September 20, 2010

Dr. Linda Spink
President
Los Angeles Harbor College
1111 Figueroa Place
Wilmington, CA 90744

Dear President Spink:

In 1999, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges adopted a policy on the evaluation of institutions in multi-college districts (Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-College/Multi-Unit Districts or Systems). This policy was revised in January 2009. It requires colleges undergoing comprehensive review to provide with the Self Study Report a clear description of district and college authority and responsibility in areas of operation and decision making addressed by the Accreditation Standards. The purpose of this clarification is to provide clear guidance to the college conducting its self study activities on where the locus of responsibility or authority is, and to provide to the visiting team clear direction for team inquiry during the comprehensive visit. The teams visiting the colleges in your district will develop a collective evaluation of district operations using the Accreditation Standards.

Accordingly, as part of its self study, Los Angeles Harbor College is asked to provide an organizational map of the functional lines of authority and practice in the district-college relationship. This map should not be an organizational chart, but rather a descriptive analysis of both intended and actual practices, as well as what is understood about the impact of the division of responsibility on the college. If appropriate, lines of responsibility and authority between the colleges of the district should also be included.

In asking for this information, the Commission acknowledges that each multi-college district or system may choose to distribute authority and responsibility for institutional functions in a unique way. Since one of the purposes of accreditation review is to assess institutional effectiveness, it is necessary for visiting teams to know how each district or system has chosen to organize. The evaluation team will develop conclusions regarding issues pertaining to the district for inclusion in the report to the Commission.

Please let me know if you need any assistance.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Beno, Ph.D.
President

BAB/tl

cc: Dr. Daniel LaVista, Chancellor, Los Angeles Community College District
Background

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges accredits institutions which award the degree. Almost half of the member institutions are part of larger systems, either by being part of a multi-college district/system or by being owned by a larger corporate entity. Colleges must work closely with district/system offices to ensure accreditation standards are met and quality is sustained. The district’s role is to facilitate and support the successful implementation of the college’s strategic plan. This necessitates dialogue between the colleges and district and among the colleges within the district.

ACCJC evaluates colleges based on the Standards of Accreditation regardless of organizational structure. In single-college districts all functions are carried out by the same entity. For multi-college districts/systems, key functions that relate to the Standards may be distributed among the colleges and the district/system in various patterns. In order for the Commission to evaluate colleges in single-college and multi-college organizations fairly, colleges must inform the Commission about their functional organization and involve district/system and college personnel responsible for the functions in accreditation activities.

The integrity of the district/system programs and services falls within the scope of the institution’s accreditation. The district/system auxiliary programs and services are subject to review if the program or service is executed in the name of the district/system or college, or if the district/system administers or the board authorizes the program or service. The delineation and distribution of responsibilities among the district/system and the college must be articulated clearly.

Policy

The ACCJC ensures the equitable evaluation of all institutions regardless of organizational differences and clarifies the Commission’s expectations regarding the conduct and outcomes of institutional reviews in multi-college districts/systems.

Elements of this policy are the following:

1. While the Commission accredits individual colleges, the district/system holds a fundamental role and responsibility in the analysis and evaluation of district/system structures and how these structures assist the colleges to achieve and adhere to all the Standards of Accreditation and gain and sustain accredited status.

2. Institutions have the responsibility to describe and display clearly the particular way functions are distributed in their unique multi-college organization. The distribution of these functions is to be evaluated. There must be ongoing communication between the college and the district/system regarding the distribution of these functions. The Commission will use this description to
identify the locus of responsibility for the institution’s ability to meet accreditation standards.

3 When serious inadequacies in a district/system function are verified, such deficiencies could jeopardize the accreditation of one, some, or all of the district/system colleges. Responsibility for correcting deficiencies is with both the district/system office as well as the college in question.

4 The Commission reserves the right to initiate direct interaction with district/system officers regarding the ability of institutions to demonstrate that they meet or exceed the Standards. When district/system officers are contacted regarding an institution, the college(s) will receive the same communication.

5 A district/system may make a special request to evaluate the effectiveness of its central functions in conjunction with scheduled institutional reviews. This activity is limited to issues related to the ability of colleges to demonstrate that they meet or exceed the Standards. The outcome of this activity does not result in any “accredited” status for the district/system.

Procedures

A. Self Study

1. As part of the self study process and in consultation with the district/system, the institution must specify whether primary responsibility for all or parts of a specific function is at the college or district level through an organizational “map,” which is a description of the delineation of district/system and college functions. Analysis and evaluation of the “map” is done to assure continuous improvement. The “map,” provided in the self study, must accomplish the following:

   - defines the major functions of the colleges and the district/system office, accounts for every major function regardless of whether it is the college or the district/system office responsibility,
   - addresses all Standards,
   - makes clear how the information it provides relates to the Standards
   - is factual,
   - provides sufficient information about each function,
   - reflects consultation between the college and the district/system, and,
   - provides analysis, evaluation, and subsequent planning for organizational improvement.

Moreover, the Commission recognizes that institutions in a multi-college system may have lateral relationships with other institutions in the district/system which should be included in the map. For example, police services may be a district/system service for all colleges in a multi-college district/system, yet located at one institution in the district/system.

2. Individuals, whether on the campus or in the district/system office, must be actively involved in developing the self study based upon who has responsibility for the institutional function. As a result, close cooperation between and among the institutions and the district/system office is expected as a part of the institutional self study preparation.
3. In the self study, institutions are expected to include a discussion of how the identified district/system functions and decisions affect the colleges’ ability to meet the Standards. For example, the board’s role in adopting the college mission statement is addressed in the Standard dealing with mission; the district/system office responsibility for personnel is discussed in the Standard appropriate to faculty and staff; the district/system financial allocation system should be included in the Standard in which financial resources are addressed. The organizational map will provide guidance for this discussion. The effectiveness of the map’s delineation of functions includes analysis, evaluation, and subsequent planning for organizational improvement.

4. The district/system chief administrator and governing board are expected to be involved in the process of developing the self study. The governing board must review and approve the final self study and certify broad institutional involvement in its development.

B. Team Composition

Just as for colleges in single-college districts, team composition for colleges in multi-college districts/systems is shaped by the institution being accredited. Teams visiting colleges in multi-college districts/systems will have the range of expertise appropriate for the college and also individuals with multi-college district/system perspectives. Institutions may request team members with special expertise in multi-college issues. The Commission makes every effort to include individuals who have experience in similarly situated institutions and multi-college districts/systems to serve as team chairs and team members.

C. Visit Organization

The Commission conducts evaluation visits to institutions in multi-college districts/systems simultaneously or in clusters of institutions. This arrangement allows the Commission to consider district/system issues when taking action on the accredited status of institutions in multi-college systems. It also improves the efficiency of self study preparation and evaluation visits.

D. District/System Visiting Team

Prior to simultaneous visits taking place in the colleges of a district/system, the President will name a coordinating chair. This coordinating chair, in consultation with institutional team chairs, will form a small district/system team which is drawn from all of the teams visiting the colleges. It will consist of all of the team chairs and such members of the respective teams as are needed to address the district/system issues identified in the self studies and by the evaluation teams.

The purposes of the coordinating chair and district/system team are to:
- evaluate the evidence provided in the self studies to confirm that the functions provided by the district/system enable the institutions to meet the Standards,
- explicitly identify issues pertaining to the Standards that are related to district/system functions,
- ensure commonality and comparability of team recommendations across institutional team reports when accreditation issues have district/system consequences, and,
- support the work of the teams evaluating each college.
This team will meet with the district/system administration before the visit to discuss prior district issues and will spend an appropriate period of time validating the portions of the self studies that pertain to centralized operations. Any recommendations regarding district/system functions will be included in institutional team reports.

The coordinating chair may have a separate team assistant available to him/her solely for the purpose of supporting the district/system team and for performing organizational tasks related to this part of the evaluation visits. Team chairs on the special district/system team will receive the self study, the previous team reports, and Commission action letters from every college involved and will make the materials available to institutional team members on the district/system team.

E. Reports by the Institutional Teams and District/System Team

The district/system team will develop conclusions about any major issues pertaining to the district/system. Recognizing that some district/system observations may pertain to all colleges, and others only to particular colleges, the institutional team chair, working in conjunction with the coordinating chair and the members of the district/system team, will incorporate appropriate conclusions within the Standards in the individual institutional team reports. When the district/system team feels a recommendation, that pertains to the district/system as a whole is in order, that same recommendation will appear in each of the institutional team reports.

At the end of each evaluation visit, the team chair meets with the college chief executive to discuss major findings. The team chair will then make a presentation of the team process and findings at an open meeting involving the entire college community. The coordinating chair shall meet with the district chief executive prior to meeting with the college chief executive and present district findings. This discussion is limited to the district/system functions identified in the organizational map and the issues related to them which are identified in the institutional self studies and the findings of the institutional teams. The themes reported by the coordinating chair ought to be congruent with those shared with the chief administrator at each of the colleges.

Although the district/system policies may affect the accredited status of the institution(s), the district/system team will not make recommendations on the accredited status of the colleges. Confidential recommendations, submitted to the Commission, on the accredited status of the colleges will come from each of the institutional teams.

The coordinating chair will send a letter to the district/system chief administrator advising him/her of the results of the district/system visit with copies sent to the college chief administrators.
F. Commission Actions and Public Disclosure

The Commission will receive the following items for each college in preparation for
Commission action: the self study, the team report, the catalog, and other pertinent
documents. The Commission, using its reader system, will consider each institution
separately in relation to the district/system and take the appropriate action for each
institution.

The Commission will discuss the district/system and develop a consensus on any matters to
be communicated to the district/system chief administrator. In its action letters to the
institutions, the Commission will comment on important district/system matters that
significantly enhance or impinge on college quality.

In a case where one or more accreditation concerns, relating to the district/system are
identified, the Commission may request a written response from the district/system itself and
may also specify a visit, by Commission representatives, to validate any such response.
The Commission will make clear that significant inadequacies in district/system office
functions can jeopardize the accreditation of one, some, or all of the district/system colleges.
When correspondence is sent to the district/system chief administrator, copies will be sent to
the appropriate college(s).

Should the Commission decide that a district/system response and visit are in order, the
district/system team will normally include the coordinating chair, a member of the
Commission, and additional persons with special expertise, as needed. The purpose of the
visit is to validate the response from the district/system. This response could be the basis for
subsequent Commission action, relative to the accredited status of one or more of the
institutions, in the district/system.

G. Follow-up Activities

The district/system chief administrator is required to share the team report and Commission
Action letter of any visit related to district/system functions with the governing board and
appropriate staff at the district/system and at the colleges.

The Commission may issue special communications to college chief administrators on
particular leadership issues. When the college involved is a member of a district/system, the
district/system chief administrator will be copied on this correspondence.

H. Cost

The costs associated with the additional activities of a district/system visit may be billed
directly to the district/system involved on an actual cost basis.