

January 28, 2014

Barbara A. Beno  
President  
Western Association of Schools and Colleges,  
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges  
10 Commercial Boulevard, Suite 204  
Novato, California 94949

Dear Dr. Beno:

I am writing to inform you of my decision on the renewal of the recognition of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). Department of Education staff and the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) have each made recommendations to me. These recommendations were made under Sections 114 and 496 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), as amended, and pursuant to relevant statutory and regulatory provisions.

Both the staff and the NACIQI recommended that I continue ACCJC's recognition as a nationally recognized accrediting agency at this time, and **require the agency to come into compliance within 12 months of the date of this letter with the criteria listed below**, and submit a compliance report due 30 days thereafter that demonstrates the agency's compliance. They further recommended that ACCJC be granted an extension of scope to include correspondence education and the granting of accreditation for the first baccalaureate degree offered by means of a substantive change review offered by institutions that are already accredited by the agency.

§602.12(b)	§602.13	§602.15(a)(3)	§602.16(a)(1)(i)
§602.16(a)(1)(ii)	§602.16(a)(1)(iii)	§602.17(a)	§602.17(f)
§602.18(e)	§602.19(b)	§602.20(a)	§602.20(b)
§602.21(c)	§602.25(a-e)	§602.26	

In making my decision, I carefully reviewed the record, and also your letter dated December 20, 2013, in which you request that I find ACCJC in compliance with two of the criteria cited in the staff report. I did not find anything in the record to warrant my discounting the recommendations made by the staff and the NACIQI. I am satisfied that accreditation by ACCJC is a required element in enabling the institutions the agency accredits to establish eligibility to participate in programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education under the HEA.

Accordingly, I continue the Department's recognition of ACCJC as a nationally recognized accrediting agency with the scope of recognition as detailed below, for the time necessary to permit ACCJC **12 months from the date of this letter to achieve compliance**, and to submit a compliance report within 30 days thereafter documenting compliance, and to permit the Department to review and make a final recognition decision in light of the compliance report under the procedures set forth in 34 C.F.R. Part 602, Subpart C.

Scope of recognition: The accreditation and preaccreditation ("Candidate for Accreditation") of community and other colleges with a primarily pre-baccalaureate mission located in California, Hawaii, the United States territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, which offer certificates, associate degrees, and the first baccalaureate degree by means of a substantive change review offered by institutions that are already accredited by the agency, and such programs offered via distance education and correspondence education at these colleges. This recognition also extends to the Committee on Substantive Change of the Commission, for decisions on substantive changes, and the Appeals Panel.

You should submit your compliance report using the Department's electronic submission system. The system can be accessed at:

<http://opeweb.ed.gov/aslweb/>

Material that cannot be submitted electronically may be forwarded in hard copy. Please submit four copies of any hard copy material to the Accreditation Group, U.S. Department of Education, 1990 K Street, NW, #8065, Washington, DC 20006-K-OPE-8-8065

**I am confident that ACCJC will be able to come into full compliance with all the criteria cited above by the deadline, and document compliance in its compliance report within 30 days thereafter. However, I wish to remind you that if ACCJC**

**does not, the Department may be compelled to limit, suspend or terminate ACCJC's recognition**. Such action is required because of the provision in the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 that requires the limitation, suspension, or termination of the recognition of any agency found to be either in noncompliance with the criteria for recognition or ineffective in its performance with respect to those criteria. Alternatively, the law allows the agency to be given up to 12 months to come into compliance. If the agency fails to come into compliance within the specified time frame, the law requires termination of the agency's recognition, unless it is determined that the time frame for coming into compliance should be extended for good cause. Senate Report, No. 105-181 (May 4, 1998), on the Higher Education Act Amendments of 1998, 10511 Congress, 2d Session indicates there is an expectation on the part of Congress that extensions will be granted only rarely and only upon a showing of good cause by the agency. The period the Department is providing in this letter for achieving compliance with the criteria cited above constitutes the maximum time frame (12 months) the law allows you to correct the deficiencies noted in the Department staff analysis.

Please convey my appreciation to the members of ACCJC for their continuing efforts to improve the quality of postsecondary education in the United States. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Brenda Dann-Messier  
Acting Assistant Secretary

**Sections Violated by ACCJC as noted in letter and [remarks by Dept. of Education staff]**

§602.12(b) The agency must demonstrate that its standards are sufficient to comprehensively evaluate baccalaureate level degree programs and are comparable to commonly accepted standards for ensuring quality in baccalaureate degree programs.

§602.13 Acceptance of the agency by others.

The agency must demonstrate that its standards, policies, procedures, and decisions to grant or deny accreditation are widely accepted in the United States by -

(a) Educators and educational institutions; and

(b) Licensing bodies, practitioners, and employers in the professional or vocational fields for which the educational institutions or programs within the agency's jurisdiction prepare their students.

*[The agency must demonstrate wide acceptance of the agency's standards, policies, procedures, and decisions to grant or deny accreditation by educators.]*

§ 602.15 Administrative and fiscal responsibilities.

The agency must have the administrative and fiscal capability to carry out its accreditation activities in light of its requested scope of recognition. The agency meets this requirement if the agency demonstrates that -

(a) The agency has (3) Academic and administrative personnel on its evaluation, policy, and decision-making bodies, if the agency accredits institutions;

*[The agency must demonstrate that academic personnel, as generally defined by the accrediting agency and wider higher education community, are represented on its evaluation teams.]*

§602.16(a)(1)(i) The agency must demonstrate that it evaluates the appropriateness of the measures of student achievement chose by its institutions.

§602.16 Accreditation and preaccreditation standards.

(a) The agency must demonstrate that it has standards for accreditation, and preaccreditation, if offered, that are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the agency is a reliable authority regarding the quality of the education or training provided by the institutions or programs it accredits. The agency meets this requirement if --

(1) The agency's accreditation standards effectively address the quality of the institution or program in the following areas:

(i) Success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission, which may include different standards for different institutions or programs, as established by the institution, including, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, State licensing examination, and job placement rates.

§602.16(a)(1) The agency's accreditation standards effectively address the quality of the institution or program in the following areas:

(ii) Curricula.

*[The agency does not meet the requirements of this section based on its requested scope. It must demonstrate that its standards for accreditation regarding curricula are sufficiently rigorous and comprehensive to ensure that the agency is a reliable authority regarding the quality of the baccalaureate level education provided by the institutions it accredits. The agency needs to incorporate its substantive change protocol requirements for baccalaureate degree programs into the agency's curricula standards.]*

§602.16(a)(1) The agency's accreditation standards effectively address the quality of the institution or

program in the following areas:

(iii) Faculty.

*[The agency does not meet the requirements of this section based on its requested scope. It must demonstrate that its standards for accreditation regarding faculty are sufficiently rigorous and comprehensive to ensure that the agency is a reliable authority regarding the quality of the baccalaureate level education provided by the institutions it accredits.]*

§602.17 § 602.17 Application of standards in reaching an accrediting decision.

The agency must have effective mechanisms for evaluating an institution's or program's compliance with the agency's standards before reaching a decision to accredit or preaccredit the institution or program. The agency meets this requirement if the agency demonstrates that it -

§602.17(a) Evaluates whether an institution or program -

- (1) Maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate in light of the degrees or certificates awarded;
- (2) Is successful in achieving its stated objectives; and
- (3) Maintains degree and certificate requirements that at least conform to commonly accepted standards;

*[The agency must demonstrate that it evaluates an institution on its maintenance of clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate in light of the credentials awarded, and is successful in achieving its stated objectives with specific regards to baccalaureate degree programs.]*

§602.17(f) Provides the institution or program with a detailed written report that assesses—

- (1) The institution's or program's compliance with the agency's standards, including areas needing improvement; and
- (2) The institution's or program's performance with respect to student achievement; and

*[The agency must provide documentation to demonstrate that it has fully implemented its revised policies to demonstrate that the agency clearly delineates between areas of non-compliance and areas for improvement. The agency must also demonstrate that it provides the institution with a detailed written report that assesses the institution's performance with respect to student achievement.]*

§ 602.18 Ensuring consistency in decision-making.

The agency must consistently apply and enforce standards that respect the stated mission of the institution, including religious mission, and that ensure that the education or training offered by an institution or program, including any offered through distance education or correspondence education, is of sufficient quality to achieve its stated objective for the duration of any accreditation or preaccreditation period granted by the agency. The agency meets this requirement if the agency—

§602.18(e) Provides the institution or program with a detailed written report that clearly identifies any deficiencies in the institution's or program's compliance with the agency's standards.

*[The agency must provide documentation to demonstrate that it provides the institution with a detailed written report that clearly identifies any deficiencies in the institution's compliance with the agency's standards.]*

§602.19(b) The agency must demonstrate it has, and effectively applies, a set of monitoring and evaluation approaches that enables the agency to identify problems with an institution's or program's continued compliance with agency standards and that takes into account institutional or program strengths and stability. These approaches must include periodic reports, and collection and analysis of key data and indicators, identified by the agency, including, but not limited to, fiscal information and measures of student achievement, consistent with the provisions of §602.16(f). This provision does not

require institutions or programs to provide annual reports on each specific accreditation criterion.

*[The agency must provide information and documentation to demonstrate that it requires additional information from an institution when student achievement data, or any other key data or indicators do not meet the agency's standards.]*

#### §602.20 Enforcement of standards.

(a) If the agency's review of an institution or program under any standard indicates that the institution or program is not in compliance with that standard, the agency must—

(1) Immediately initiate adverse action against the institution or program; or

(2) Require the institution or program to take appropriate action to bring itself into compliance with the agency's standards within a time period that must not exceed—

(i) Twelve months, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is less than one year in length;

(ii) Eighteen months, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is at least one year, but less than two years, in length; or

(iii) Two years, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is at least two years in length.

*[The agency must demonstrate that it consistently enforces the time period to return to compliance with the agency's standards.]*

(b) If the institution or program does not bring itself into compliance within the specified period, the agency must take immediate adverse action unless the agency, for good cause, extends the period for achieving compliance.

*[The agency must demonstrate that it takes immediate adverse action if an institution does not bring itself into compliance within the specified period.]*

#### § 602.21 Review of standards.

§602.21(c) If the agency determines, at any point during its systematic program of review, that it needs to make changes to its standards, the agency must initiate action within 12 months to make the changes and must complete that action within a reasonable period of time. Before finalizing any changes to its standards, the agency must -

(1) Provide notice to all of the agency's relevant constituencies, and other parties who have made their interest known to the agency, of the changes the agency proposes to make;

(2) Give the constituencies and other interested parties adequate opportunity to comment on the proposed changes; and

(3) Take into account any comments on the proposed changes submitted timely by the relevant constituencies and by other interested parties.

*[The agency must provide documentation that it must complete the standards revision process within a reasonable period of time.]*

#### § 602.25 Due process.

The agency must demonstrate that the procedures it uses throughout the accrediting process satisfy due process. The agency meets this requirement if the agency does the following:

(a) Provides adequate written specification of its requirements, including clear standards, for an institution or program to be accredited or preaccredited.

(b) Uses procedures that afford an institution or program a reasonable period of time to comply with the agency's requests for information and documents.

(c) Provides written specification of any deficiencies identified at the institution or program examined.

(d) Provides sufficient opportunity for a written response by an institution or program regarding any deficiencies identified by the agency, to be considered by the agency within a timeframe

determined by the agency, and before any adverse action is taken.

(e) Notifies the institution or program in writing of any adverse accrediting action or an action to place the institution or program on probation or show cause. The notice describes the basis for the action.

*[The agency must provide documentation to demonstrate that it provides written specification of any deficiencies identified at the institution examined.]*

#### § 602.26 Notification of accrediting decisions.

The agency must demonstrate that it has established and follows written procedures requiring it to provide written notice of its accrediting decisions to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public. The agency meets this requirement if the agency, following its written procedures—

(a) Provides written notice of the following types of decisions to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public no later than 30 days after it makes the decision:

(1) A decision to award initial accreditation or preaccreditation to an institution or program.

(2) A decision to renew an institution's or program's accreditation or preaccreditation;

(b) Provides written notice of the following types of decisions to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, and the appropriate accrediting agencies at the same time it notifies the institution or program of the decision, but no later than 30 days after it reaches the decision:

(1) A final decision to place an institution or program on probation or an equivalent status.

(2) A final decision to deny, withdraw, suspend, revoke, or terminate the accreditation or preaccreditation of an institution or program.

(3) A final decision to take any other adverse action, as defined by the agency, not listed in paragraph (b)(2) of this section;

(c) Provides written notice to the public of the decisions listed in paragraphs (b)(1), (b)(2), and (b)(3) of this section within 24 hours of its notice to the institution or program;

(d) For any decision listed in paragraph (b)(2) of this section, makes available to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, and the public, no later than 60 days after the decision, a brief statement summarizing the reasons for the agency's decision and the official comments that the affected institution or program may wish to make with regard to that decision, or evidence that the affected institution has been offered the opportunity to provide official comment;

(e) Notifies the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and, upon request, the public if an accredited or preaccredited institution or program—

(1) Decides to withdraw voluntarily from accreditation or preaccreditation, within 30 days of receiving notification from the institution or program that it is withdrawing voluntarily from accreditation or preaccreditation; or

(2) Lets its accreditation or preaccreditation lapse, within 30 days of the date on which accreditation or preaccreditation lapses.

*[The agency must demonstrate that it provides written notice of negative decisions to the Secretary and the other entities required by this section at the same time it notifies the institution of the decision.]*