

Accreditation and the Board's Role

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 & DOLIRUQLD +DZDLL DQG WKH IRUPHU 8 6 7UXVW 7HUULWRULHV LQ W 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 DFFHSWDQFH RI VSHFLÀF UHVSQRVLELOLWLHV LQFOXGLQJ FRPPLQJ DQG

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, boardsmanship

