges.

They also offer 4 concrete ideas:

1. Replace self study with a permanent, ongoing institutional self-assessment.
2. Major focus should be a longitudinal flow of data about student learning and not a site visit.
3. Teams must be trained to look for data that indicate educational performance.
4. High standards for evidence of educational performance should be developed by the accrediting agency.

8. Dill Article

This article compares (1) Program Review, (2) Accreditation, and (3) Academic Audits. Program Reviews are usually focused on a particular subject field or program level. They focus on criteria such as program objectives, program resources, and faculty quality. Accreditation determines if an institution meets threshold quality criteria. The focus is on the mission, resources, and procedures of an institution. Academic Audits focus on the processes which the institution monitors its academic standards and acts to improve the quality of teaching and

learning. Audits are concerned with the basic processes of academic quality assurance and improvement.

The remainder of the article reports on academic audits in some foreign countries. There is the suggestion that audits have helped to focus faculty attention and effort on maintaining academic standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

9. WASC Senior Commission Handbook

Addresses a new framework for accreditation, “Core Commitments” of institutional capacity and institutional effectiveness.

Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity

The institution functions with clear purposes, high levels of institutional integrity, fiscal stability, and organizational structures to fulfill its purposes.

Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness

The institution evidences clear and appropriate educational objectives and design at the institutional and program level, and employs processes of review, including the collection and use of data, that assures delivery of program and learner accomplishments at a level of performance appropriate for the degree or certificate awarded.

Focusing on Educational Effectiveness

Articulating a Collective Vision of Educational Attainment

Organizing for Learning

Becoming a Learning Organization

The 4 Standards

1. Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives (Institutional Purposes and Integrity)
2. Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions (Teaching and Learning, Scholarship and Creative Activity, and Support for Student Learning)
3. Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability (Faculty and Staff, Fiscal, Physical and Information Resources, and Organizational Structures and Decision-making Processes)
4. Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement (Strategic Planning and Commitment to Learning and Improvement)

This system appears to be a “streamlined” one that focuses on “inputs” (capacity) and “outputs” (effectiveness). It is not directly related to Baldrige Criteria or continuous quality improvement.

CONCLUSIONS

The AQIP approach to accreditation might be favored by a few institutions seeking WASC accreditation or reaccreditation. The number would probably be very small and not worth the additional costs to implement such a system as an alternative to the more traditional form of accreditation. Following are some of the reasons for this observation.

- * Very few colleges are currently pursuing CQI at a total institutional level.
- * CQI is quickly becoming passe in higher education circles.
- * Most faculties would resist an approach focused on CQI.
- * The costs to participating institutions and to WASC would be substantial.
- * A huge training effort in CQI would need to be undertaken in the colleges.
- * The system focus is on student learning yet the system emphasizes processes and their improvement. The link between institutional processes and student learning is not clearly defined in postsecondary education institutions.

However, these observations do not preclude substantial changes to the ACCJC accrediting process or standards. Before any substantial changes are undertaken, ACCJC must assess its purposes for accreditation. If the notion of "assuring quality in higher education" remains the underlying premise for accreditation, that notion should shape the accreditation process. If the notion of "fostering change", "implementing CQI" or some other premise comes to the forefront, then an alternative system should be developed.

It is becoming apparent, after reviewing the materials for this report, that (1) highlighting effectiveness, in terms of results, and (2) ensuring improvement systems are paramount in today's community and junior college environment. It is incumbent on the institutions being accredited that they account for effectiveness assessment and improvement systems. Accreditation should insure that these assessments and systems are in place, being utilized, and leading to improved effectiveness.

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VIII. Appendices

APPENDIX A
Proposed Revision of ACCJC Purpose Statement

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, VALUES AND PROCESSES

The Primary Purposes of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

In keeping with the intent of regional accreditation generally, the primary purposes of the ACCJC are, for institutions offering the Associates Degree within the Western Region:

- To assure quality by determining that standards are met.
- To promote the ongoing pursuit of excellence by emphasizing institutional improvement.

To assure quality the Commission establishes institutional accreditation standards which emphasize student learning and related student outcomes. As well, each institution has the responsibility for defining characteristics of quality and excellence for itself and presenting evidence that such quality and excellence are being achieved. The Commission recognizes institutional differences in ways that protect both general standards of excellence and individualized educational philosophy and practice, as expressed in institutional mission statements.

To promote the ongoing pursuit of excellence, ACCJC standards stress student learning outcomes as central measures of excellence. Commission processes emphasize improvement through internal assessment, planning and plan execution. Accreditation reviews result in recommendations for improvement, no matter what the current level of performance exhibited by the institution. Accommodation is made for a wide variety of internal institutional systems to promote experimentation and the advancement of higher education practice generally.

The Commission accredits institutions, not individual programs. It does so by examining evidence of educational effectiveness based on demonstrated student learning outcomes and the achievement of other institutional goals. Educational programs and services, resources, and leadership are reviewed as the means to and support for educational effectiveness.

Commitment to Values

At the core of the Commission's work is a commitment to values that relate to higher education in the American context. These values permeate the ACCJC's primary purposes, and support efforts to fulfill them.

Excellence: The Commission, even as it encourages institutions to strive for improvement in quality, reflects best practices in its own standards, processes and operations.

Cooperation: The Commission believes in positive working relationships. This extends to its interchange with, and service to, member institutions, and with other individuals and organizations involved with higher education quality improvement. The Commission encourages collegial relations in the pursuit of institutional objectives.

Progress: The Commission recognizes that, to be a responsible influence in 21st century America, purposeful change is to be encouraged in member institutions and the ACCJC's own undertakings. This extends to support for experimentation aimed at enhancing opportunities for, and improvement in, organizational and student learning, while recognizing enduring educational values.

Diversity: The Commission believes that a range of perspectives enhances discussion and decisions; a diversity of participants enhances learning and organizational environments; and a variety of institution types and arrangements extends educational opportunity.

Integrity: The Commission strives to be objective, honest and fair in its relations with member institutions, and it expects them to do similarly with students and the community served.

Background

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) is one of the six regional accrediting associations covering the United States who pursue continual improvement of education and cooperation among educational institutions and agencies. WASC functions through a board of directors and three accrediting commissions: the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, and the Accrediting Commission for Schools. The board of directors consists of nine members, each accrediting commission electing three members. Each commission, with the involvement of all participating institutions, develops its own standards, procedures, and fiscal policies under the authority and subject to the approval of the WASC board of directors. The accreditation actions of each commission are certified by the board of directors of WASC.

Voluntary nongovernmental institutional accreditation as practiced by the Commission and the other regional commissions is a unique characteristic of American education. No institution in

the United States is required to seek accreditation; however, because of the recognized advantages, most of the eligible institutions in this and other regions have sought to become accredited. In many other countries the maintenance of educational standards is a governmental function.

Institutions seeking ACCJC accreditation must first be found eligible through review based on Commission Eligibility Requirements, and then must participate in a comprehensive self study and evaluation team review process aimed at determining that all Commission standards are met. Accreditation ceases whenever an institution requests in writing that its accreditation be terminated, when the Commission formally acts to terminate accreditation, or when an institution fails to pay its annual fees.

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges was formed in 1962 as one of the three commissions that form the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. ACCJC evaluates colleges that offer the Associate Degree and meet the Commission's standards in California, Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau. At the turn of the millennium, 138 institutions were accredited by ACCJC including 110 public and 13 private institutions in California, seven public and two private colleges in Hawaii, and six public institutions throughout the far Pacific.

Specific Objectives

In pursuit of its two primary purposes the Commission has recognized five major objectives:

1. To assure the educational community, the general public, and other organizations and agencies that an institution has clearly defined objectives that relate to student learning and are appropriate to postsecondary education, has established conditions under which their achievement can reasonably be expected, presents evidence that it is accomplishing them substantially, is so organized, staffed and supported that it can be expected to continue to do so, and meets Commission standards;
2. To encourage institutional development and improvement through self study and periodic evaluation by qualified peer professionals;
3. To develop and use standards to assess and enhance educational quality and institutional performance, and to validate these standards by ongoing research;
4. To promote interchange of ideas among public and independent institutions through peer review; and
5. To protect institutions against encroachments which might jeopardize their educational effectiveness or academic freedom.

The College-Commission Relationship

Accreditation is a continuing process, the heart of which lies in periodic self-appraisal by each institution. In its initial application for candidacy or accreditation, and in preparation for each subsequent visit, every institution prepares an extensive report with primary emphasis on self-analysis and evaluation. Between scheduled visits, each institution addresses visiting team recommendations and submits Annual Reports.

As a result of extensive experience and research, the Commission has determined that there are certain basic characteristics of quality required of all institutions of higher education. These are reflected in Commission standards, policies, and procedures. In carrying out its functions, the Commission has established a code of good practice, both for its relations with the institutions it serves and with regard to its internal organization and procedures. Every institution seeking recognition by the Commission is expected to abide by the standards and policies of the Commission as stated in the *Handbook of Accreditation* and as may be developed in the future. As knowledge increases and the needs of society change, institutions are continually evolving in order to serve their students and community better. Consequently, the Commission periodically reviews the role and validity of its standards and policies and relies on widespread consultation with the accredited institutions in the region and the experience of the Commission and visiting teams to make appropriate revisions. The Commission conducts research to assess the validity, reliability, and usefulness of its standards and procedures as aids to institutional improvement.

The effectiveness of self-regulatory accreditation, however, depends upon the institution's acceptance of specific responsibilities, including complying with all of the standards and abiding by the Commission's policies, procedures, and decisions. There must be institutional commitment to and involvement in the accreditation process. Where an institution provides programs not commonly offered by accredited institutions of higher education in the United States, the institution bears the burden of demonstrating that the subject matter offered is appropriate to higher education, is academic in quality and rigor, and can be reviewed by peers from accredited institutions. The process assumes that each institution has the responsibility to accept an honest and forthright assessment of institutional strengths and weaknesses. As a consequence, a comprehensive self study report and peer evaluation are required. Only in this way will the validity and vitality of the accreditation process be ensured.

To further specify the relationship the ACCJC seeks with member institutions, the Commission has a policy titled "Code of Commission Good Practice in Relations with Member Institutions." This policy was last updated in January 2001. Its detailed elements are as follows:

In its relations with the institutions it accredits, the Commission makes the commitment to:

1. Make an initial visit to, or evaluation of, an institution only on the written request of the chief executive officer of the institution;

2. Revisit an institution only on request by the chief executive, or if a visit is initiated by the Commission, after due notice to the institution;
3. Permit withdrawal of a request for initial candidacy or initial accreditation at any time (even after evaluation) prior to final action by the Commission;
4. Appraise institutions in the light of their own stated purposes so long as these are within the general frame of reference of higher education and consistent with the standards of the Commission;
5. Use the institution's self study, the team report, and relevant qualitative and quantitative information in institutional evaluation;
6. Consider information contained in a minority report that is developed in response to either a self study or another accreditation report submitted by the institution; the minority report should be received in approximate conjunction with the self study or other accreditation report to which it pertains. The Commission will notify the institution when a minority report is received by sending a copy of the report to the institution;
7. Interpret standards for accreditation in ways that are relevant to the character of the particular institution, respecting institutional integrity and diversity;
8. Encourage sound educational innovation and assist and stimulate improvement in the educational effectiveness of the institution;
9. Publish at least twice annually in the newsletter the names of institutions scheduled for comprehensive evaluation;
10. Accept relevant third-party comment on the institutions scheduled for evaluation. Such comment must be submitted in writing, signed, accompanied by return address and telephone number, and received no later than five weeks before the scheduled Commission consideration. The Commission will notify the institution when a third-party report is received by sending a copy of the report to the institution;
11. Establish reporting systems for annual, midterm, and self study reports which inform the Commission regarding student loan default rates and the standing of the institution with respect to appropriate state agencies, institutional or specialized accrediting agencies;
12. Consider information regarding adverse actions against a member institution by another accrediting agency or state agency and provide an explanation

13. Limit oversight required by federal statute and regulations to issues expressly required by that mandate;
14. Include on evaluation teams representation from other institutions of similar purpose and academic program to the extent feasible;
15. Provide institutions an opportunity to object, for cause, to individual members assigned to the team designated to visit the institution, with special concern for possible conflict of interest;
16. Arrange consultation during the visit with administration, staff, students, and trustees, and include a publicized opportunity for an open hearing during the visit;
17. Address performance with regard to student achievement in reviews of institutional effectiveness. In addition, the team report should make clear those standards with which the institution does not comply and those areas needing improvement.
18. Provide to the institution a detailed written report on its review assessing the institution's or program's compliance with the Commission's standards, including areas needing improvement, and the institution's performance with respect to student achievement.
19. Emphasize the value and importance of institutional self study and respect the confidentiality of the institutional self study and evaluation team report. An institution, at its discretion, may make such documents public. In event of an adverse action, the Commission staff will attempt to reach agreement with the institution on a statement for public distribution, but the Commission reserves final authority in case of an impasse. Should the institution issue selective and biased releases or use the public forum to take issue with Commission actions, the Commission and its staff will be free to make all the documents public;
20. Provide opportunity for the institution to respond in writing to all types of team reports before they are finalized, supply all final team reports to the institution before an accrediting decision is made, and provide opportunity to the institution to appear before the Commission when such reports are considered. The Commission staff will notify an institution in writing as soon as reasonably possible regarding Commission decisions;
21. Encourage discussion and use on campus of major team recommendations;
22. Revoke accreditation only after advance written notice to the institution;

23. **Provide opportunity for Commission review of its adverse decisions, and in addition, for appeal of those decisions to a panel established by the WASC Board;**
24. **Provide an opportunity for institutional representatives and the general public to attend those portions of Commission meetings devoted to policy matters and others of a non-confidential nature;**
25. **Refrain from conditioning candidacy or accreditation upon payment of fees for purposes other than annual fees and evaluation costs; and**
26. **Encourage continuing close relationships and communication between the Commission and institutions through the establishment of liaison officer positions in each institution, with appropriate visibility and responsibility.**

APPENDIX B
COMMISSIONER AND LEADER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND
SUMMARY RESPONSE

Commissioner Interview Responses

Q1. Does the Commission operate usefully and effectively? Please give an example to support your response.

General Summary of Responses:

Respondents addressed this question from two points of view: first, with regard to the relationship of the Commission to member institutions; and second, with regard to the internal working of the Commission from the point of view of the Commissioners.

In general, respondents agreed that the Commission operates usefully and effectively for member institutions. There were several reasons suggested as to why this might be so, ranging from the attitudes of member institutions regarding the importance of the accrediting outcome, to the communication skills of the Commission's Executive Director and staff in discharging their responsibilities to the member institutions. As one public member said, "Whenever a college is having a problem, everyone on the Commission strives very hard to assist the institution to overcome its problem." This thought was echoed by one of the accreditation professionals who commented that, "The advantage of this Commission is that it has fewer institutions than other regional associations; therefore, there is a degree of intimacy ... matters of concern become part of discussions with staff and team members that is much more complete. Closeness enhances usefulness by helping institutions to know where they need to do a better job before an area becomes of great concern." This view was balanced by the observation of another of the accreditation professionals who suggested that it is the "goodwill of the institution" that is a powerful determinate in guaranteeing the effectiveness of the process, and critical to the success of responding to sanctions. Two Commissioners noted that there is a variation in quality of the written reports, and that poorly written reports can sometimes caused problems for member institutions. One Commissioner suggested, "There is a need to do more screening of chairs, and eliminate after a bad experience." In addition, two respondents suggested that there is room for improvement in the standards themselves, in content and conciseness, and hoped the Commission would include that element in this review process. That issue will be addressed further in Question 3 and 5.

Commissioners who commented on the internal working of the Commission were generally positive about the internal processes that allowed them to be effective in meetings. One Commissioner noted that having primary and secondary responsibilities worked especially well. Another Commissioner complimented the process saying, "Commissioners debate until there is understanding, with agreement that incorporates the various viewpoints." However, another Commissioner felt that process to be too time consuming, "Because everyone feels a

need to express their opinion on the issue at hand, irrespective of whether the points have been made by previous speakers.” One of the accreditation professionals noted a potentially serious structural problem in the Commission, that “Institutional members – presidents, faculty, public members speak from personal perspective when making decisions about the organization; for example, in the areas of policy and planning. Other regional Commissioners generally have clearer sense of when they are deciding on institutional matters and when acting as an organization board.” Another accreditation professional noted, “The 2-year Commission is more focused because there is a smaller range of types of institutions; the Commission is practical and moves expeditiously. It is an efficient operation.” Finally, an observation about the timing of Commission meetings lead to this concern, “Timing may be an issue. For the January meeting, team chairs may not be available to work with staff or Commissioners. There is no mechanism for fixing errors in a report after it goes to the board, so we need to work with team chairs before then.”

Suggestions:

A Commissioner suggested the need for additional attention in Hawaii, “to assist in the process of helping more people become aware of the accreditation process and then becoming involved in it.”

Additional training was identified as a need to help improve the quality and usefulness of the written reports. This was seen as most important for team chairs and writers of the Self Study.

Screening, training and evaluation procedures for the development of an effective Accreditation team chair should be re-examined, particularly with regard to desired outcomes for written reports, team communication and institution relations.

Commissioners may need to be reminded about their “global” Commission responsibilities on a regular basis – perhaps as part of a yearly re-orientation process, and as needed in the discussion regarding policy and planning. If written material does not exist explaining this aspect of Commissioner responsibility, perhaps that material should be developed.

From some of the comments made in response to Question 1, a few suggestions can be inferred:

The Commission should determine whether there is more that they should be doing to develop the “goodwill” of member institutions, and if so, what.

The timing of meetings with regard to the production of complete and correct Team Reports should be discussed. Alternatives (in timing or process) for team chairs having difficulty meeting the deadlines should be considered.

Q2. Does the Commission positively impact and improve the quality of the accreditation process through its activities? Please give an example to support your response.

General Summary of Responses:

Respondents replied to this question in two different contexts. The first context dealt with the work of the Commission with regard to the evolution of the accrediting process. The second context dealt with the impact of the accreditation process on member institutions.

There was general agreement that the role of the Commission is positive and formative with regard to the development and refinement of the process. As one commissioner said, "The Commission very definitely positively impacts and improves the quality of the accreditation process." When speaking of the role of Commissioners, one Commissioner said, "Theirs is a bureaucratic role; they are responsible for deciding if policies and standards need to change. For example, there was a special Commission subcommittee on distance Education resulting in an excellent guide for self studies around distance education." Several Commissioners mentioned the concern of the Commission with regard to treating member institutions fairly and consistently, and saw this as a positive aspect of what the Commission does in support of improving the quality of the process. "Commission spends much time working on balance and fairness," commented one commissioner. In addition, the subject of training was raised here as an example of how the Commission works to improve the process. As one Commissioner said, "In response to decisions made in the Commission, we continually improve the training of the colleges in what we expect in the self study and in the training of team members in what we expect from the team report." A cautionary note was sounded by one of the accrediting professionals, "Mechanisms for reviewing standards and consultation are strong; Commission has been effective in deciding where they need to take a leadership position and when to follow membership. Commission has not broken much new ground nationally with regard to standards; it is still focused on resources and processes. It is not thinking about new ways to address issues." However, as another of the accrediting professionals commented, "New things are learned each time we go out; a standard that is problematical becomes part of the staff and Commission's awareness and frequently gets factored into the training program. Standards get reviewed and revised every five years, which is more frequent than other agencies."

Several respondents to this question interpreted the "quality of the accreditation process" to refer to what happens at individual colleges. All of these responses included positive comments regarding the impact of the accreditation process on member institutions. A sample of those comments follows. "...any team that goes out knows the Self Study influences the school. The validation of the team is very positive activity." "Yes, some campuses have had major problems and through the accreditation process have experienced growth and improvement." "All people in the college get involved with the process. The various groups in the colleges rely on accreditation to foster changes in the colleges." "What we hope we do is bring the best-of-the-best together to come up with whatever solutions, remedies, input we can offer. Without question there is a positive impact." "Part of why the

process improves is the extensive evaluation process that is done with the teams, and that is used to develop the training. The process does improve the quality at the institutional level. If the people at the institution have been out on teams, they know what to put into the self study.” In the eyes of these respondents, the accreditation process is seen as a change agent, not only in response to problems, but as a tool for general institutional improvement.

Suggestions:

No specific suggestions were made in response to this question. However, the comments identify areas that the Commission might wish to explore. The fact that several Commissioners chose to respond to the question only in terms of institutions, rather than the work of the Commission, echoes the concern raised in response to Question 1 regarding the need to strengthen the global aspect of Commission responsibilities. The responses also enforce the role of the Commission in developing training in support of strengthening the process. Finally, there is the implied suggestion to the Commission that it might consider initiating discussions about “new ways to address issues.”

Q3. Does the Commission help institutions improve quality through its standards, Self Study, and Team Reports? Do Commission standards, policies, and procedures have sufficient emphasis on institutional improvement? Please give an example to support your response.

General Summary of Responses:

Respondents generally agreed that the Standards, Self Study, and Team Reports help institutions improve quality. But their opinions differed regarding whether there is sufficient emphasis on institutional improvement. In particular, several respondents cited the lack of emphasis on accountability regarding the quality of the educational program as an area that needs improvement. Additionally the review currently underway was cited in response to this question as an example of how the Commission periodically examines the basis for emphasizing institutional improvement.

Many of the respondent’s replies focused on the standards. One Commissioner was particularly concerned about the changing educational environment and that impact on the definition of standards. “We’ve got to start looking at the standards and allow for this changing environment (e.g., increased use of technology, unbundling of faculty role, evolution of distance delivery, changing role of learning resources). The standards, once comfortably identified as discrete units, are getting all blended together.” Another pointed out the increased role of public accountability. “Most of the current standards focus upon processes and inputs. The public, however, is more interested in what happens with learners.”

In discussing the role of standards with regard to instructional quality and institutional improvement, one Commissioner had this to say, “I do not believe that the standards as currently written put enough emphasis on quality of the educational program. I do believe that in the area of fiscal control, in the library and in the role of faculty that quality is

considered. However, I do not believe that we have found a way to get at the overall quality of the educational program that is offered, so I do not believe that the institutional improvement piece is there.” This thought was echoed by a Commissioner, who said, “There needs to be an emphasis on learning, and a focus on continuous improvement. The Commission needs a way to express the philosophy of continuous improvement, to engage the institutions in a dialog about what they do to continuously improve.” Another Commissioner replied, “Some institutions are not paying attention to institutional research and planning. More needs to be done in this area.” An accreditation professional noted that, “Institutional accreditation tends to focus on institutional matters more than subject, degree, and departmental quality. Quality assurance mechanisms do not focus on the educational programs at this time.”

In opposition to the opinion expressed above, the following remarks, each from a different respondent, reflect an appreciation for how standards work to foster institutional improvement.

“The standards force the institutions to focus on the whole array of concerns- that puts a spotlight on quality. The process forces colleges to confront things they might not otherwise address.”

“The entire emphasis of the standards is improvement. The premise is we learn from other institutions what works very well, and ultimately those things that are highly efficient become standards. And they continually adjust the standards in one way shape or form and the whole intent is improvement-- never punitive, but improvement.”

“Those institutions that use (accreditation) as an opportunity to stop and reflect on their practices can improve quality. The standards give tremendous opportunity to do that.”

A different assessment of how accreditation works to develop institutional improvement was expressed by two of the accreditation professionals. One said, “The Commission does a pretty good job of helping institutions improve; although its influence is moral and persuasive. It does use its “club” appropriately.” Another commented, “Quality improvement is dependent upon the spirit of the institution; dependent upon how much attention is paid to the Team Report.” This suggests that in order to be more effective, each institution needs to be encouraged to be more responsible to its communities (internal and external), and perhaps the Commission can be more active in that regard.

There were few mentions of the role of the Self Study and Team Report in developing institutional improvement. Among the comments recorded, one Commissioner said, “The Team Reports are most critical to improved quality. The report is a powerful weapon for improvement.” Another observed merely that, “The self studies vary greatly depending on the institutions.” There was no mention of specific Commission policies and procedures in support of institutional improvement.

Suggestions:

There were several specific suggestions made in response to this question. In addition, several suggestions can be inferred from the comments. Here are the specific suggestions.

1. Consider combining Standard One (Mission) and Two (Integrity). (suggested twice)
2. Consider the interconnections of Standard 4 (Educational Programs) and Standard 6 (Information and Learning Resources) with regard to the increased use of media and technology, development of distant delivery, integration of non-credit programs, and educational programs that are no longer just disciplinary-based academic programs. Consider how the two standards might be integrated.
3. Consider the impact of different educational program delivery systems and the unbundling of the faculty function on the content of Standard 7 (Faculty).

Q4. Does the Commission make decisions that are fair and justifiable? Does the Commission take negative actions when warranted? Please give an example to support your response.

General Summary of Responses:

Respondents generally agreed that the Commission strives to make fair and justifiable decisions, including taking negative actions when warranted. However, one Commissioner cautioned, “The chair of the visitation team has a big influence on the Commission. The preparation and operation of chairs is uneven so the decisions the Commission makes could also be uneven.” Another Commissioner noted that “...it becomes more difficult to assure that decisions at two different meetings have the same level of fairness, given that there is some turnover at each meeting and events external to the meeting have an impact. For example, at one meeting, the standard for a straight reaffirmation with a midterm report were extraordinarily high, and almost every college reviewed got a decision of a midterm report with a visit if there were any problems at all. At the next meeting, there was a discussion at the beginning about when and why we should have visits, and the number of visits recommended dropped dramatically.” Another Commissioner reported some concern that the “Commission has hit institutions a little hard on a single standard even though little or no difficulty was noted on the remaining standards.” This Commissioner also “...occasionally felt as if there was an inappropriate balance in evaluating institutional performance on all standards.”

A public member commented, “The Commission’s decisions are fair and justifiable. Commissioners take great pains to study the issues carefully and then make appropriate decisions that will lead to improvement. However, at times the Commission may put too much emphasis on how an institution is responding to the process rather than the end result of change.” One Commissioner said, “Much time and effort is spent on making decisions that are consistent. The Commissioners discuss this a lot, especially when sanctioning an institution. They discuss the reasons, and what must be done.” Another mentioned that, “The Commission really struggles to be fair. In areas where there is latitude, they try to decide which sanction would be most helpful, the “big punch” or “tread lightly.”

With regard to taking negative actions, the following comments were recorded: "I think that any negative action is looked at very carefully and that all colleges that are up for review in the same meeting are treated the same way. ...The Commission does take negative action, however ... the negative action is rarely for providing a poor educational experience. There are a few colleges in the region that believe that the Commission should be more rigorous in its negative decisions, but that is only if they are not the ones who are getting the negative decision." "This is where a group of people will literally shut the door and sweat blood over a decision to send a really strong warning to an institution [that had problems] that severely affected the campus environment, the instructional staff. And so we made a tough decision and we did take negative action. We did it and we hoped it would improve the situation and from what we can see it has." "The Commission does take negative actions when warranted. They've gone all the way to "show cause" on two colleges in recent times. There are many actions requiring visits, special reports, etc."

The opinions of the accrediting professional mirrored those of other respondents. For example one professional said, "Commission has been quite courageous in limiting and in using its power. Some of the work done with institutions in the Pacific has been very strong in helping them. There has also been good impact on improving private institutions." Another noted that the "Commission goes out of the way to be fair. It has a real concern to be helpful to institutions with appropriate restraint. ...Negative sanctions are taken very seriously by institutions, although that may not appear to be the case on the outside." While another accreditation professional thought this Commission did a better job than some other Commissions, and in a case of negative action, the Commission was "on target".

Suggestions:

Three specific suggestions were made in the body of the responses to this question. The first has to do with the perceived need to have the field understand the need to take negative actions. "I think maybe, we can get the field to understand the role of the Commission and our need to take negative action so they don't consider us to be, like the big bad guys and we are the adversaries. I don't know what we can do about it, but maybe through the presidents and chancellors we can get the field to appreciate more the role of the Commission."

The second suggestion is related to an internal matter regarding leadership of the Commission. "I think our Commission goes out of the way to be fair to the various constituency groups to the point where we take turns rolling the Chairmanship of the Commission to the different representatives of the constituency groups. Maybe as a comparative issue, how do the other commissions do it? Do we rotate around the leadership of the Commission among the representatives of various constituency groups? Does that work well compared to other Commissions? We might just want to take an intellectual look at it. I'm not saying it's broken, but I think we tend to be a little to California in this-- everybody is equal, everybody has to be represented."

The third suggestion relates to a desire for historic information to help in making consistent decisions. "Yes, the decisions are fair. Perhaps they would be more even handed if there

were numerical data available. Would like to see tables reflecting the team recommendations to the Commission with Commission action that followed, and a list of sanctions with what the colleges were asked to do. Example: Two institutions were discussed at the same meeting. One was not put on Warning after a discussion of what warrants it. The other was coming back for review six months after being on Warning for what was remembered as similar problems. Some tabular data might have helped, so Commissioners weren't relying on memory."

In addition, some areas of concern identified in the general responses might warrant further discussions. For example, exploring the perceived inconsistency between meetings, unequal emphasis on different standards, and perceived emphasis on process rather than outcomes might lead to better Commission performance.

Q5. Are Commission standards clear, appropriate, consistent, and sufficient to measure and communicate quality and accountability? Please give an example to support your response.

General Summary of Responses:

Most respondents think that the standards are appropriate and consistent but do not agree that they are clear or sufficient to measure and communicate quality and accountability. Several people suggested here, and in response to other questions, that it was time to review the standards with an eye to making them more referent, especially with regard to the increased role of technology, and to permit them to be more responsive to local concerns. Some respondents recorded specific difficulties and concerns.

With regard to clarity, the general sentiment about the standards is "On the whole they are fair, but may not be as clear as could be in all sections." A public member said, "As far as being clear, yes they are clear, no ambiguity, and an institution would read them and understand them fully because it's their profession. I can't say that they are concise, because it has to be explained what the standard entails, and sometimes you have several paragraphs. You wish you could put it in a sentence, but you can't." A Commissioner noted that they were not clear, but "They are the best that they could be when they are written. The meanings of things change over time. Language that is contextual when current needs revision after time. ...It is hard to remain clear over the span between reviews."

About appropriateness one Commissioner said, "The first three standards are redundant and could be better if linked. There is redundancy throughout, but some of that yields additional information." Another Commissioner cited some concerns about a potential California emphasis, "Some issues come up concerning the "California syndrome", i.e., the tendency to look at all colleges as California publics." Then also suggested that, " There may be too many sub-standards. Maybe trying to be too specific in the standards." Another Commissioner reported that, "The Commission is discussing whether the standards could be more outcomes oriented. Now many are process-oriented so institutions can side step outcomes." Another Commissioner felt that the "...Commission would benefit from just 10

general standards and less specificity because with greater specificity, the absence of a particular component as an illustration of appropriate evidence may be interpreted by campus representatives as unimportant.” Another Commissioner suggested that, “The Commission should increase the emphasis on “effectiveness”” and that “ The **standards** do need to take into account the “local conditions” which can vary tremendously among the member institutions.” One of the accreditation professionals suggested that the **standards** “measure what is relatively easy to measure; such as, existence of policy. Not as forward looking as it might be in asking institutions to look at outcomes. The concentration of institutional type and preponderance of publics very much affects how Commission thinks about quality.” Another said that “in general there is a lot pressure to get all Commissions to deal more with public accountability issues.”

Consistency was not specifically addressed in the responses, but sufficiency to measure and communicate quality and accountability was. One public member generally agreed with the questions but commented that the standards “must approve on accountability.” A Commissioner stated, “I do NOT believe that the Commission standards are sufficient to measure and communicate quality and accountability. For example, almost all of our community colleges have as one of its missions preparing students to transfer to four-year colleges. Yet no self study or team report that I have read comment on the success that students have when they have transferred or even on the numbers that have transferred.” One accrediting professional noted that, “Commissions are more responsive to member institutions. Greatest accountability is to member institutions.” Yet Commissions need to address public accountability issues also.

Suggestions:

Note: see also responses to question 3.

In addition to the comments recorded in the summary above, which suggest areas of inquiry the Commission might undertake, suggestions made by respondents in the course of answering this question covered 2 different areas. The first deals with the formulation of the standards and their clarity for use. The second deals with the scope of the standards, their sufficiency, and their appropriateness. Specific suggestions include:

Regarding clarity:

“Governance standard would benefit from efforts to clarify the organizational development components of governance with which the Commission is concerned and what is meant by culture of evidence.”

“Clarity of language is needed for standards, and repeated training for institutions and teams as to what the language means to the Commission.”

“...they are sometimes too wordy.”

“Some of them have too much jargon. We need to make sure that it isn’t “jargonese”.”

“There may be too many sub-standards. Maybe the Commission is trying to be too specific in the standards.”

“Have some questions regarding clarity, sometimes examples would help.”

Regarding sufficiency and appropriateness:

“Link the first three standards.”

“It’s time to give the standards a re-look to see if they are appropriate for the new educational environment now, and for the future.”

“Must improve on accountability.”

“Perhaps we need to put more emphasis on changes occurring in teaching in colleges. Must address distance education without creating a separate ghetto.”

“The Commission should increase the emphasis on “effectiveness”. The standards do need to take into account the “local conditions” which can vary tremendously among member institutions.”

Q6. Does the Commission respond adequately to issues and tensions surrounding accreditation? Please give an example to support your response

General Summary of Responses:

Although the nature of the “issues and tensions” was not defined, respondents generally took this to mean one of three things. First, threats to the Commission in fulfilling its mandate, as one Commissioner noted, “The only tension I ever felt was when a District filed a complaint. That took much time and many resources to respond to.” Second, issues brought to the attention of the Commission by participants regarding the participants and the process. Third, issues related to the perceived need to change the standards in response to current/future conditions. The feeling of the Commissioners is that the Commission does respond adequately. As one public member said, “...painfully so. I sometimes feel that we could move a little faster toward a decision, but it’s much better to consider it very carefully when you are affecting an institution that is as important as one of our educational institutions.” Although another Commissioner cautioned, “There are times when the Commission is inclined to overreact, or react too soon.”

In the first category, a few respondents made reference to legal responsibilities, for example one Commissioner said, “In our litigious society, the Commission must always be careful about the issues and tensions surrounding its actions. In a recent case, I believe the Commission got into trouble because the decisions was not clearly enough linked to the standards.”

With regard to the individual college or District experience, one Commissioner said, “Confidentiality is a concern. Mainly the Commission knows about and responds to tensions at the local level. Sometimes things said in confidence to Team Members are not held in confidence.” Another Commissioner noted, “There have been institutional and District challenges (for example with regard to militant challenges and pressure surrounding the issue of affirmative action). The Commission responds adequately within the limits of confidentiality and without micro-managing. It is nimble at not responding to political interest groups that are inappropriate.” But most Commissioners agreed with this thought, “When key issues are brought to the attention of the Commission, they look at everything related to the issue and try to make fair and justifiable decisions on how best to respond to

the issue.” One of the accreditation professional noted, “The Commission puts a lot of responsibility on the Executive Director, while the Commission is shielded from the issues.” Another said, “Most responsibility in this arena is dealt with by the Director and staff, for example working with new administrations or regulations.”

The area of issues related to changing educational conditions brought many thoughtful responses. “The Commission has retreats to spend time on issues, there is no time at the meetings to discuss issues.” Another Commissioner identified distance education as “the” issue to watch. A different respondent noted, “ACCJC has been very involved in distance education and with the Inter Regional Accreditation Committee’s efforts to address distance education offered across State and regional boundaries.” Another Commissioner suggested that it is in the area of responding to the changing “culture of American higher education” that the most important issues can be found.” This respondent asked this question: “Is having voluntary, peer, self-evaluation in the form of accreditation still relevant when considering all the challenges, changes and issues that are coming up, (e.g., monitoring the self-evaluation process, unbundling the faculty role, distance education, and learning assessment)?” An accreditation professional noted, “ The Commission is trying to respond to broad issues like evidence of learning outcomes, dealing with new providers and public accountability. Most folks do not want to move in the new arenas, but not so with ACCJC.” Another said, “The use of retreats to focus on topics outside decision-making is a good idea.”

Suggestions:

There were few specific suggestions made in response to this question, other than identifying some of the broader issues, in all three categories, that might be effectively discussed by the Commission. Those are noted above. The few who mentioned the retreat seemed to believe that it was valuable and therefore should be continued. One Commissioner took the opportunity offered by this question to reiterate a concern related to an educational issue, “I think that it is essential that, as a second stage, we need to revise the standards to assure that quality and student outcomes are being measured by the college.”

Q7. Does the Commission use it’s accumulated information/data to assist member institutions facilitate change? Please give an example to support your response.

General Summary of Responses:

The key to this question probably lies in how the word “facilitate” is interpreted. Traditionally the knowledge generated by the institution during the Self Study and from the Team Report, as well as the focus of attention by the institution on the institution was seen as the change motivator. Several respondents also noted the influence of Commission publications, workshops and training on institutional change. There was general agreement that the Commission does work to help institutions facilitate change in these ways and also by providing advice during the accreditation process and referrals as needed. In the opinion of most respondents change is a by-product of the process, at the discretion of and under the direction of the member institution, and should remain that way. The opinion of the few

others seems to suggest that a re-focus of accreditation activities toward quality improvement, rather than quality assurance, should be considered. The potential conflict between the role of accreditation as a validation of quality assurance, related to **standards** of performance, versus the role of accreditation as an active change agent for quality improvement, is central to an important issue facing accreditation throughout the country.

The majority of respondents seemed most comfortable with the Commission as a passive agent of change. “Why does ACCJC need to facilitate change?” asked one Commissioner. Another said, “I’m not sure the extent to which the Commission does, or should, promote institutional change.” As a public member said, “Facilitating change is about the toughest thing you can do in the world. What we are going to do though, is to be sure that our message to the institution does give them an opportunity to facilitate change.” Another public member described the relationship of the Commission to institutions as a synergistic one. “A synergy that is created when all of these diverse individuals come together to offer our support based of our experiences, the data we have gathered, things we have learned from the better institutions and also from those that have needed help.” Another Commissioner was in favor of sharing information, “Whatever information we have accumulated we should share with institutions, whether or not the Commission would take the lead in facilitating change – I’m not sure whether we are equipped and well enough staffed to do that. But the information can be shared.”

Among those who would like to see a more proactive Commission, one comment was “We need to enlarge the role of the Commission as change agent.” And, “That’s definitely our dual role – quality assurance and being geared to improvement.” Another said, “In one case, a college requested to do a modified Self Study to test itself against Baldrige criteria, and the Commission allowed that. As a general rule however, I don’t think that the Commission does anything to facilitate change if it is not related to self improvement of the college to meet standards.” Another Commissioner cautioned about switching to a quality improvement model of accreditation, “ I do not think using the Baldrige criteria for accreditation is the way to go, it relies on internal processes, rather than outcomes.”

There were several positive comments about the ways in which the Commission communicates with the field. Of particular note was the support of the Assessment Institutes, the web-site, and newsletter and other publications, as well as the visits of Director, staff, and Commissioners to coach and support institutions. An accreditation professional noted, “On one level I agree that more could be done in this area, but the Commission must think carefully about what areas of change should come from within the Commission’s purview. Most other accrediting bodies have more extensive annual reports, for example. It would be worth thinking through the idea of disseminating more information about change.”

Suggestions:

The general sense in response to this question seems to be to continue to provide the information/data that the Commission is currently doing – with improvements as it is possible to develop. There were few specific suggestions made in response to this question.

However, in addition to the suggestion noted above (creating a more extensive annual report and providing more information about changes that might affect accreditation) there were a few others:

“I am interested in developing a resource bank to which colleges could be referred to meet specific needs.”

“I am interested in an analysis of labor market changes.”

“I do not think that ACCJC has done enough to publicize and promote California Assessment Institutes.”

“The website should be more comprehensive.”

Q8. Does the Commission achieve a balance between being the evaluator of institutionally determined quality versus being the impetus for institutional change? Please give an example to support your response.

General Summary of Responses:

The responses of the Commissioners to this question mirror those of Question 7. Most were clear about the value of the Commission’s evaluation role, and less clear about the role of being the impetus for change. As with question 7, there was recognition that it is the institution’s responsibility to make changes. Most were comfortable with the balance achieved, and with the primary function of the Commission being related to evaluation.

As one Commissioner said about the balance, “This occurs naturally, particularly when the Commission issues a report evaluating an institution less favorably than it would desire. ACCJC feels it must provide solid evidence to support any recommendations it offers that call for change in the institution.” Or, put another way, “The Commission is generally pretty cautious about pushing change. They try to get the institution to see the need.” Another Commissioner noted that some balance is found in the distinction between meeting a standard and a suggestion for improvement, “Almost all Team Reports differentiate between suggestions for improvement and for areas where the college is not in compliance with standards. Formal recommendations are only related to the standards.” Still another Commissioner suggests that the instruments of the process contain the seeds for change. “Most important in the process is the evaluation of the institution’s self-evaluation because someone from the outside can tell the institution how it is perceived. And that serves as a change catalyst.” Another Commissioner cautioned, “The Commission cannot serve as “legislature” and “judge”. The process should encourage Districts to change, but the emphasis should be on assessing quality.” A Commissioner identified another area needing balance. “We have to constantly strive to achieve a balance between evaluation an institution and informing them of trends in higher education.”

Some Commissioners noted some concern about over-reliance on the process, “There is concern (in the accrediting process) about how the institution is responding to the process, how their processes are carried out, a concern that they are being done correctly, rather than looking at the end result.” Or, in one instance, on the perceived California bias of the

process, "I think we are still too California-based to become an effective impetus for institutional change. ...a lot of the change that has to occur depends on the local conditions."

The final word in response to this question is reserved for comments made by the accreditation professionals. One mentioned, "The Commission intends that colleges respond to its diagnostic comments and that the college take measures that make sense to that college. No one size fits all." And, "When the institution wants to change and when accrediting experience gives help, change will happen. When an institution does not want to change, the institution will not change."

Suggestions:

Again few suggestions were made. One was, "I recommend not substituting Baldrige criteria for current Commission standards." An implicit suggestion was made in recounting the positive effects of the Hawaii Community College Chancellor's Office assessment of the system using the ten standards. Perhaps other member systems would benefit from such an exercise.

Q9. Does the Commission demonstrate leadership to its member institutions by providing information pertinent to changing educational conditions and future trends? Please give an example to support your response.

General Summary of Responses:

All but three respondents responded solely in the affirmative to this question. Cited as examples of leadership were the publications, website, Assessment Institutes, workshops, presentations at conferences, and general responsiveness to needs of member institutions. One Commissioner said, "The Commission is really good about sending out informative articles without overloading the Commissioners or the colleges. The staff have really tried to help private institutions, which frequently have less access to current trend data." One accrediting professional noted, "The Director does inform constituencies about issues from the standpoint of accreditation rather than fiscal matters, which dominate State and CEO concerns." Another Commissioner suggested that, "The Commission needs to be discrete about when to create their own conferences, etc., and when to promote those already offered by others." Another Commissioner said, "The Commission tries to strike a balance between informing colleges about environmental pressures and trends, and trying not to get too far ahead of the institutions, and between not forcing them to respond, just informing." This thought was echoed by a Commissioner who said, "The Commission should move slowly in providing leadership. It must not be too far ahead of its member institutions." Another Commissioner related thoughts about the Commission's paper about distance education: "I believe that the paper will eventually go to the institutions saying that ACCJC believes that this represents changing educational conditions and future trends. And that the institutions should be aware of what should go into decisions about distance education. In this case I believe that the Commission did demonstrate leadership in providing pertinent information. However, it does not happen very often."

The three responses that identified room for improvement included these comments from one Commissioner. “It is difficult for an institution that needs to make a lot of change to also be told, “And here are the future trends.” It’s a stick and carrot thing. Depending on what the institution seems to require, you have to use a little of both. We can probably do better at that.” Another Commissioner said, “We’re not there yet as a Commission. We’re still enforcing standards rules, operating by rules of the game and an organizational structure and operating policies established before. And we’re not getting ready to provide information to promote change – given that we will change in response to future trends and conditions. I think we can do that, but we haven’t yet.” An accreditation professional noted, “The Commission needs to focus on its role of quality review and assurance. That information is hard to come by. The key is to helping institutions understand and utilize information on quality review and quality assurance. (Our current) Mission-based accreditation does not focus on definition of quality.”

Suggestions:

There were no specific suggestions contained in the responses to this question. Implied suggestions include the maintenance and improvement of traditional communication systems with the field and the Commissioners. A plea for more forward and future-oriented thinking, responsive to individual institutions, is implied in the comments above. In addition, it seems that good information about what quality means in the community and junior colleges would be appreciated by member institutions.

Q10. For institutions experiencing difficulties, are the current follow-up arrangements, i.e., a one-day visit by a two-person team, sufficient?

General Summary Responses:

The responses to this question can be easily and quickly summarized by saying, it depends. In the majority of cases, where there are few difficulties and the team is experienced and knowledgeable, the one-day visit can work very well. “A two-person visit is very effective. I think, to a large extent, it is not intimidating. ...we go in as an ally.” On the other hand, one Commissioner noted that, “A one day visit can be very cosmetic. Need time for conversations among Team Members. Depends on the enormity of the problems.” One accreditation professional said, “In most cases it probably is. One could always work at giving those visits more focus or clarity. There may need to have more expanded review of reports for institutions that are likely to receive a negative action.”

Among concerns cited by respondents, the statement of one Commissioner summarizes what most others said, “I think as a rule of thumb, that the kind of difficulty that the institution is in ought to be the determinant of the size of the team and the length of visit.” Another Commissioner said, “This is an area that we had better look at as a part of our procedure. I’m not sure if we are really effective or not.”

Suggestions:

There were no specific suggestions made about this topic, other than determining if the one-day, two-person follow-up visit is an effective practice.

Q11. Do the Self Study, Team Report, and other reports offer a sufficient basis for Commission actions? Is the current arrangement to have typically one or two Commissioners serve as in-depth readers of evaluation visit materials sufficient?

General Summary of Responses:

Most respondents believe that, most of the time, the information provided is a sufficient basis for Commission actions. Says one Commissioner, "Rarely does it not." Another commented, "If the Self Study (and Team Report) has been done well, it easily provides a sufficient basis and support for Commission actions." However, more than one respondent commented on unevenness in the quality of the reports. One accreditation professional said, "The weak spot is the uneven quality of Team Reports." Another Commissioner suggested, "Evenness of report quality could be an issue for us to look at." Training of Chairs was also mentioned here, even including the content of Team Reports, "I tend to like the Team Reports that are not strictly simply reading back the standards... They should identify the needs of the institution that are lacking, rather than saying you don't come up to meeting a specific standard. There is a tendency to be a little standard-oriented, too much so, so the standards become something in themselves more than just a measurement for the institution."

However, several Commissioners stated a desire to have more information, "It is crucial in many cases for the Commissioner to call the team chair for clarification and the in-depth reader needs to listen carefully to the Chair's perspective on visitation materials." Or, as another Commissioner said, "Without (the Chair and the Commissioners having a dialogue) I find that sometimes the Commission members are second-guessing the Team's recommendation, and that's not good. ...Sometimes, I wish I could talk to the Chair and say, "What did you do this for?" ...That would make the Chair more responsible in making recommendations"

With regard to the current practice of two Commissioners doing in-depth evaluations of materials, respondent believe that to be an effective and useful practice. "This way you can spend more time on the ones that you are responsible for, to prepare to answer questions. The rest are read, but with less study." Commissioners felt that the system worked even in cases where the Commission might reach a different conclusion than the Team, "In-depth readers present the case and the justification for any recommended actions. Sometimes the Commission supports actions that differ from those recommended by the visitation teams. In such cases, the Commissioners occasionally incorporate knowledge of recommendations for other colleges that have or have had similar circumstances as a basis for modifying visitation Team recommendations." Although one Commissioner stated, "Sometimes the Commission chooses to deviate from the visitation team's recommendation without adequate justification. Sometimes I feel there may be a hidden agenda in place. Although generally the Commission struggles to be fair in all cases."

Suggestions:

Several suggestions were made in response to this question:

More than one Commissioner suggested making a conversation with the team chair part of the review process. "For comprehensive visits we include, as part of the Commission consideration, a short dialogue between the Chair of the visit and possibly even the CEO of the college visited. ...After a presentation the CEO leaves. The Chair stays and gives the Team recommendations. Then the Chair and the Commission have a dialogue." The Commissioner noted that there would be an additional cost to the institution to implement this practice.

Additional training of Chairs was suggested with regard to writing, and content, of Team Reports to achieve better, more usable, report quality.

One accreditation professional noted that, "Some other regional commissions solve the problem by having a staff member on every visit who is responsible for writing the report, but that system is very costly."

Q12. In what ways, if any, should the Commission revise accreditation standards and processes to better fit and serve the changing contexts of higher education?

General Summary of Responses & Suggestions:

Several of the other questions elicited responses related to this question. You will find that the responses and suggestions included here are echoes of that previous information. In reply to the way the question was asked, responses took the form of suggestions. Some addressed the general approach to the revision process, many related to content of specific standards, while still others addressed the conceptual basis of accreditation.

General approach suggestions included:

"Clarity of language should guide revisions. Perhaps standards should have addenda of examples."

"Make them more relevant to the changing conditions and environment for education."

"Standards should continuously be revised to reflect current thinking, and should include accountability."

"Get rid of the jargon."

"There are so many overlapping questions and there is no tie-in with the fact that they are overlapping – and that we are trying to correct."

"It would be appropriate to change standards related to prevalence of distance education if they are really needed, but I would caution against reacting to every new trend of issue."

"I think we need a better balance between input (i.e. information resources) and output (i.e. student outcomes.)"

Specific content suggestions included:

"Put more emphasis on learner outcomes than is currently the case – issues such as pass rates, job placement, student retention, etc."

"We need to gather evidence of student achievement."

"Need to focus on outcomes in standards, practices and policies."

- “Will need to address partnerships between institutions and businesses, etc.”
- “Revise governance standards for greater clarity.”
- “Need more emphasis on assessing community opinion and institutional effectiveness.”
- “Certainly the emphasis on student learning, which is pretty much of a given now, is one of the things that needs to be emphasized and we have to learn to measure better.”
- “Need to address all modes of distance education as incorporated into curriculum.”
- “Changing demographics need to be looked at beyond diversity.”

Conceptual suggestions included:

- “Maybe we should rethink the topics. People get accustomed to the standards, and they get stale. ... They need to be just as comprehensive, but with a fresh rubric.”
- “Would like to see fewer and more general standards.”
- “Conceptual framework is now rooted in functional areas of institutions. There are some models that do not divide institutions in traditional ways. For example looking a leadership in relationship to outcomes.”
- “Academic audit is another interesting model to consider.”
- “We need to get closer to the classroom.”

Q13. What new roles would be appropriate for the Commission to fill or new services should the Commission provide that promote and advance excellence in its institutions and in higher education?

General Summary of Responses & Suggestions:

Like the last question, most responses to this question also took the form of suggestions. Some were in favor of focusing on current endeavors. Others had suggestions of arena for further exploration.

Focus on current endeavors:

- “Not sure new roles are needed or advisable. Perhaps greater depth is needed in current roles.”
- “Continue with the roles that it has traditionally performed. Commissions purpose is to evaluate institutions for quality assurance and bring information to bear in making judgments in this regard. Not sure that any new roles are right for the Commission.”
- “I think if our Commission just stays where it is and doesn’t add any more new roles, but serves present roles more effectively, guiding and facilitating our own self review, I think it would be fine. I don’t think we ought to be getting into any more issues.”
- “Can’t initiate and evaluate at the same time. Must concentrate on evaluation role.”
- “Not sure Commission should take on too many roles. It is more advisable to retain a focus on evaluation of excellence and quality assurance.”
- “Not a new role, but early articulation on quality review and assurance.”
- “Accreditation organizations are under-capitalized, in the absence of additional capacity cannot do more.”

Arena for further exploration:

“Information about inter-regional issues, and we need to look at global aspects as well.”

“Institutes or written guidelines for issues that institutions are having trouble with... such as, assessment, planning, substantive change, distance education, and faculty/staff evaluation.”

“Online Commission work.”

“Maybe Commission could send a team as a facilitating group to work with colleges to solve educational problems.”

“We might be wise to have an open community night to discuss accreditation and what it means when a team goes in. ...Public does not understand accreditation.”

“Public has absolutely no idea what an Accrediting Commission is. I think you need to open up that channel a little more, to make the Accrediting process just a little more an open process that people understand.”

“Perhaps publications and a conference on Quality in Higher Education (WASC does).”

“An annual meeting of institutions accredited by ACCJC to discuss specific topics of interest to community colleges would be useful.”

“Whatever new roles must be in the context of outcomes, distance education, and new providers.”

“Identify, devise, and evaluate a model of institutional quality assurance; provide software and coaching in this area.”

“Providing moral leadership is an important role.”

Q14. To what extent should the Commission build and engage in partnerships, alliances, and collaborations that shape and advance higher education?

General Summary of Responses:

Many respondents felt that since staff time is limited, and the primary purpose of the Commission is institutional quality assurance, the focus of partnerships, alliances, and collaborations should be strongly rooted in the accrediting community. “ACCJC must maintain connections with its counterparts in other regions, and must maintain networks with WASC senior and school divisions because ACCJC is in the middle.” said one Commissioner. Another Commissioner echoed this thought, “I would like to further encourage regional partnerships and alliances among the regional accreditation groups, and possibly even include people other than the Executive Director in engaging in various partnership activities between regions.” As another Commissioner put it, “Regional alliances are good for looking at national standards for accreditation.” An accreditation professional commented, “There are some opportunities for the Commission (staff have done well in this regard) to explore increasing activity among regions. Adoption of common policies might be considered.”

But not all Commissioners believe that such associations are mandatory, “I do not believe that this is a major necessity, except for working with other regional accreditation agencies to assure that institutions which operate in more than one region are evaluated properly.” A different Commissioner said simply, “When appropriate.”

A Commissioner pointed out that positive partnerships already exist, “With CHEA, Western Cooperative for Telecommunication, NCHEMS for data collection, other regions, IRAC and others.” One Commissioner suggested that ACCJC “Could build a partnership with CPEC and the Pacific Island equivalent.” Still another thought that it would be worthwhile, “...getting the community colleges, the state university system and the UC system working even partly together – it’s just amazing what they can do.” And there was an advocate for alliance with business, “Connections with business employers is important because of the workforce training that the colleges provide.” But an accreditation professional cautioned, “An important feature of accreditation is its independence, especially from government, so alliances need to be considered in light of need for independence and focused on a task such as institutional quality, integrity and effectiveness.”

Suggestions:

In general there seems to be general support for maintaining connection with other accrediting agencies, as long as such activities do not sap the strength of the Commission. Support for other connections are less well agreed upon. This might be a good topic for the Commission to explore in the context of resource allocation.

Q15. How can the Commission establish better communication, information, and networking resources and systems with and among member institutions and others?

General Summary of Responses & Suggestions:

Respondents recognized that the Commission is already engaged in many activities designed to establish better communication, information and networking resources and systems with and among member institutions and others. Due to the way the question is worded, most responses took the form of offering ideas about the subject. In addition to maintaining and strengthening the current efforts involved with producing newsletters, web page, other publications, conference presentations, Assessment Institutes, leadership institute and training workshops (which some Commissioner felt was quite enough) several suggestions were made:

“Better use of technology. Could use website instead of written Self Study for Team Members to review. Could interact with Districts through technology.”

“Use technology such as list serves.”

“Provide an electronic bulletin board for discussions.”

“I’d like to see an annual conference.” “I think an annual meeting would help.”

“Continue training efforts with member institutions. Perhaps institution-specific Team training.”

“Need to do more with legislators.”

“Make available information from others, with more glitz.”

“More involvement of institutions in issue discussion.”

“Wonder if we could sponsor area meetings where people could come in to talk about colleges with Commissioners hearing institutional perspective on changes in education.”

“Have workshops etc. in Hawaii to get more people there involved.”

“Ongoing connection with members could be enhanced, for example by utilizing accreditation liaisons and Self Study chairs.”

“Contacts beyond the region could be broadened beyond the Director.”

Q16. What can the Commission do to catalyze and support innovation, experimentation, learning, and change in its institutions and in higher education?

General Summary of Responses & Suggestions:

Again the form of the question has led to suggestions forming the body of most responses. But in addition to the suggestions, several observations were made. One Commissioner noted, “Need to support the idea that higher education institutions ought to be learning organizations, with innovation and change encouraged from that point of view.” Another Commissioner wants to have the Commission encourage broader discussion of issues as a catalyst, “Consistent with work being done, take time with constituents to probe issues, such as distance education and new providers.”

Several respondents focused their attention on the Standards and Reports of the accreditation process as vehicles for catalyzing and supporting innovation. For example, one Commissioner said, “I think by making the accreditation standards and our processes such that you accommodate outside-of -the-box thinking, we allow for different ways of thinking – about the role of faculty for example. ...Make the standards much more amenable to experimentation, innovation and change in an institution.” A different Commissioner said, “An institution could have flexibility in how it applies the standards. The Commission already does that for those institutions that request a different process. It is responsive and that is good.” Another Commissioner went further, “I think as much as we can within federal laws we ought to allow institutions to experiment without getting prior approval and, if it doesn’t work, to stop it without having to report everything to ACCJC.” Another Commissioner suggested that “Standards should be focused on outcomes rather than processes. Give institutions a chance to use a different model, maybe add a little more flexibility in a strong institution. Look at AQIP model.” Another Commissioner who mentioned this thought said, “Continue to support experimental Self Studies.” Another Commissioner thinks that, “The best catalyzing is through Commission recommendations, particularly those that address planning to plan, and research-based planning.” Doing what the Commission already does serves as the catalyst in this situation.

Organizationally, several Commissioners felt that the Commission had a role to play, primarily in the area of communication. One said, “Emphasize best practices, publicize those. Perhaps parts of the Team Report could be considered for Commission publication.” Another Commissioner believes that “It’s a matter of being able to share the experience of viewing a highly efficient organization’s success, how they have achieved it, and how they have served their student body.” Finding ways to share this information would then become important. Sharing information is also at the base of this suggestion, “Commission could be of service by providing an institution with policy on good behavior (best practices) re: quality

and quality assurance.” In the context of a different kind of communication, “Increase collaboration between Hawaii and the Pacific Island institutions. ACCJC currently has too much of a California bias, despite its continuous effort to resist such emphasis,” says a Commissioner.

Not all Commissioners were enthusiastic about acting as a catalyst for change. One said, “The Commission should not take the lead in these areas except to provide information when requested.” Another stated, “I am not in support of having ACCJC assume the role of a catalyst for change.”

In investigating some of the ideas presented here, the Commission would do well to remember what one accreditation professional said, “Commission should model focus of change on the principles of quality and quality assurance. Accreditation is about quality, not change.”

Q17. What can the Commission do to increase institutional commitment to assessment and improvement of student learning? Quality assurance and improvement based on that learning?

General Summary of Responses & Suggestions:

Since this question asks for suggestions, most replies take that form of answer. Suggestions range from ideas based on general observations about the problem to specific ideas for helping to solve it. At the same time, there is recognition of the work done by the Commission in this area already. “The Commission has taken strong steps by working with the Chancellor’s Office to take leadership on assessment.” Along those same lines, one Commissioner said, “Take on a greater leadership role, including assigned staff, to make sure that the CAI and assessment assistance to institutions are well done.” But, as one Commissioner reminded, “The emphasis on student learning is only a part of accreditation and should not drive the entire effort.”

Several Commissioners looked to the standards for a way to increase institutional commitment. One said, “Make sure that standards that refer to student learning are clear and well understood by all institutions.” Another thought, “To increase the commitment to assessment and student learning by the institutions, the Commission has to change the standards to more specifically require that institutions address these issues.” In order to do that, a Commissioner suggested “The Commission needs to do something about defining desired outcomes. What is student learning, for example?” An accreditation professional said, “There is a need to develop tools for the Commission and institutions to measure outcomes. We need to bring about agreement on what constitutes evidence of student learning and how to use information to make judgments about quality.” One thing that might help: “Maybe a guideline on assessment would be helpful. That is the missing piece, “helping them see the way”.” Or another tactic might be to “Highlight those organizations that are doing premier jobs, maybe even going so far as to give in-depth reporting on how it is they’ve accomplished what they have accomplished.” Finally, as one Commissioner pointed out, “The standards require looking for evidence of institutional commitment to

assessment. Institutions need to have data and use it.” This suggests that the collection and effective use of data might require additional training.

A different approach was suggested by another Commissioner, “Recast the way Self Studies are done, link planning and student outcomes.” Someone else said, “Change criteria to become more outcome-based. An emphasis on, or requirement for, multiple measures and institutional review of those measures as the basis for institutional and program changes would produce better quality results.” The effectiveness of this idea depends on the correct use of data. “The standards require looking for evidence of institutional commitment to assessment. Institutions need to have data and use it.” One accreditation professional reminds us that the Commission should “...become more insistent on institutions developing strong systems of assessment. Commission can provide information, coaching and encouragement, but should not say how it should be done, as colleges are all different.”

Discussion of this fascinating topic will continue to be of interest to accrediting commissions, not only in this area, but also throughout the nation. This is a complex subject, as one Commissioner said, “Student assessment and improvement of student learning, those are the two things that we are trying to get at that seem to be the most important, and we’re not really doing well enough now.”

Q18. Is there any other information you would like to share with me regarding the Accrediting Commission, its procedures, policies, standards, or actions?

General Summary of Responses:

In addition to compliments for the high level of professional demeanor, leadership and for the work of the Executive Director and Staff, many Commissioners commented positively about the high quality, motivation, spirit, ethics, and fairness of Commission members. The accreditation professionals were also quite complimentary about the Commission. “The Commission is in many ways exemplary. The willingness of the Commissioner to engage institutions is very strong characteristic. The Commission is willing to take a stand when needed.” Another said, “I do believe that his Commission does a better job than most Commissions because of a long history of synergy between the Commission and the colleges.” Another said, “The broad-based institutional experience of those on the Commission serves it well. The Commission has a strong executive sense.”

Other comments were made about issues of importance to individual members. They follow in no particular order.

“Some of the time in our discussions of the institutions we may be a little over-concerned about how they do something, rather than what they do. The two things we need to work on are to be sure that our procedures aren’t a reason (an end?) in themselves, and that our standards are good and clear.”

“ACCJC should continue to take a periodic look at itself, its policies, and its procedures. The Commission sometimes errs in favor of political realities rather than slavishly insisting on strict adherence to the standards.”

- “There appears to be several people who are willing to raise issues about whether we are treating the various institutions equitably.”
- “It’s a significant loss to watch excellent Commission member’s terms expire.”
- “May want to look a past serious situations in a retreat and ask, Could we have handled this better? Could benefit by development of hypothetical situations to be used in training, particularly of team chairs.”
- “One of the things that is hard to resist is to be prescriptive, which is a mistake. There is an element of expectation that the standards must be met... The Commission must be very careful to define its role. For example, distance education is a delivery method. Why has it been separated out? The Commission needs to be on guard about such things.”
- “Commission should look for needed changes in standards, but should not change them purely in response to complaints and/or questions received. Be on the alert for needed changes in internal policies and procedures as well.”
- “Commission should get more direct input from students in assessing colleges.”
- “Will higher education in the Western region ever consider becoming a single Commission? I’m advocating taking a look at the concept.” (The current system is a disadvantage for community colleges in Hawaii.)

COMMISSION SELF-EVALUATION RESULTS

N = 12

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

Preamble

Just as the accreditation standard on governance (Standard 10) calls for periodic self-evaluation of governing boards, it is incumbent upon the Commission to adhere to the same standard and conduct its own evaluation. This three-part evaluation helps the Commission identify those areas of Commission functioning that are working well and those that may need improvement. Self-evaluation assists the Commission in focusing on specific directions or priorities and activities, thereby strengthening Commission organization and operations.

At the same time, evaluation enables the Commission to build better communication and understanding among its members, leading to a stronger, more cohesive working group. It clarifies what is expected of individual members and offers a better understanding of what Commission members expect from themselves and from each other.

Methodology

The three-part Commission self-evaluation is completed anonymously by each Commissioner every two years. Each Commissioner receives and completes the evaluation prior to the January meeting.

Part I, "The Commission as a Whole," is intended to measure how well the Commission adheres to its own statements of good practice as a unit. This part is collected at or before the January meeting for compilation by staff. The compiled results are reviewed by the full Commission at its spring retreat (every two years), during which sufficient time is allowed for discussion and critique.

Part II, "The Commission as Individuals," provides Commissioners the opportunity for self-reflection based on activities expected of Commission members. It is completed by each Commissioner as a self-evaluation and is not seen by others.

Part III, "Commission Operations Survey," contains an operational evaluation and an evaluation of how the Commission is addressing current issues. The instrument is revised and updated in each iteration to reflect new concerns. Part III is collected at or before the January meeting for compilation by staff, and the compiled results are reviewed and discussed by the full Commission at its spring retreat.

COMMISSION SELF-EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
PART I. THE COMMISSION AS A WHOLE

MEAN RESPONSE
1 = Strongly Agree to
4 = Strongly Disagree

The Commission

A. Shapes and supports its mission.

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. Commission standards and policies are based on good practices in higher education. | 1.17 |
| 2. The Commission constantly engages in study and discussion of good practices and current issues affecting higher education. | 1.60 |
| 3. The Commission examines its mission on a regular basis. | 1.70 |
| 4. The Commission regularly evaluates whether its mission is being accomplished. | 1.70 |

B. Takes responsible action on the accredited status of institutions and makes broad accreditation policy.

- | | |
|--|------|
| 5. The Commission bases decisions on its established standards and policies. | 1.17 |
| 6. The Commission appraises private and public institutions in terms of their own stated purposes within the context of accreditation standards. | 1.50 |
| 7. Decisions affecting the accredited status of institutions reflect the Commission's commitment to improving educational effectiveness, with particular emphasis on student learning. | 1.50 |
| 8. Commission processes ensure consistency in accreditation decisions. | 1.58 |
| 9. The Commission gives appropriate consideration to reports and recommendations of evaluation teams when making accreditation recommendations decisions. | 1.25 |

C. Functions as a unit.

- | | |
|---|------|
| 10. Commission processes support majority decisions. | 1.09 |
| 11. The Commission honors diverse opinions. | 1.27 |
| 12. The Commission has established processes to promote cohesiveness of the group. | 1.33 |
| 13. The Commission engages in ongoing and comprehensive self-evaluation to foster improvement. | 1.73 |
| 14. The Commission maintains a strong partnership with the Executive Director as a team member. | 1.00 |

D. Has identified its stakeholders and understands their needs and perspectives.

- | | |
|--|------|
| 15. The Commission has a clear understanding of the diverse interests of its membership, including those of private and public colleges and institutions located in the Pacific Islands. | 1.67 |
| 16. The Commission provides its membership with effective leadership and direction on accreditation issues. | 1.25 |
| 17. The Commission communicates effectively with its institutional membership, other constituencies, and agencies. | 1.33 |
| 18. The Commission provides appropriate guidance to institutions as they prepare self studies and other reports. | 1.25 |
| 19. The Commission provides institutions with appropriate follow-up to accreditation decisions. | 1.17 |

E. Monitors and evaluates how it is fulfilling its goals, function, and mission based on outcomes, not activity.

- | | |
|---|------|
| 20. The Commission engages in regular and meaningful discussion of its effectiveness. | 1.83 |
| 21. The Commission has effective means for setting and revising its policies. | 1.42 |
| 22. The Commission employs an effective method of evaluating its actions. | 1.80 |

Please comment on the following items.

23. As a Commissioner, I am most pleased about the following things which the Commission has accomplished or is currently undertaking:

Need more information and experience for honest and fair evaluation.

Maintaining high quality commission membership & staff.

Study of technology & change. Project Renewal.

ACCJC weathered recent controversy. Project Renewal is a thorough undertaking which will have many benefits. Timely review and decisions on colleges being reviewed. The leadership program and joint accreditation coordination are important projects that contribute to the long term success of accreditation.

CCLDI

Simplification of standards

Consideration of redrafting standards in light of distance education and other changes in program delivery to meet needs of 21st C.

Project Renewal

A sharper focus on student learning as a central measure of institutional effectiveness!

24. As a Commissioner, I have some concerns about the following:

Process for evaluation of distance learning and new technologies

Legal action taken by some colleges when they disagree with what I believe is a very unbiased commission.

I have felt at times that some votes were the result of personal agendas rather than determined on the individual issue.

None.

Our standards don't focus enough on outcomes.

None.

None.

Moving beyond policy level on Distance Ed to procedural level more appropriate at campus level.

That the commission reflect more on evaluating its actions and effectiveness.

That the volume and cycle of institutional reviews vis a vis the size of the Commission and staff, consume available time at the expense of continuous self (commission) evaluation and improvement.

25. As a Commissioner, I would like the Commission to emphasize the following in the near future:

Student evaluation and local public assessment of services provided within local districts.

None.

None.

Continue efforts in cross-regional connections.

A revision of the standards to focus more on outputs.

How technology will impact the accreditation process and reporting.

Culture of evidence--What all that may be; CAI.

Value/meaning of AA degrees.

#24 in conjunction with #23

The adoption of a standard on student learning as the central focus of institutional evaluation with other standards flowing from this core element.

26. Other Comments:

None.

None.

None.

None.

Executive Director is doing a superb job.

Continue spending time on the changing world of accreditation.

None.

More significant role of vice chair; any way logistically that we can reorder agenda and/or deadlines so that burden to commissioners does not concentrate upon xmas period prior to January annual meeting.

**PART II. THE COMMISSION AS INDIVIDUALS
RETAINED FOR PERSONAL REFERENCE**

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Disagree 4=Strongly Disagree 5=Don't Know/Not Sure

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I recognize my ethical responsibilities by accepting and subscribing to the defined purposes of accreditation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I respect the role of the Commission and in no way misuse the power inherent in the office. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I function effectively as a Commissioner by staying informed on educational and accreditation issues. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I attend professional workshops, educational conferences, and training sessions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I attend and actively participate in Commission activities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I review agenda and supplemental materials prior to Commission meetings. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I am active in the development of policy and practices of the Commission. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I assist in formulating recommendations for institutions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I serve as an objective decision-maker on the accredited status of institutions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. I base my decisions on consistent criteria for all institutions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. I vote on Commission actions based on accrediting policies and existing Commission standards. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I complete my assignments when I serve as a reader and evaluator for institutional reports. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. I respect the confidentiality of relationships between the Commission and the institutions it accredits. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. I refrain from commenting to the media or members of the public on Commission actions or matters before the Commission. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. I do not publicly represent the Commission unless so directed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. I promote and maintain good relations with fellow Commission members. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. I respect the opinions of other Commission members and abide by the principle of majority rule. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Disagree 4=Strongly Disagree 5=Don't Know/Not Sure

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18. I keep an open mind and promote the opportunity to think through other facts and points of view. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I inform the Commission when a matter under consideration might involve or appear to involve a conflict of interest. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. I avoid situations that might involve or appear to involve a conflict of interest. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. I interpret accreditation issues to various constituencies as assigned. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. I participate in evaluation activities and performance of the Executive Director. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. I arrive at Commission meetings and activities on time. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. I remain at Commission meetings and activities until all business is completed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Notes to Self:

PART III. COMMISSION OPERATIONS

MEAN RESPONSE
1 = Strongly Agree to
4 = Strongly Disagree

A. Commissioner Training

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1. The Commissioner orientation provides sufficient background to successfully begin a Commission appointment. | 1.70 |
| 2. New-Commissioner mentoring provides good ongoing support and education. | 2.13 |
| 3. What suggestions would you make to ACCJC to improve training for Commissioners?
<i>Need more experience for an honest and fair evaluation. However, I have received immediate responses to all requests for help so far from Dr. Wolf & Dr. Hernandez.</i> | |
| <i>None.</i> | |
| <i>If there is a mentoring program, I'm unaware of it. I did receive training from David, but it was much to absorb in one meeting.</i> | |
| <i>None.</i> | |
| <i>Annual meetings with new Commissioners before their final meeting.</i> | |
| <i>No orientation or mentoring when appointed to Commission.</i> | |
| <i>None.</i> | |
| <i>Commissioner orientation is weak; mentoring association could be strengthened. Retreat for new commissioners with mentors assigned; Commissioner manual.</i> | |

B. Staff Support for Commission

- | | |
|---|------|
| 4. Commission meeting materials are complete. | 1.08 |
| 5. Commission meeting materials are received in a timely manner. | 1.25 |
| 6. Reading materials for discussion of issues are informative. | 1.25 |
| 7. Committee support from staff facilitates Commissioners' focus on substantive issues. | 1.09 |
| 8. Other communication between staff and Commissioners is appropriate and professional. | 1.18 |
| 9. Guidance provided by staff is appropriate. | 1.18 |
| 10. What suggestions would you make to ACCJC for improving staff support to the Commission?
<i>None.</i> | |
| <i>None.</i> | |
| <i>ACCJC has a committed & talented staff which always provides appropriate and useful support.</i> | |
| <i>None.</i> | |
| <i>Staff support outstanding.</i> | |
| <i>None.</i> | |
| <i>None.</i> | |
| <i>Memoranda re too long & repetitious.</i> | |

C. Commission Decision-making Processes

- | | |
|--|------|
| 11. The Commission has effective means to ensure that its accreditation actions are appropriate and consistent from institution to institution. | 1.64 |
| 12. Self studies provide adequate assessment of colleges' strengths and weaknesses. | 1.82 |
| 13. Team reports provide a balanced assessment of the college's strengths and weaknesses. | 1.55 |
| 14. Together, self studies and team reports provide an adequate description and analysis upon which to base accreditation decisions. | 1.50 |
| 15. Relevant Commission policies provide adequate ground rules for making decisions. | 1.58 |
| 16. Commission reader procedures are clear. | 1.60 |
| 17. Use of readers provides sufficient expertise to assist the Commission in making decisions. | 1.70 |
| 18. Staff analyses of institutional reports are adequate for making decisions. | 1.70 |
| 19. The Commission takes negative actions when warranted. | 1.75 |
| 20. The Commission clearly communicates its decisions to the institution. | 1.42 |
| 21. What suggestions would you make to further ensure accreditation processes are effective?
<i>Insure that all college constituencies have input into self studies and receive copies of team reports.</i> | |
| <i>None.</i> | |
| <i>None.</i> | |
| <i>The current Project Renewal should do this quite will.</i> | |
| <i>None.</i> | |
| <i>Ineffective Commissioners should be replaced after the first term. Not fair to other Commissioners.</i> | |

If self studies are well written #12.

Staff need to be careful not to try to get team chair to change team recommendations; staff should/could provide that input as staff analysis.

Self studies do not always provide adequate assessment of a college's strengths & weaknesses. Some team reports are better than others depending upon ability/commitment of team chair. Readers do not receive materials in sufficient time to make in-depth evaluations.

MEAN RESPONSE

1 = Strongly Agree to

4 = Strongly Disagree

D. Commission structure and internal processes

22. Commission composition allows for appropriate constituent representation.	1.10
23. The Commissioner selection process is fair.	1.50
24. The officer selection process is fair.	1.36
25. The Commission committee structure is effective.	1.40
26. Procedures for creating and revising policies are effective.	1.58
27. Operating rules (Bylaws) are effective.	1.55
28. Commission self-evaluation processes provide timely and relevant information for improvement.	1.80
29. The January/June timing of Commission meetings is optimal, considering the needs of the institutions.	1.33
30. The organization of Commission meetings is efficient.	1.18
31. Commission meetings are of the appropriate length to allow for all business to be conducted efficiently and effectively.	1.18

32. What suggestions would you make to improve Commission structure and processes?

Need more information & experience for meaningful recommendation.

None.

At times I have felt that some decisions are made because of personal knowledge & information of a few commissioners, rather than because of the reading material provided for all commissioners.

Inform the entire Commission of the commissioner selection process.

I think new method of selecting officers is reasonable.

None.

None.

Problem with January & digesting mountains of materials. Some reordering of reception of campus reports in order to get materials to Commissioners in Nov-Dec prior to Jan. meeting.

E. Participation/involvement of Commissioners

33. Commissioner participation on team visits aids Commissioner understanding of the accreditation process.	1.17
34. Commissioner participation in conferences and meetings of other organizations promotes Commissioner understanding of accreditation.	1.30
35. Commissioner workload, while demanding, is appropriate for decisions involved.	1.33
36. Communication between and among Commissioners at meetings and retreats is adequately provided for.	1.27
37. The Commission is sufficiently visible among member institutions.	2.11
38. Commission interaction with other commissions is useful.	1.56

39. What suggestions would you make to facilitate Commissioner participation/involvement in accreditation?

None.

None.

None.

Should do more of #33 & 37. #34 is desirable, but how can the Commission assist this in happening?

None.

None.

None.

F. Communication with Member Institutions

40. The ACCJC newsletter is an effective device for communication with member institutions.	1.55
41. The ACCJC web site is effective for communicating with member institutions.	1.50
42. The handbooks are effective for communicating with member institutions.	1.45

MEAN RESPONSE
1 = Strongly Agree to
4 = Strongly Disagree

43. Telephone, e-mail, and other communication used by ACCJC are appropriate and effective means of communicating with member institutions. 1.44
44. ACCJC staff is sufficiently available to member institutions. 1.27
45. ACCJC projects a professional image to member institutions. 1.18
46. What suggestions would you make to ACCJC for improving communication with member institutions?
None.
Attend as many college functions/conferences as reasonable.
David's letters to institutions are carefully crafted to avoid misunderstanding. I'm sure they are helpful to colleges.
Could newsletters be made more frequent?
None.
None.
None.
Not sure/don't know how effective our present communication is.

G. Accreditation Training

From your inspection of team training materials and first-hand experience you may have had at training workshops, please evaluate the training components.

47. The orientation provided by the Commission to visiting team members is useful. 1.40
48. The orientation provided to colleges preparing self studies is useful. 1.38
49. Accrediting Commission handbooks provide effective guidance to colleges completing self studies. 1.40
50. The Accrediting Commission web site is a helpful training tool. 1.80
51. Accrediting Commission staff support, including on-site assistance, phone consultations, and e-mail communication to colleges is helpful. 1.33
52. The Assessment Institute focuses attention on measurement of student learning. 1.00

53. What suggestions would you make to ACCJC for improving training for member institutions?

None.
None.
None.
Handbook could provide examples of good responses to standards.... maybe poor responses too.
None.
None.
None.
Not sure.

H. Accreditation Process

54. The traditional accreditation paradigm is the most effective way to ensure institutional quality. 1.44
55. The traditional accreditation paradigm is the most effective way to ensure institutional improvement. 1.60
56. The accreditation process reliably directs institutional attention to self improvement. 1.58
57. Preparation of the self study fosters institutional improvement. 1.67
58. Team visits foster institutional improvement. 1.64
59. Accreditation processes advance college measurement of learning. 2.11
60. The accreditation process encourages institutions to enhance the capacity to perform research and planning for institutional improvement. 1.40
62. Commission services adequately assist institutions with self improvement. 1.55
63. Reports received and issued by the Commission are of high quality. 1.59
64. The Commission fosters exchange of ideas and transmission of good practices in the field. 1.64
65. Accreditation is an effective process for maintaining the integrity and quality of community colleges. 1.09

I. Standards

66. Each of the ten accreditation standards is appropriate for assessing the quality of a college.
1. Institutional Mission 1.55
 2. Institutional Integrity 1.45
 3. Institutional Effectiveness 1.45
 4. Educational Programs 1.33

MEAN RESPONSE
1 = Strongly Agree to
4 = Strongly Disagree

5. Student Support and Development	1.42
6. Information and Learning Resources	1.33
7. Faculty and Staff	1.33
8. Physical Resources	1.50
9. Financial Resources	1.42
10. Governance and Administration	1.50
67. Each of the ten accreditation standards is <u>clearly stated</u>.	
1. Institutional Mission	1.67
2. Institutional Integrity	1.58
3. Institutional Effectiveness	1.75
4. Educational Programs	1.67
5. Student Support and Development	1.58
6. Information and Learning Resources	1.75
7. Faculty and Staff	1.42
8. Physical Resources	1.50
9. Financial Resources	1.50
10. Governance and Administration	1.50
68. Each of the ten accreditation standards is <u>sufficiently comprehensive for the ACCJC range of member institutions</u>.	
1. Institutional Mission	1.64
2. Institutional Integrity	1.64
3. Institutional Effectiveness	1.50
4. Educational Programs	1.42
5. Student Support and Development	1.58
6. Information and Learning Resources	1.42
7. Faculty and Staff	1.42
8. Physical Resources	1.67
9. Financial Resources	1.33
10. Governance and Administration	1.58

FUTURE DIRECTION

This portion of the questionnaire seeks guidance in determining the future roles the Commission should assume to better serve its institutions and to shape the future of higher education. The following questions were included in the Project Renewal Survey completed by member institutions and evaluation team members in spring 2000. At the beginning of each set of items is a general statement that reflects a synthesis of information collected by other regional accrediting agencies who are also determining how they can best address the changing dimensions of accreditation. Please indicate what priority ACCJC should place on each item below.

Transformation of Accreditation Processes

MEAN RESPONSE
Extremely High Priority = 1
Extremely Low Priority = 4

General Statement #1. Accreditation processes must meet diverse needs and types of institutions and changing contexts and values of higher education.

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. Accreditation processes should be focused on the future and on assisting higher education in moving toward the future. | 1.83 |
| 2. Accreditation processes should hold achieved learning as a central commitment and as evidence of quality. | 1.25 |
| 3. Accreditation processes should be integrated into the ongoing improvement systems of the institution. | 1.58 |
| 4. Accreditation processes should be streamlined and cost-effective. | 2.09 |
| 5. Accreditation processes should capture and share institutional best practices, innovative initiatives, and benchmarks. | 1.54 |
| 6. Accreditation process should be continuous, versus periodic, and include ongoing assistance and consultation from ACCJC. | 2.05 |
| 7. Accreditation process should allow more inclusion from business and industry. | 2.90 |
| 8. Accreditation processes and reports should be split into distinct categories: quality assurance and quality improvement. | 2.35 |

General Statement #2. New roles and services are needed from ACCJC.

- | | |
|---|------|
| 9. ACCJC should become an informational resource for stakeholders, learning, synthesizing, and reporting to further excellence in higher education. | 2.00 |
| 10. ACCJC should focus on being an advocate for, spring board for, and partner in change. | 2.00 |
| 11. ACCJC should establish mentoring and coaching systems, linking ACCJC evaluators and other agencies to institutions for continual improvement. | 2.11 |
| 12. ACCJC should become a service organization that learns from its institutions, shares that learning, and continually improves. | 2.00 |

General Statement #3. ACCJC needs to build and participate in partnerships, alliances, and collaborations.

- | | |
|---|------|
| 13. ACCJC should partner with other regional, professional, and specialized accrediting agencies so that the evaluation processes are more integrated with one another, reducing duplication of effort. | 1.91 |
| 14. ACCJC should become a consultative partner with member institutions that are exploring unique, innovative, and experimental projects. | 2.25 |
| 15. Business and industry should be included as partners in the ongoing quality assurance and improvement of higher education. | 2.50 |

General Statement #4. ACCJC communication and learning systems should be fully developed and responsive to stakeholder needs.

- | | |
|---|------|
| 16. ACCJC should increase stakeholder understanding of its mission and work, beyond a few key people at member institutions. | 1.50 |
| 17. ACCJC should develop new systems of communication to better engage and inform member institutions and other stakeholders. | 2.10 |

General Statement #5. ACCJC should take a proactive role in leading and shaping the future of higher education.

- | | |
|---|------|
| 18. ACCJC should provide forums for discussing and addressing trends, issues, and future directions for higher education. | 2.09 |
|---|------|

19. Accreditation systems should serve as catalyst and support for change, innovation, improvement, and experimentation. 1.64

General Statement #6. ACCJC should focus its efforts to improve institutional quality on student learning outcomes.

20. ACCJC should focus its efforts in quality improvement on achievement of each institution's unique mission through student outcomes. 1.33

What should the priorities of ACCJC be as it moves into the next century? The statements below capture the General Statements by which the previous set of questions on the survey was categorized.

Ranked in order of importance for ACCJC's work in the future.

	MEAN RESPONSE
	Highest Priority = 1
21. Transforming accreditation standards and processes to better fit and serve the changing contexts and cultures of higher education	2.08
22. Providing new roles and services that promote and advance excellence in higher education	3.58
23. Building and engaging in partnerships, alliances, and collaborations that shape and advance higher education	4.42
24. Establishing communication, information, and networking resources and systems with and among member institutions and others	3.33
25. Catalyzing and supporting innovation, experimentation, learning, and change in higher education	3.75
26. Focusing institutional commitment on assessment and improvement of student learning and on quality assurance and quality improvement based on that learning	1.17

STAKEHOLDERS

As ACCJC continues to define its mission, vision, and future directions, it has many important stakeholders in the work of accreditation. When you consider the products or outcomes of the accreditation process, who should be the primary benefactors, customers, or stakeholders?

Below please check the 4 stakeholder groups you consider most important to accreditation. (The number indicates the total selection that item among its 4 stakeholder groups.)

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Institutions = 9 | <input type="checkbox"/> Business, Industry = 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Community = 9 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Institutional Administrators = 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Federal/State Government = 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Counselors = 0 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching Faculty = 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> General Public = 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Institution Staff = 1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Students/Learners = 10 | <input type="checkbox"/> ACCJC Commission & Staff = 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other = 0 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employers = 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Media = 0 | |

APPENDIX D EVALUATING THE EVALUATORS: ROUND 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In 1993, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of WASC initiated a comprehensive survey to evaluate the standards and procedures it used to accredit colleges. This information was used, in part, to revise the standards. In 2000, a survey was developed that had many of the same questions as the 1993 survey. The purpose of this approach was to ensure that a comparison could be made from 1993 to 2000. This survey was conducted by the RP Group, independent of the Commission. The intention was to survey the college community including faculty and staff who had been on visiting teams and had prepared college self studies using the 1996 standards. This report presents the findings of this survey.

The Survey

A total of 1236 surveys were distributed to two groups:

- Members of visiting teams during the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 academic years
- Staff and faculty members who had participated as self study chairs or chairs of standards during preparation of the self studies reviewed in the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 comprehensive visits
- All College Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Accreditation Liaison Officers (ALOs)

Six hundred and sixty-six completed questionnaires were received, for a response rate of 54%. This is lower than the 1993 study, which had a 70% response rate.

The Survey Findings

In general, survey findings were very positive for both team members who participated in Accreditation reviews and college staff members who participated in the self study process, as well as for CEO's and ALO's. Also, the findings indicate positive increases from the survey conducted in 1993. Although the causal factors related to this change cannot be categorically stated, it appears that Accreditation in the year 2000 may be viewed more positively than in 1993.

As with the previous survey, many of the areas surveyed were the same, as the intention of this survey was to compare the two time periods. However, there were some additional areas added to the 2000 survey. All areas surveyed appear below.

Process – Respondents were generally very satisfied with the process of Accreditation. Not only were they satisfied with Commission attributes such as Commission orientations and staff

support, they were also very satisfied with the quality of the visiting teams and the communication with the Commission in regard to the decisions made.

Utility – In most areas, respondents felt that the Accreditation process was useful to the college. Specifically, they felt that Accreditation was most useful in broad contexts, such as helping the institution look at its mission and goals, in turn, stimulating planning and program review. Accreditation, however, was not perceived as very useful for developing measures of effectiveness at the course level or improving the functioning of the Board of Trustees.

Standards – The standards were evaluated on their ability to assess quality, their clarity, and comprehensiveness. High marks were received on all three measures.

The Larger Value of Accreditation – High marks were received in almost all areas; the most positive responses were for the ability of the process to identify important issues for the college to address, along with the belief that, overall, the Accreditation process is valuable to the college.

Transformation of the Accreditation Process – Questions taken from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools' survey were used to determine how respondents see the future of Accreditation. Clearly, respondents view the Commission as a resource for quality assurance and quality improvement, as well as commitment to improving student learning. Yet, over a third of respondents gave a low priority rating to having the Commission advocate change or include representatives from business or government on teams.

Although respondents gave generally positive opinions, there were some notable exceptions, specifically:

- Respondents gave lower than average ratings for the usefulness of Accreditation results in some measures of effectiveness, leadership, campus relations, staffing, and in improving specific department functions.
- While quality and clarity of the standards were rated fairly high, comprehensiveness of the standards was rated lower than the other two areas.
- As with the 1993 survey, the perception that the Commission takes negative action when warranted is viewed with some skepticism.
- There were fully a third of respondents who stated that colleges moved either slowly or waited until the next Accreditation to act on team recommendations.
- In every area surveyed, respondents perceived the self study as less accurate than the visiting team report.
- Respondents do not appear to be ready or willing to embrace the increased input from business and industry in the Accreditation process.

Regardless of these negative findings, the overwhelming opinion of respondents is that the Commission is doing a fine job with the Accreditation process.

Finally, the full report and the appendices provide the following: data on the survey process, outcomes of the survey, comparisons with the 1993 survey, policy implications, and detailed responses by demographic grouping.

APPENDIX E

ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS SUMMARY

Background of Study

In fall 2000, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) contracted with Company of Experts (COE) to assist it in one aspect of its Project Renewal. COE was to conduct interviews of staff involved in self study processes at three member institutions. Interview questions focused on perceptions of the accreditation process and responses to a comprehensive survey conducted the previous spring. Three institutions were selected to represent the range of institutions accredited by ACCJC. They were the Defense Language Institute, a private military institution, Fresno City College, a large college in a multi-college district, and Lassen College, a small college in a single-college district. After reviewing institutional self studies, two members of the COE conducted day-long interviews with individuals and groups at each campus.

Findings of Study

The ethnographic interviewers congratulate the Commission on the generally excellent reputation it appears to hold in the field. The 38 people interviewed at the three institutions in the study gave many, many commendations to the Commission both programmatic and in terms of Commission staff. These commendations are noted throughout the report.

Aspects of accreditation that might need improvement are also noted throughout the report. In the view of the ethnographic interviewers, areas that could be improved tended to cluster in seven areas: Standards, Public information and public relations, Models, Team and/or staff visits, Commission decisions, Follow-up, and Training. They are listed below in order of perceived institutional priority according to the judgment of the ethnographic interviewers:

Standards:

Redundancy, both within and across the standards; rigid and checklist-y, the language and/or conceptual frameworks don't always "fit" the institutions and seem biased toward California Community Colleges; institutional confusion between the role of WASC and the California Community College Chancellor's Office (Title 5, Partnership for Excellence, Outcomes-based funding); lack of involvement of District office and trustees, especially in Standard 10.

Public information and public relations:

Not visible; not enough presentations at conferences; web site needs to be kept updated and interactive; not enough in-person visits; narrow dissemination of newsletter; lack of information pieces or briefs on various aspects of the accreditation process, pieces that could be easily used within the institutions, including resources for implementing the recommendations; no professional journal for discussion of such issues as outcomes and assessment; too much in handbook; lack of promotion of services, including the California Assessment Institute (CAI); video received mixed reviews.

Models:

Lack of models and best practices, especially outcomes and assessment and self studies; could be put on web.

Team and/or staff visits:

Too brief; team doesn't visit enough classes or meet with students; not enough visits (in between and/or during self study process); not enough open forums; sometimes don't have right people on team because they dropped out at last minute; team sometimes talks to "old" players, not the current players; not always people from institutions that are "one step up" or similar to one they're visiting.

Commission decisions:

Waited too long to act (Lassen).

Follow-up:

Not enough follow up after the Commission decision; are the colleges following up on recommendations?

Training:

CAI weak at first, but getting stronger and more useful; for self study teams/ALO trainings, always held in major metropolitan areas; need to be rotated to locations throughout the state.

Company of Experts very much enjoyed being of service to the Commission and its membership in one aspect of the Commission's Project Renewal.

APPENDIX F REVIEW OF STANDARDS

Standard One: INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

Those institutions which are public generally have a mission statement that parallels the legislative intent of the authorizing body. Most institutions connect the allocation of resources to institutionally adopted priorities and goals rather than directly to the mission statement; therefore, deleting references to resources allocation in this section and placing that reference elsewhere may be appropriate.

In addition to currency to the mission statement, a major question or expectation should be the assessment of, Does the institution actually achieve its mission.

Standard Two: INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

The integrity of course content is implied in the statements, “The institution represents itself clearly, accurately, and consistently...” and “current information is provided in the catalog concerning...curricular...and course offerings;” however, with regard to course content the integrity of the institution would be more specifically addressed by stating an expectation that the course outlines are fully adhered to and that course outcomes are consistent with those objectives.

Standard Three: INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

I agree with an earlier observation that institutional mission statements tend to be very broad and, in the case of the California Community Colleges, aligned with the statutory mission assigned to them. Moreover, the mission statements tend to describe the students that institutions serve but not necessarily what the institutions propose to do with such students beyond offer courses. As such, Standard Three reflects some of the imprecision attendant to a vague mission statement and could benefit from some editorial modification. I offer the following as possible modifications:

The institution, ~~appropriate to its mission and purposes as a higher education institution,~~ develops and implements a broad-based and integrated system of research, evaluation, and planning to assess institutional effectiveness *in accomplishing its mission and purposes as a higher education institution*, and uses the results for institutional improvement. The institution identifies institutional and learner outcomes which can be validated by objective evidence.

A.1 Institutional Research *is focused, systematic,* integrated with, and supportive of institutional planning and evaluation.

A.3 The institution *has defined the criteria for developed and implemented the means for* evaluating how well, and in what ways, it accomplishes its mission and purposes. *and has implemented processes to systematically gather information related to these criteria.*

A.4 The institution provides evidence that its program evaluations ~~lead to improvement of~~ *are used to improve* programs, *practices*, and services.

B.3 The institution engages in systematic and integrated educational, financial, physical, and human resource planning and implements changes to improve programs, *practices*, and services.

C.1 The institution specifies intended institutional *and learner* outcomes and has clear documentation of their achievement.

Given the suggested editorial changes to the existing Standard Three, I would also suggest reordering sub-section A in the following manner:

Change A.1 to A.2 – to follow definition of criteria for evaluation with statement that research be focused, systematic, and supportive of both planning and evaluation.

Change A.2 to A.3 – to follow statement that research be focused and systematic with statement that adequate sources are provided in support of systematic research and evaluation.

Change A.3 to A.1 – to begin the section with a statement on the importance of defining the criteria for evaluating institutional effectiveness.

The remaining statements contained in Standard Three, I believe, can stand as they are.

Standard Four: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Impact of Issues and Trends on Standard Four

The Learning Paradigm and the Competency Movement

The concept of focus on “learning” versus “teaching” is not significantly addressed in the current standards. Standard Four does have language addressing “learning outcomes for degree and certificate programs” (B.3.). It also has language addressing “evaluation of student learning” (D.3.). It might be improved by adding language assuring that criteria have been developed for certifying that students have achieved learning outcomes for degree and certificate programs. Given the acknowledgement that not all ACCJC institutions are likely to embrace the “learning paradigm” in the coming six years, and that the standards need to be broad enough to be all inclusive, the editorial board may find the existing language sufficient.

Effectiveness and Accountability

Standard Four as it currently is written requires all institutions “to have in place clearly defined processes for establishing and evaluating its programs.” It also requires that an institution “ensures the quality of instruction, academic rigor, and educational effectiveness of its courses and programs.” Based on feedback that the External Review Committee has received, there is indication that Standard Four could be worded to focus more directly on outcomes.

Distance Education

While Distance Education has very definite implications for Standard Four, those implications also reach far beyond instruction. For Standard Four, we recommend that Distance Education be reviewed with the same standards as other instructional methodologies. The External review Committee also recommends the dispersal of Distance Education review among the standards as appropriate. In particular, the standards editorial board is asked to look at Distance Education implications in Standards 4, 5, 6, and 8.

Technology

Technology has both academic and administrative applications, and needs to be reviewed accordingly. The ERC expressed concern that the standards not inadvertently define how technology should be addressed at the campuses, since a variety of models currently exist. For Standard Four, technology may be included as a tool for instruction, for assessment, and as a resource. The language currently in Standard Four, A.4 may be sufficient.

Outsourcing

This is covered in a generic fashion in D.6., but the editorial board will want to ensure that the specific issues are addressed. While the standard states that all courses and programs must be “designed, approved, administered, and periodically evaluated under established institutional procedures”, some editing could assist to clarify the intent of this standard.

Time to Degree

Standard Four already requires that institutions offer programs in a manner that allows students to complete “within a reasonable time”. With the great diversity of programming available today, further proscription would be inadvisable.

International Education

This issue is closely related to the issue of Distance Education. Like Distance Education, its impact is seen across most aspects of the institution, so would probably be best integrated into the standards than standing alone as a new sub-part.

Standard Five: STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

In this standard the statements mostly describe an institutional focus on students, but these is not a direct statement about student-centeredness. For clarity, every statement regarding “services should be clarified by the term “support services.”

Modify the language of current standards to

- Elevate the importance attached to faculty providing out-of-class mentoring and support services to encourage learner achievement
- Encourage institutional provision of opportunities for students to engage in self assessment as a means of determining their readiness to move on to advanced courses/competencies

Standard Six: INFORMATION AND LEARNING RESOURCES

Issues Summary

Over the years, accreditation standards have been discussed and then changed as needed. As new minor issues and concerns arose and were addressed in the accreditation process, the normal procedure was to have them inserted as sub-issues underneath appropriate, existing standards. Such was the case when increased recognition of the value of distance learning led to significantly increased use. Institutions began to feel increasing pressures to change the comfortable and familiar procedures of the past and develop distance learning programs.

When it came to accreditation standards it initially appeared that the best fit for distance learning would be under Standard 6, Information and Learning Resources. However, with time and further consideration, it became apparent that that decision was insufficient and did not take into account the entire distance learning process.

When distance learning in the '90s was increasingly being recognized as filling an unmet need, it usually represented a substantive change under the accreditation process for higher education institutions. Since distance learning needed to be identified and examined during the self-study, a determination had to be made as to where it would best fit under the ten existing standards. A careful analysis of Standard 6, Information and Learning Resources, showed it dealt mainly with equipment, software, and supporting personnel used primarily for the purpose of electronic storage and retrieval of information, whether in print form, directly from a stand-alone computer, or through a system of networked computers. Since libraries traditionally have been the established repository for storage and retrieval of print information, it was a natural extension to have them also responsible for all electronic information storage and retrieval. It also made sense to place all of the equipment, software and supporting personnel under one semi-discrete standard, Standard 6, Information and Learning Resources. Since technology plays an integral role in all distance learning programs, it was assumed that the best possible fit would again be with Standard 6, already heavily equipment and software oriented. Over the years, this placement appeared to work reasonably well.

Unfortunately, just placing distance learning under Standard 6 was insufficient. Distance learning is a process that cuts across all areas of the campus. It is not just a semi-discrete collection of equipment, software, and support personnel. Distance learning goes to the core of the reason for the college--student learning. Distance learning extends the knowledge, expertise, and experience of the faculty member beyond the four walls of the traditional classroom. Students can participate in courses without having to physically come to a specific classroom on campus multiple times a week at special pre-determined times. However, providing access to higher education to these previously disenfranchised students came at a cost.

All services (as identified by the accreditation/self-study process) that are guaranteed to traditional on-campus, classroom students must also be guaranteed to students in distance learning programs. This means that all of the different elements of the campus that directly or indirectly provide services to students who physically come to campus, must now adapt their

operations to provide the same services to students who are participating in distance learning programs and, in many cases, may never set foot on campus. And for accredited institutions, they must prove the quality of their distance learning program through the self-study/accreditation process. Since, as stated before, a quality distance learning program cuts across all areas of the campus, elements of the distance learning program should appear under all ten accreditation standards. In other words, distance learning is part of the mission of the college and all ten standards are designed to address and support that mission.

Identified below in the form of questions are some of the key issues pertaining to a distance learning program that should be recognized and addressed under one or more of the ten accreditation standards:

- I. Is distance learning clearly covered by or part of the institutional mission?
- II. Are all of the applicable elements under institutional integrity appropriately applied to the institution's distance learning program?
- III. Is distance learning an integral part of the institution's measurement of effectiveness, including its research, evaluation, and outcomes assessment activities?
- IV. Does the distance learning program remain within the parameters of the institution's educational programs and does it meet all of the criteria identified in Standard 4? Is Information Literacy a clearly identified element in the institution's educational programs and does it apply to all students?
- V. Does the distance learning program meet all of the student support and development criteria as listed in Standard Five?
- VI. Does the institution meet the special needs of distance learning students through its information and learning resources, including but not limited to, equipment, software, training, and support as identified in Standard 6? (Information Literacy is an essential element for quality and success under this standard.)
- VII. Does the institution provide appropriate faculty, staff, and professional training to fully support and successfully operate its distance learning program?
- VIII. Does the institution specifically identify sufficient and appropriate physical resources for its distance learning program?
- IX. Has the institution specifically identified financial resources and appropriate contract/agreement controls to guarantee a viable, dependable, continuing distance learning program?
- X. Is the Governing Board fully cognizant of the distance learning program and does it uphold its responsibility on issues of quality, integrity, and policy?

In summation, a viable distance learning program with integrity cuts across all 10 standards. A distance learning program must be an integral part of all campus activities as identified by those standards. Each campus/district organization must be fully aware of the special needs of a distance learning program and provide the necessary support and change to help guarantee its success.

Modify the language of current standard to

- Indicate that equipment and materials should be updated, as needed, and that qualified staff be provided to train users in effective application of technology to teaching and learning rather than just student learning.

Standard Seven: FACULTY AND STAFF

The institution has sufficient qualified full-time and part-time faculty and staff to support its educational programs and services wherever offered and by whatever means delivered. Consistent with its mission, the institution demonstrates its commitment to the significant educational role played by persons of diverse ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds by making positive efforts to foster such diversity.

Overview

Write standard components in behavioral, measurable terms.

Place evidence samples along with each substandard category. Require a check mark for which evidence is being cited and provide a space for additional evidence where the respondent can write in others sources of evidence.

There is dated terminology used in some of the standard components. Such as “teaching” emphasis instead of emphasis on “student learning”.

Include the term “administrators” in the first sentence, after “faculty”.

Clarify “whatever means delivered” with some examples.

Expand “diversity” to include gender, culture, disability, and sexual orientation.

Add “at every level of the institution” after “educational role”.

A. Qualifications and Selection

A.1 Add “administrators”

A.1 Add “to perform assigned functions in support of” after “experience”.

A.2 Add “developed by a broad base of people” after “public”.

A.3 Add “recent” before “leadership”.

A.3 Change “effective teaching” to “producing high levels of learning”.

A.4 “degrees” are irrelevant for vocational faculty.

B. Evaluation

B.1 Add a last sentence “The evaluation system for each category of staff is developed with representation from those categories”.

B.2 Add “results” after “effectiveness”.

B.3 Change “teaching effectiveness” to “production of learning”.

B.3 Add “community” to “in institutional service”.

C. Staff Development

C.1 Add “and resources” after “opportunities”.

C.3 Add a new one “The results of staff development programs are systematically evaluated and improvements are made in the programs”.

D. General Personnel Provisions

D.2 Add “improve” after “assesses”.

D.3 Add “developed by participating appropriate staff”.

D.4 Add “maintained in a central location” after “personnel records are”.

Supporting Documents for Standard 7 (EVIDENCE)

List of evidence on page 53 should be moved to support the actual standard components they support. Some of this evidence is inappropriate, as mentioned below.

#6 Salary Schedules- There is nothing in the standard dealing with compensation.

#7 Affirmative action policy and plan- Not in California after Prop 209.

#8 Criteria and procedures for employing, evaluating and compensating faculty in special programs- Nothing in the standard dealing with compensation.

#14 Too general, meaningless.

ADD “Budget for Staff Development Programs”

Standard Eight: PHYSICAL RESOURCES

8.1 “...wherever & however” needs to be expanded to include technology and IT-oriented staff. This standard should have a significant technology element. Maybe administrative systems and technology should be included here, too.

Standard Nine: FINANCIAL RESOURCES

This standard should reflect the need for institutions to consider technological expertise. A “sinking fund” or method to upgrade and replace equipment should be included in institutional planning for technology.

Standard Ten: GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Impact of Issues and Trends on Standard Ten

Part A. of Standard Ten concentrates on the responsibilities and practices of governing boards. This standard has the potential for ensuring that critical issues and trends are addressed at the highest level of policy-making. It is at the level of college-wide, system-wide, or district-wide, policy-making that boards can support or hamper development of trends such as the learning paradigm, distance education, or technology. Boards can also impact these initiatives through funding decisions, and even through selection of key administrators. While Standard Ten A. is probably not a place for interjection of specifics, language could be added to assure that Board members are somehow regularly educated or updated on the critical issues and trends.

Part B. of Standard Ten concerns Institutional Administration and Governance. Here again, policies become a major factor in the successful implementation of new initiatives. Plans and budgets that allow for, and even support, innovation and change are critical. Standard Ten B. already clearly mandates faculty, staff, and student input in decision-making, policy-making, and planning.

Part C. of Standard Ten deals with Multi-college Systems or Districts. This standard requires system or district offices to “support the missions and functions” of the colleges. It also emphasizes the role of the district/system chief executive officer in effecting priorities for the institutions. (10.C.1.) In order for colleges to institute new initiatives in most systems or districts, support at the highest level is necessary. The existing substandard on communication (10 C.5.) is important to maintain.

APPENDIX G DISTANCE LEARNING

Students Using Technology to Access Higher Education

Since the early years of this country, students who wanted to learn and receive recognition for their formal learning had to physically travel to designated classrooms. Rooms for learning and their associated teachers were located in communities throughout the country, whether they be parochial, public, or private. Additionally, when we were still an agrarian society, most students only completed a few of the initial grades. As the country developed, urban centers grew, economies improved, and pockets of wealth were formed, institutions of higher education were founded and developed. Initially, they were sparsely scattered throughout the country. For the few who wanted to pursue a higher education, many had to travel great distances to get to the designated classrooms. Access to higher education was only available to a lucky, relatively few people.

In the mid and late 1800s, forward-looking entrepreneurs began to use technology to fill an education vacuum that had developed. They provided access to courses in the areas of technology, general education, and higher education. Initially, students could access those courses through the U.S. mail and/or newspapers, two of the earliest examples of distance learning. Then in the first-half of the 20th century, students began receiving their course work over the radio. And just after the midpoint of the 20th-century, many students could utilize the newly developed television to complete courses in higher education. Finally, in the most recent manifestation of distance learning, as the 20th century neared a close student access to higher education was profoundly increased through the development of low-cost computers and the Internet.

Throughout the history of the development of distance learning, the number of students accessing higher education through some form of technology was very, very small compared to the number of students who participated in traditional classrooms settings. This began to change, somewhat, in the 1990s. As the number of students wanting a higher education increased and the funding for higher education institutions remained steady state or continued a decline, many institutions became concerned about the increasing enrollment pressures. Some sought new ways to become more efficient in using the revenues they received, to make their dollars stretch farther. A new recognition by institutions of higher education for using technology to reach students began sweeping the country. The initial result was a dramatic increase in using television and televised courses. And then in the past few years, the greatest increase has been in using computers and the Internet to conduct courses.

Distance learning received little attention in the just-past decade when the number of students taking distance learning courses via television was insignificantly small. It was a time when most students took just a few distance learning courses to supplement their traditional classroom courses. Institutions of higher education were able to maintain their traditional monopoly without any real threat from the outside. However, in the second half of the '90s when distance learning started spreading like wildfire, became the "in" thing to do, and threatened the status quo, many major concerns and problems arose, especially for accredited institutions--the least of

which being competition from commercial concerns.

Distance learning courses and programs represented issues of substantive change, a change in mission. And the importance was compounded when complete degrees could be earned through distance learning programs. Although initially unrecognized, quality distance learning programs cut across all organizations within the institution. A quality distance learning program becomes an integral part of the entire operation of the campus; it cannot be a narrow, isolated, temporary, tacked-on operation. Thus, one of the major concerns for accredited institutions became how to guarantee to distance learning students the same quality of instruction and education that was traditionally guaranteed to on-campus students, as defined by the accreditation process.

With a traditional higher education setting, all services reside physically in buildings on campus. A student desiring some service is expected to go to the office or location on campus providing that service. This includes registration, financial aid, classroom instruction, instructional resources, etc. Each service has a specific location on campus, and the student in order to access that service, travels to that location. But this centuries-old paradigm is generally not appropriate for the distance learning student. A lock-step process designed for the convenience of the employees of higher education institutions is usually incompatible with a flexible distance learning system designed to give access to many heretofore disenfranchised students.

Historically, with the traditional system, the burden was on the student to appear at a specific place within specific time parameters to receive desired services. But today, if an institution chooses to provide a distance learning program, the onus is on the institution to provide access to student services for all distance learning students through some appropriate form of technology. Distance learning students must be able to access student services without having to physically appear on campus. Failing this, the campus places in jeopardy the quality of instruction and learning experience for the student.

Listed below are a few of the myriad of questions that accredited institutions should ask themselves when they want to develop a rational, equitable, effective distance learning program--one with integrity.

1. How can we make our distance learning program an integral part of our institution's mission?
2. Do we have a clear and rational set of reasons as to why we are developing a distance learning program?
3. Are we prepared for a long-term commitment in the development and operation of a distance learning program?
4. Do we have or can we locate the funding to develop and maintain a viable distance learning program?
5. Do we have or can we obtain the necessary set of specialists to develop and maintain a distance learning program?

6. Do we have or can we develop the facilities and equipment, the infrastructure support, for a viable distance learning program?
7. Do we have internally, or can we locate from outside sources, people to train our faculty and other personnel in developing and conducting courses through a distance learning process? And then provide continued support?
8. Are we willing to make the necessary changes that will guarantee all students equal access to all student services, whether on-campus or in the distance learning program?
9. Where and when necessary, are we willing to develop agreements with outside providers for their specific services, to establish a system to monitor their performance, and to have in place alternative resources to be used, if necessary, to guarantee distance learning students uninterrupted service?
10. Are our faculty ready and willing to accept the additional learning and changes that will be needed in order for them to be able to conduct their courses and reach additional students through some form of technology? Even if it leads to changes in their duties and responsibilities, such as the narrowing of their span of control (unbundling) and working as one member of an instructional team? If not, can we locate outside resources to assist us in moving forward in this learning/evolutionary process?
11. With the help of others, are we willing to begin the evolution into instructional objectives and learning outcomes for students?
12. Are we willing to have an evaluation system in place that proves that our distance learning courses are at least as good as our traditional classroom courses? Or, in other words, is student learning in our distance learning courses at least equal to student learning in our traditional classroom courses?
13. Are we willing to enter into conversation with other institutions regarding articulation agreements as related to our distance learning courses? And conversely, with appropriate documentation, are we willing to accept their distance learning courses as equal to their traditional courses? Will we be open to accepting transfer of credits for students across regional accrediting agency boundaries?

In a nutshell, some of the key issues institutions face regarding distance learning programs are listed below:

1. College mission
2. Legitimate reasons for program development
3. Infusion of the distance learning process into all campus organizations and operations
4. Sufficient funding for development and support, on a continuing, long-term basis

5. Sufficient and appropriate staffing for training and support for all affected campus personnel, on a continuing basis
6. Appropriate facilities, equipment, and infrastructure with technical support
7. Student services for all students
8. Changing faculty responsibilities
9. Quality and trustworthiness of outsourcing, with appropriate backup
10. Evaluating distance learning programs and measuring learning outcomes
11. Transfer of credits/articulation agreements

In summation, distance learning provides new opportunities to students who have had access to higher education withheld from them because of the highly restrictive on-site, specific-time structure of traditional classroom methods. However, providing access to these here-to-fore disenfranchised students through a distance learning program requires careful planning, coordination, commitment, and control by the higher education institution.

CONCLUSIONS:

Districts and Campuses must be aware of all of the implications of developing and maintaining a quality distance learning program. They must be fully aware of all of the issues and challenges involved. Through its publications and web site, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges should provide members with specific information and links covering all key issues and best practices related to distance learning programs and the accreditation process.

APPENDIX H REVIEW OF BIBLIOGRAPHY

Commission Activities

ACCJC - Public Session June 4, 2000

I attended the captioned meeting as a member of the Project Renewal External Review Committee.

I refer the reader to the attached agenda and subsequent minutes (in preparation) of the meeting to review the subjects, discussions, and deliberations that occurred.

OBSERVATIONS

My observations are of a more general nature having to do with the process of the Public Session portion of the Commissioner's meeting.

I must say that I was disheartened by the lack of attendance from the constituent member institutions. Here was an opportunity for involvement and observation of the workings of a group of individuals whose decisions have significant impact on the quality, viability, and success of regionally accredited institutions. Few were in attendance. Perhaps the agenda discussing the "nuts and bolts" of operations such as the budget, calendar, and staff reports was information that member institutions felt they already had at hand. However, there were discussions regarding policy and agency relations that were of note because they addressed direction and practices that will govern the commission in the future.

The public session also provided a venue for getting to know and understand the commission; its mission and challenges. The meeting put into perspective the constraints for continued excellence and success of the accreditation process. It was refreshing to listen to educational colleagues discuss the processes and the difficulties encountered over the past year, and the potential remedies that could be initiated.

SUGGESTION

A more well publicized meeting announcing the benefits and understanding that would come with participation would be of value.

**Commission Meeting
January 7-8, 2001
Report: January 13, 2001**

The Commission operated in a very businesslike and efficient fashion, yet it was also clear that the commissioners were a team and respected each other. Commissioners were careful to leave the room if there was any possibility of a conflict of interest.

The Self-study as well as current and previous Team Reports and other reports are read by commissioners using guideline forms with key questions for Eligibility Review, Comprehensive Evaluation, Focused Midterm Report/Visit, Interim Report, Interim Report/Visit, Progress Report, Progress Report with Visit, Substantive Change, Addenda to Annual Report, Show Cause Report with Visit, Review of Commission Action.

The team readers had diligently prepared and gave strong rationale for recommended action. Prior to taking action, the question of consistency was raised and other actions referenced. Clearly the Commission tried to do whatever would be helpful to the institution. Yet, the Commission was committed to determining whether or not the institution met the standards. There was some joy expressed when an institutional report demonstrated that prior recommendations had been helpful to the institution in making improvement. Institutional representatives from one college clearly affirmed that the Team Report had “served as a spark” for immediate change and collaboration. They indicated the visit had served as a “catalyst” for faculty participation. Another institution was referred to as having been “resuscitated” by persistent action of the Commission. The organizational memory of commissioners and staff was also present and shared.

The Commission noted areas where the process could be improved; for example, the uneven quality of Team Reports and a new trend of a few team chairs to consolidate the recommendations into a single recommendation. Also noted, were items that had implications for future consideration; such as, substantive change reports. The discussion reflected feeling that standards on information systems were weak. Some concern was expressed regarding the role of the accreditation liaison.

The Commission was hospitable to institutional representatives who spoke on behalf of their respective colleges. Questions were direct and related to issues raised in the team report. Commissioners were fully aware of the tendency of institutions to paint a rosy picture that much had improved since the site visit. While commissioners listened carefully, they were not swept away by rhetoric.

I was impressed by the commitment of commissioners to help institutions, to uphold standards, to be fair and consistent. The collegiality among public members, administration, faculty, and Commission staff was very evident. The staff is clearly effective in both leadership and support of the Commission. The Commission expressed pride in the Guidelines on Technology for the delivery of instruction, indicating a feeling of “being ahead of the game.”

**ACCJC Retreat
June 7, 2000**

I attended the captioned Commissions' retreat as a member of the External Review Committee. These retreats serve to keep the commissioners current with educational issues and proposals, and allow them to engage in self-evaluation with the goal of commission excellence.

OBSERVATIONS

The commissioners are representative of the majority of their constituents. Representation is always difficult to balance with total satisfaction of the member organizations. Gender balance is equitable, however, minorities appear under-represented. There is an obvious respect for each other's positions, as well as, a camaraderie developed over short, but intense sessions together. They are frank with one another and I had the impression that they are very receptive to new information and thinking that would make them better commissioners. The commissioners felt comfortable with observation from outside and are as committed to their experiencing and benefiting from the same rigor of review as the member institutions.

PROGRAM AND AGENDA**

- a. Commission Excellence and Self Evaluation - Led by David Viar and Wallace Albertson, the commissioners discussed the definition of mission and excellence. Mr. Viar discussed four questions that need to be asked regarding effectiveness of the Commission. He followed with the six general areas that are measurements of effective Boards. The commission then held a very inter-active discussion on this subject.
- b. Distance Learning - Led by Sally Johnstone, she discussed the impact, methodologies, and outcomes of Distance Learning. The Commissioners were provided realistic examples of four different scenarios and small groups discussed implications of evaluation, outcomes, and other significant challenges vis a vis the current standards.
- c. CRAC draft

CONCLUSIONS

The commissioners take their responsibilities very seriously. Every one of them participated in these learning and discussion sessions with enthusiasm. It is remarkable to have such prominent leaders in the education field give the amount of time required to continue to develop their skills in the assessment arena, after having spent many long hours reviewing self studies and recommendations and deliberating on related actions. The commissioners should be commended for their dedication and diligence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

None

**I refer the reader to the attached agenda and meeting minutes for a more detailed description of the program and discussions led by Viar and Johnstone.

Self Study Training and Institutional Assistance

As with other ACCJC publications, the *Guide to Institutional Self Study and Reports to the Commission* is a very solid document. It is well written and very clear. The suggestions in boxes in the area of a comprehensive self study are excellent. And they are especially meaningful when going through the standards. The carefully selected appendices fill out the information that is necessary for success. Since this is a 1997 edition, it is expected that some of the information will have changed and updating will be necessary.

The self study workshop agenda is another solid piece of work. It represents the end result of using constant feedback from participants to fine-tune and change. It is expected that this agenda will continually evolve as the environment changes and additional feedback is received. As with other evaluation forms, the evaluation form for the self study workshop should be revised. The information that's collected is appropriate, it's simply that the form looks dated and should be redesigned and updated. As an example, a small square box could be placed in front of "poor", "fair", "good", and "excellent," to be checked off. This would leave more room for comments and suggestions. And the way values are assigned to the descriptors under "key," there is a question about how much meaning one can place in the values that are computed for "pace".

Regarding the self study workshop evaluation compilation, it appears that the key is reversed. Based on past observations of the External Review Committee, it doesn't make sense that the participants would rate Format, Content, Video, Colleges, between "fair" to "poor." Since the agenda and approach are always undergoing fine-tuning, expected ratings should be between "good" and "excellent."

The videos need to be updated. If monies are not available in the budget for this, perhaps arrangements could be made with one or more of the members to bring this about. Some have studios and related personnel on their campuses. As with printed materials, they leave an impression about the organization and the process. Impressions about both should be as positive as possible.

Overview and Context of Accreditation is excellent. David Wolf has given this presentation a number of times. Response from the audience has always been very positive and many have said this is the first time they have had the opportunity to see the complete accreditation picture. This presentation has been very helpful to them in understanding the accreditation process because they had only known about one narrow portion of the whole process. *Overview and Context of Accreditation* gives renewed confidence in the process. If it is continually updated, it will remain an important presentation for all ACCJC members, especially those individuals new to the accreditation process.

Team Chair Training

Team Chair Workshop
Westin Hotel, Millbrae
August 18, 2000

Situation: Site Visit team chairs for fall 2000 were convened at the Westin Hotel, Millbrae, for the purpose of assuring quality of visits across diverse colleges. More than 15 chairs and 1 team assistant were in attendance. The ethnic mix of team chairs included Hispanic, Black, and Asian as well as White representatives, three of whom were female.

As the group walked through the *Team Chair Handbook* provided for each participant, Dr. David Wolf and Dr. Gari Browning alternated presentations, giving pertinent examples and helpful suggestions. Potential problem areas were discussed. Emphasis was placed upon the need for evidence to support both the College Report and the Team Report. In order to assist colleges in their efforts to improve, team chairs were strongly advised to limit and focus the number of recommendations. The authority of the chair was made clear and that the final report of the Team Visit belonged to the team chair. There was ample opportunity for team chairs to ask questions as well as share experience from previous visits. (Only one chair appeared to be new to the role.)

Observation: The small group exercise of Writing Effective Recommendations was taken seriously by the participants. The responses generated considerable discussion which should improve the quality of recommendations.

Attention was given to sensitive issues such as dealing with the media or difficult persons.

The Handbook is extensive in content and includes samples of useful forms and model reports as well as day-by-day site visit outlines of activities.

Suggestions:

The review of the pilot multi-college evaluation policy and outcomes could lead to an additional section in the *Team Chair Handbook*. The review should be shared in a forum of chancellors for comment.

Encourage greater participation of team assistants in training sessions.

More time could be spent in the training session on effective meetings with Board members during the site visits.

Recommendations:

- A. Additions to the Team Handbook which could be helpful in conducting site visits include:
1. Appraisal Forms to elicit comments on Standards and Team Handbook.
 2. Statement on Confidentiality which could be distributed to the media.

3. Guidelines for meeting with Board members, including a briefing paper for Board Members regarding their role in accreditation.

B. Consider adding a training session or handbook for Accreditation Liaison appointees with emphasis on the annual report on changes in the institution and preparation of the self-study. The collection of more extensive and specific data on institutional change could encourage change if information were promulgated to member institutions.

Institutional Reports

Review of Institutional Review and Action: Closed Session Agenda 1/8, 1/9/2001
1/23/01

Background

On January 19, 2001 I visited the ACCJC offices in Santa Rosa and reviewed materials from the Closed Session of the Commission when it met to take action on various reports and visitation team recommendations. I reviewed three notebooks of materials from the meeting on 1/8 and 1/9 plus letters to colleges generated from this closed session. Additionally, I perused a number of forms used by commission members as they reviewed reports from the colleges and from the visitation teams. Primarily, I investigated the agenda for the meeting and the materials that supported the agenda items.

Review

Based on the agenda for the meeting, I conducted my review as follows.

Readers Procedures and Reader List

“Procedures” is a one and a half page document that spells out duties and responsibilities of readers. All commissioners examine all team reports; two or more commissioners conduct an in-depth examination of one or more institutions.

Review of Commission Policies and Procedures

The “Glossary of Commission Action, Definitions, and Use” is a one and a half page document that defines terms used with Comprehensive Evaluations and Program Reports. The “Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions” is three and a half pages. It briefly describes the meaning of each action taken for Candidate institutions, Initial Accreditation, and Accredited institutions.

Validity and Reliability and Conflict of Interest

There is a one and a half page memo on validity and reliability. It explains what the Commission does to try and insure validity and reliability. The document references the Conflict of Interest Policy.

Observation

Neither the concept of Validity or Reliability is defined or explained in the document. The “Conflict of Interest Policy” is a one and a quarter page report that describes the general intent of the Commission regarding fairness and avoidance of conflict of interest. It contains four principles regarding conflict of interest.

Observation

This policy is quite clear and provides quite a bit of information in a short space.

Review of Comprehensive Evaluations

I reviewed five accreditation team reports for various types of institutions. Basically the reports follow the same general format with some slight variations. The most prevalent format is as follows;

Title Page

Listing of Team Members

Summary (sometimes called Introduction and Summary)

Description of college

Review of visitation team activities

Strengths with brief explanation

Recommendations (list, referencing appropriate standards)

Body of Report

Introduction

General Commendations (Listing)

Major Recommendations (Listing)

Standards Review

Response to previous team's recommendations

Observations

Analysis and Conclusions (sometimes just Conclusions)

Recommendations (if warranted) with references to specific standards

Observations

There is an overall format for the team report but there are some slight variations in headings and in content in the various sections of the report. Summary section varies among reports. It seems to lack "punch" as the first section of a report. The Observations section appears to be the most detailed and comprehensive of the report. The Analysis and Conclusions section, or just Conclusions, contains a great deal of analysis, or summary of Observations and not many, clear and concise conclusions. At times the Conclusions section seemed to contain some minor recommendations. The General Commendations are just that, very general in nature, and provided in list form. The Recommendations suggest the "what" that should be changed but not the "how to" of change and improvement.

Other Reports

Other reports which I reviewed included:

Focused Mid-term Report

Focused Mid-term Report with Visit

Interim Report

Interim Report with Visit

Eligibility Review

Substantive Change Reports

Requests for Alternative Self-studies

Observations

Most of these reports were assigned to one commission member to review. When a report was combined with a visit, there were, at time, two commissioners reviewing the reports.

Reader Reports

I reviewed the following forms used by commissioners when they undertake their reviews of the various reports submitted by colleges and review teams. I perused some forms completed by commissioners and in other cases blank forms.

- Reader Report: Comprehensive Evaluation
- Reader Report: Substantive Change
- Reader Report: Review of Commission Actions
- Reader Report: Eligibility Review
- Reader Report: Focused Midterm Report/Visit
- Reader Report: Focused Midterm Report
- Reader Report: Interim Report/Visit
- Reader Report: Interim Report
- Reader Report: Progress Report with Visit
- Reader Report: Progress Report
- Reader Report: Show Cause Report with Visit
- Reader Report: Addenda to Annual Report

Observations

The first four report formats are more comprehensive than the others are. The Comprehensive Evaluation is closely aligned to the standards. The form asks for written comments in some places but appears to be rather “cramped” to allow commission members to write comments. The Substantive Change form poses a series of Yes/No questions and asks for written comments. The eligibility review asks Yes/No questions for each standard and asks for comments. Review of Commission Actions form asks a number of essay type questions about commission actions and the review report. The other reader reports are one page or less forms requiring some written comments.

All of the forms seem to be appropriate for the tasks they serve and easy for commission members to understand.

Commission Action Letters

Finally I reviewed letters from the Executive Director to the colleges informing them of Commission actions. The letters appear to the point and easy to understand. In a few cases, I followed the strand from the college’s self-study, to the visitation team report, to the commission’s review of the report, to the action letter. In these cases, the action letters reflected the tenor of the recommendations put forth by the review team and the commission reviewers.

Recommendations

Validity and Reliability memo

Provide a simple definition of the terms “validity” and “reliability” in the beginning of the memo to provide the background for the ensuing discussion.

Comprehensive Evaluation Reports

Provide an outline format for the entire report with headings and subheadings for team leaders to follow when writing their reports. Briefly describe what should be in each section. This will bring about more conformity in the presentation of the reports.

Instead of a Summary in the beginning of the report start with a short section called “General Conclusions and Determinations” which captures the major findings and recommendations of the report. Thus the first section readers go through will present the “meat” of the report and it will be up-front in the report.

Many of the Commendations are too general and seem to be mentioned in passing. Have team members complete a short form providing more specifics about the commendation. These forms can then be shared with the field as a “Best Practices” approach.

As with many dissertations I read, Conclusions become summaries rather than informed judgments or results. Conclusions should become direct, rather short findings that emanate from the Observations/Analysis section of the report. Some sample conclusions can be given to team members to help them write conclusions.

Current Recommendations follow the quality assurance role of accreditation. They point out “what” needs to be improved to conform to standards. They do not reflect an emerging quality improvement accreditation role regarding “how” some area can be improved. Perhaps a format such as; Conclusions – Recommendations – Suggested Enhancements can be adapted in the reports.

Distance Learning

The bibliographic entries for distance learning are very solid and useful. The one exception is the *Inter-Regional Statement on the Evaluation of Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs & Evaluation Guidelines*. It is a draft, a work in progress, and in its present state should be removed. Gari Browning's, *Distance Learning: A Guide for the Self-Study and Evaluation Visit*, is the document that should be used. This document is very well written and will be extremely useful in the self-study process. All other entries are very meaningful, cover various aspects of distance learning, and should remain in the bibliography.

For distance learning, this bibliography is just a beginning. It is in no way comprehensive or complete. This statement is not meant as a criticism but just an observation.

If it is the Commission's desire to fill out the bibliography under this topic of distance learning, then appropriate articles, books, and other resources should be identified and added such that all of the questions that Gari Browning has listed under each of the Ten Standards in, *Distance Learning: A Guide for the Self-Study and Evaluation Visit*, are covered. The self-study participants would then have sufficient resources to be able to determine what is appropriate in all of the areas of distance learning identified under each of the ten standards and would be able to see how others have addressed the issues.

Since this area changes so rapidly, perhaps a small group of up-to-date experts should be used to review this section of the bibliography every six months and make appropriate additions and deletions.

Evaluator Selection and Training

The *Evaluator Handbook* has had years of fine-tuning. It is clearly written and concise. For example, on Page 1, the Team Selection Process is described in three paragraphs. It is brief, to the point, and fully understandable. The Handbook contains the necessary information and the format is such that it is a very useful document.

The Data Sheet for Team Member Selection, Reply to Serve on Team form, Reply to Serve As Team Chair Assistant form, Team Member Evaluation form, and Team Training Workshop Evaluation form, all collect the information that is necessary to make an informed decision. However, most of them appear bulky and uninviting. Consideration should be given to revising these forms. The same information would be collected, but the look and feel of the form would be improved. As an example, in some cases lines that are designed to collect a word or two of information should not extend all the way across the page. In other instances, consideration should be given to dropping the lines and only having a colon after the information description. Unless it collides with tradition, a different font might be used. As another example, in the Team Training Workshop Evaluation, the large boxes under the words of rating could be replaced by a small box in front of the word that could be checked. This would provide additional room for comments. The size of the boxes is so great that they become the center of attention of the form and are very distracting. Their sole purpose is simply to identify an area in which a person can make a mark to select a descriptive word. In summation, these forms, generally, look very old and dated. Updating them, redesigning them, will give them a more positive, acceptable appearance. This may seem a very small thing, but it is just one of many important elements by which people will judge an organization.

As with the *Evaluator Handbook*, the Team Training Workshop Agenda has been fine-tuned over the years. Every time the workshop is conducted, evaluation forms are collected and decisions are made regarding potential changes for the next session. With this kind of feedback loop, you would expect this workshop to continually evolve to meet the needs of the participants.

There is a question about the Team Training Workshop Evaluation compilation. It appears that the key values for Format, Content, Video, and Colleges perhaps have been reversed. Based on past observations, it's hard to believe that all of these elements in this workshop are rated between "fair" and "poor". The accurate ratings would be expected to be between "good" and "excellent". That concern aside, this is a good chart and it holds useful information on which informed decisions regarding this workshop can be made.

APPENDIX I OFFICE AUDIT

Facilities & Equipment, salaries and Benefits, Operations, Budget

I met with David Wolf on August 14th and again on October 24th to discuss a number of items falling under the general subjects to which I was assigned. I also had the opportunity to talk to other staff members.

At the meeting, Dr. Wolf supplied me with a number of pertinent documents that had been prepared by Barbara Dunham. I will draw from them in this report.

FACILITIES and EQUIPMENT

My first task was to observe the office layout and facilities. There are approximately 1,500 square feet including common area for secretarial and support services, three private offices for the professional staff, along with a small supplies and storage room that serves as a kitchen as well. The current rent is \$1.35 per foot per month and there are two more one-year lease options with annual increases of \$.05. Layout and space is currently adequate and restroom facilities are directly adjacent. There is an additional offsite storage unit for non-current files. Parking appears to be slightly overcrowded, but sufficient at present. Dr. Wolf indicated that he was fairly satisfied with the current facilities. More space will be needed in the future to accommodate additional staff.

The equipment and computers are considered very satisfactory. The organization is fortunate to have a knowledgeable MIS staff member, Tom Lane, who is very capable in network and data management allowing for consistent computer operations. Mr. Lane discussed his concerns that the commission would not keep up with changing technology and member institution needs without sufficient additional funding. Specifically, he is concerned with hardware and software configurations and updating staff training. There is also a very practical need for voicemail. I have asked Mr. Lane for a paper discussing technology infrastructure. Data backups are made regularly and there is offsite record duplication storage of the most essential records.

SALARIES and BENEFITS

Dr. Wolf and I then discussed personnel salaries and benefits. He indicated that current levels of pay were adequate and competitive for the geographic area with some needed modifications that are in process. However, he did mention that salaries were on the low side compared to peer groups nationally. Some staff felt salary increases and workload were somewhat imbalanced and echoed this concern. One stated that the very small annual increases were like "taking a step backward". Benefits include: medical, dental, vision, travel accident, disability, and life insurance. The retirement plan (SEP-IRA) was last reviewed in 1998 and there is an ongoing effort to receive approval for participation in the retirement plans that are available to the California public educational community.

I reviewed personnel policies, job descriptions, and the Executive Director evaluation form. The staff evaluation process is currently in development.

OPERATIONS

Dr. Wolf considers the ACCJC to be a “service agency” and therefore operations are formulated to meet that mission. He categorized three processes in this service:

1) Ordinary Service and Maintenance, 2) Process - Eligibility or Midterm, 3) Professional and Institutional. The ACCJC is involved in some interagency projects. Data sharing with the CCLC requires additional staff time, as did a past paper with the CCTA entitled “Resources for Boards of Trustees”. The staff’s responsibilities and duties are structured to meet these demands and criteria. One additional professional staff may be required in the near future and part-time clerical help could also be beneficial to smooth out workloads.

Underlying this “service” philosophy is the focused effort to provide the constituents with “best practices” and “shared problems/shared solutions” data and information. The office makes every effort to respond to inquiries with answers within a day’s timeframe. This is a challenge with current staff, workloads, and staff travel schedules.

The ACCJC is committed to good communications with its member institutions and produces four newsletters per year along with the annual report. Feedback from the institutions has been positive and constructive.

I reviewed the Handbook for Interim, Progress, and Focused Midterm Report Visits (2000 edition) along with the summary of Midterm Reports. I also examined three Midterm reports from member institutions. After reviewing this data it was apparent that the “self review” and “team visit” process does provide an impetus for change and improvement in institutions that are accredited. There was substantial evidence in each of the institution’s Midterm reports to assess the changes that were made, or the focus that was given to areas of concern, that lead to an improved process or educational delivery system. One institution wrote in their report that “the midterm report provides discipline, focus, and follow-up to observe tangible improvement. We now systematically and regularly examine and evaluate ourselves in all facets”. The attached Commission Actions chart and Commission Action Summary chart indicate a year over year improvement in members’ meeting the criteria set forth in the Standards.

The proposed Commission Operations Survey and The Commission As Individuals evaluation forms are attached. They show the first drafts of a process for improvement through member or self-evaluation. These are new formats and a new process that will allow for input to effect improvement. There are also evaluation forms for every commission meeting to assess quality and benefits and seek advice for enhancement of future meetings.

Bookkeeping is processed using Quicken 99 software. Financial information is provided to the Budget and Personnel Committee and the Commission every six months. Financial controls

appear adequate. Drafts in excess of \$2,100 or those made to Dr. Wolf require two signatures. Financial records are submitted annually to an outside CPA, Mark McDonnell, who prepares audited Financial Statements and a Management Letter. Banking is done with Bank of America. Long-term cash reserves are invested through Morgan Stanley Dean Witter of Santa Cruz in conservative interest-bearing instruments such as CD's, government securities, and money market funds. (suggest locating a Morgan Stanley office closer to the present ACCJC office)

There are approximately 25 team visits required per year. Previous scheduling adjustments have evened out past highs and lows. In response to the needs of the institutions, Dr. Wolf has instituted several changes to provide for more effective visiting teams. This has resulted in an increase in team size and member diversification. The criteria used in selecting a team is as follows:

- 1) Appropriate individuals for institution to be visited
- 2) Appropriate size of team
- 3) Assurance that requisite expertise is included within the team composition
- 4) Use of a database to select and to develop a stronger and deeper pool of experienced team members

The current "team service book" requires manual input along with information from the DBASE 4 software. However, this system will be converted over the next several months to Access to improve retrieval and selection of suitable team members. The current eleven databases will be combined in a single more efficient and reliable resource. The Access software system is used by a number of other regional accreditors with very good results.

The perceptions of value regarding the regional accreditation process, results, and benefits by the 138 member institutions will be available for review when the responses from the most recent survey are tabulated and published. This survey should serve as a guideline for clarification of perceptions, a recitation of unmet needs of the institutions, possible operational or other changes that need to be made, and will have impact on cost for services and future staffing and budgeting.

I reviewed the Interregional Policies on The Accreditation of Institutions Operating Across Regions. Having been personally involved in the initial process as a member institution that would have to operate under the policy, I was pleased to see the protocol developed.

BUDGET

The annual budgets for Fiscal Years 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, reflecting a fiscal year end of June 30, are appended. Through careful management of expenses, the FY00 budget will produce a surplus of \$34,048, whereas additional expenses (primarily legal reserves and expense associated with Project Renewal) will produce a projected fiscal deficit of about \$76,355 for FYO1. Revenue generation is primarily from member fees and evaluation service charges with additional miscellaneous returns from bank interest and investment income.

Historically, the member institutions have requested three-year constant and non-discriminatory fees. This has generally resulted in a surplus the first year following the new rate implementation, a breakeven situation in the second year, and a deficit the third year (FY01 is the third year in the cycle thus producing a deficit). This three-year fixed fee structure produces an artificial and problematic situation. Such a lengthy duration of static revenue conflicts with the accelerating annual costs of doing business. This creates an environment that could require important decision making to be more budget driven than quality driven. Furthermore, undue executive director time could be involved to manage budget rather than mission. Finally, the three-year structure results in a much larger increase in fees every three years. Small annual adjustments would provide a more relevant and business like model and provide adequate funding for equipment upgrades and appropriate salaries. Dr. Wolf and I discussed the need for a thorough review of the fee structure, and as important, the timing of the adjustments to those fees. This essential review takes the form of a recommendation at the conclusion of this report.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the commission appoint a committee, reflecting the diversity of its constituents, to review the relevancy, adequacy, and methodology of the fee structure to insure fiscal health and to provide the financial means for excellence in the ACCJC accreditation process.