

## Accreditation and the Board's Role

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### Accreditation

California's community colleges are accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Accreditation is a voluntary, nongovernmental process involving institutional self-study and professional peer review. Accreditation provides two essential services: quality assurance to the public and other institutions, and institutional improvement through a peer review process.

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges consists of three independent commissions: the Accrediting Commission for Schools (K-12), the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, and the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities. ACCJC accredits almost 140 colleges in California, Hawaii, and the former U.S. Trust Territories in the southern and western Pacific. The commission currently consists of 18 members: four faculty, three administrators, four public members (one of whom must have had trustee experience), and representatives from state agencies and other institutions.

Accreditation is a continuing process, the heart of which lies in periodic self-appraisal by an institution. In preparation for each accreditation visit, every institution prepares an extensive report with primary emphasis on self-analysis and evaluation. Preparing the report usually involves representatives from all employee groups and areas of the college. The report and other materials are sent to an evaluation team, which visits the college, meets with groups and individuals, validates the self-study report, evaluates compliance with the standards, and reviews the college's responses to the previous report.

The comprehensive self-study and evaluation are conducted at least every six years. Ongoing evaluation and planning enable colleges to integrate self-study processes into regular review processes of the institution; however, the self-study and planning for the accreditation report generally begin two years prior to the scheduled accreditation visit.

Between scheduled visits, each institution addresses its own and previous visiting team recommendations and submits periodic reports. The effectiveness of self-regulatory accreditation 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.

### Accreditation Standards

The 2014 Accreditation Standards reflect the Commission's belief that accredited institutions must have to foster learning in their students as their primary purpose. Therefore, the standards require institutions to ensure that they support student learning, continually assess that learning and pursue institutional excellence. The self-study conducted to maintain accreditation must include a college-wide dialogue on the institution's effectiveness. The standards are designed to facilitate the dialogue.

The standards are presented in four parts:

Standard I, Mission, Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness, and Integrity, addresses the institutional mission, which provides the impetus for achieving student learning and achievement, and other college goals. Institutions must provide the means for students to learn, assess how well learning is occurring, and improve that learning through ongoing, systematic, and integrated planning.

Standard II, Student Learning Programs and Support Services, includes criteria for instructional programs, student support services, and library and learning support services, which assure the quality and improvement of all programs and services as they promote and foster student learning.

Standard III, Resources, addresses the human, physical, technological, and financial resources required to achieve the purposes of the college.

Standard IV, Leadership and Governance, tackles issues related to and includes the organization and roles of the board and CEOs, decision-making processes, and organization of multi-college districts.

## Board Role in Accreditation

Accreditation requires that the board of trustees is informed about and involved in the accreditation process. At the time the self-study report is submitted, the chairperson of the board signs the self-study document, which attests to the accuracy of the report in reflecting the nature and substance of the institution. The board of trustees, as the governing board of the district, will review the final report of the evaluation team, and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the college responds to the issues raised in the self-study, the recommendations of the evaluation team, and the decisions of the Commission. Boards may also assume leadership in ensuring that the self-study report and subsequent recommendations become an integral part of the institutional planning process.

How the board of trustees participates in the development of the self-study will vary among institutions with different missions and needs. Examples of trustee involvement might include preparing responses to the standards related to the governing board, receiving and discussing regular reports on board agendas about the process and progress of the self-study, or other appropriate activities developed cooperatively with the college.

Boards of trustees for multi-college districts may find themselves interacting with several colleges undergoing self-study at the same time. Accreditation is achieved by colleges, not districts. Governing boards should work closely with each of the institutions to achieve consistency in their participation.

The board and CEO should have a strategy to address Standard IVC Governing Board at the beginning of the accreditation self-study process. (See the box for the text of IVC for standards on the governing board. IVB addresses the role of the chief executive, and IVD addresses multi-college systems.) The strategy should be coordinated with the efforts of the college steering committee for the accreditation process. It may include:

- assessing the status of board policies related to the standard and updating policies if necessary.
- identifying the strategies used by the board to meet the standards, describing the results of those strategies, and developing new strategies if necessary.
- contributing to and reviewing drafts of the report for the self-study.

College boards are encouraged to devote significant time and thought to their responses to the standards. Through a thorough and deliberative exploration of the issues involved in each of the areas, boardmanship is enhanced and the district is ultimately strengthened. It is important that all board members be significantly involved in the discussion – it is through that involvement that a group commitment to the policies and processes developed is assured.

## Resource

### Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

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## Standard IV.C Governing Board

1. The institution has a governing board that has authority over and responsibility for policies to assure the academic quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the student learning programs and services and the financial stability of the institution.
2. The governing board acts as a collective entity. Once the board reaches a decision, all board members act in support of the decision. Standard IV: Leadership and Governance 16
3. The governing board adheres to a clearly defined policy for selecting and evaluating the CEO of the college and/or the district/system.
4. The governing board is an independent, policy-making body that reflects the public interest in the institution's educational quality. It advocates for and defends the institution and protects it from undue influence or political pressure.
5. The governing board establishes policies consistent with the college/district/system mission to ensure the quality, integrity, and improvement of student learning programs and services and the resources necessary to support them. The governing board has ultimate responsibility for educational quality, legal matters, and financial integrity and stability.
6. The institution or the governing board publishes the board bylaws and policies specifying the board's size, duties, responsibilities, structure, and operating procedures.
7. The governing board acts in a manner consistent with its policies and bylaws. The board regularly assesses its policies and bylaws for their effectiveness in fulfilling the college/district/system mission and revises them as necessary.
8. To ensure the institution is accomplishing its goals for student success, the governing board regularly reviews key indicators of student learning and achievement and institutional plans for improving academic quality.
9. The governing board has an ongoing training program for board development, including new member orientation. It has a mechanism for providing for continuity of board membership and staggered terms of office.
10. Board policies and/or bylaws clearly establish a process for board evaluation. The evaluation assesses the board's effectiveness in promoting and sustaining academic quality and institutional effectiveness. The governing board regularly evaluates its practices and performance, including full participation in board training, and makes public the results. The results are used to improve board performance, academic quality, and institutional effectiveness.
11. The governing board upholds a code of ethics and conflict of interest policy, and individual board members adhere to the code. The board has a clearly defined policy for dealing with behavior that violates its code and implements it when necessary. A majority of the board members have no employment, family, ownership, or other personal financial interest in the institution. Board member interests are disclosed and do not interfere with the impartiality of governing body members or outweigh the greater duty to secure and ensure the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution.
12. The governing board delegates full responsibility and authority to the CEO to implement and administer board policies without board interference and holds the CEO accountable for the operation of the district/system or college, respectively. Standard IV: Leadership and Governance 17
13. The governing board is informed about the Eligibility Requirements, the Accreditation Standards, Commission policies, accreditation processes, and the college's accredited status, and supports through policy the college's efforts to improve and excel. The board participates in evaluation of governing board roles and functions in the accreditation process.

*Resource: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges*