



ACCREDITING COMMISSION for COMMUNITY and JUNIOR COLLEGES
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Barbara A. Beno, President
Susan S. Kazama, Chair

August 16, 2016

To: Dr. Helen Benjamin
Dr. Brian King

CC: Members, Work Group 1
ACCJC Commissioners

From: Chair Susan Kazama *Susan Kazama*
President Barbara Beno *Barbara A. Beno*

Re: ACCJC Preliminary Response to the Recommendations of Work Group 1

On behalf of the Commission and its staff, we thank you and all others who participated in crafting your document, *A Preliminary Report to the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, June 8, 2016*. Your report included many appropriate, thoughtful and helpful ideas for improving and strengthening the ACCJC's accreditation processes and its relationship with its members.

Enclosed please find the *ACCJC Preliminary Response to the Recommendations of Work Group 1*. This response was prepared following a thorough review of your recommendations by the Commission's Evaluation and Planning Committee on July 28, 2016. The ACCJC's response addresses each of the specific recommendations contained in your report. The blue type indicates things that ACCJC plans to implement in the future or will consider in the future, and the black type represents actions the ACCJC has already taken which align to the recommendations of Work Group 1.

ACCJC has titled this response "preliminary" because there are some recommendations for which we'd like further clarification as to meaning or intention. ACCJC is open to continuing this discussion and welcomes the opportunity to engage Work Group 1 in further dialog regarding its recommendations and advice at a future meeting.

In the meantime, please feel free to share this widely; ACCJC will post the document to its web page later this week. We look forward to your feedback and to continuing dialog.

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ACCJC Preliminary Response to CA CEO Board Recommendations

August 15, 2016

The ACCJC is committed to improving the quality of its evaluations and services to its member institutions. This document is the response of the ACCJC to the specific and detailed recommendations presented by the CA CEO Board's Work Group 1. This response includes a description of actions that ACCJC has already implemented or have been standard practice for some time, actions that we can commit to implementing, and actions that will require a continuing dialog and/or further consideration by the Commission.

Area of Focus I: Training and Selection

The improvement of the Training and Selection of Accreditation Evaluation Teams is a priority for the ACCJC. The ACCJC concurs that this is an area where increased attention is needed. Changes have already been implemented and others are being integrated into the processes.

Recommendations:

1. VISITING TEAM CHAIR TRAINING

In addition to the specific recommendations noted below, the ACCJC is also considering and planning for other training options including short training sessions, webinars, and conference calls that will assist Team Chairs in their assignments.

Prior to face to face training

- **Assign visiting teams at least 8 weeks before the site visit**

This is current practice. The ACCJC currently invites team members earlier than 8 weeks, but delays in responses from invitees and late or even last minute withdrawals of members from the team confound our efforts.

This will continue to be a priority and as we train new evaluators (See related items below), we hope to have more potential trained team members to be assigned, thereby increasing our opportunity for timely completion of teams.

- **Assign 2 CEOs to each team (one as a chair, one as a chair in training to be mentored)**

This is current practice for the ACCJC. Teams are chaired by a CEO, and another, usually newer CEO, is also assigned. The ACCJC recently discussed the ideas of mentoring and increasing the length of chair training with fall 2016 team chairs. Chairs are willing to provide opportunity for CEO team members to participate in some of the chair's activities as a way to learn more about the role of chair. Initial implementation of this will occur with the fall 2016 evaluation teams and we'll ask Chairs and CEOs how it worked.

In ACCJC's current practice, an individual is not asked to serve as Chair until he/she has served on two or three teams and is recommended by their last Chair as "ready to chair." Not all CEOs who serve on teams will become chairs. The ACCJC will explore this issue of chair's mentoring potential new chairs in more detail to ensure a robust and effective process in the future.

- **Create a "how to read and evaluate the self study report" guideline.**

This is good idea. ACCJC can develop this in time for training of the spring 2017 chairs and teams.

- **Enhance chair training by requiring online training module tool kits reviewing the basics prior to "two day onsite training."**

This is an area that will require additional conversation with team chairs. Fall 2016 team chairs, when asked about this idea, expressed some concerns about the limits to the time they can commit. Their input is also needed to determine what tool kits they would like to see developed.

This will be initiated with a survey to the chairs as to what tool kits and specific skill sets they would find helpful as online modules. After determination of the need, modules can be developed similar to those used by SACS.

- **Require completion of on-line modules.**

As noted above, the ACCJC will consider the development of on-line modules as a component of its training processes; if we develop useful modules, we'll certainly require chairs or evaluators to complete them.

- **Include a review and crosswalk of USDE changes and resource documents**

Under current practice, ACCJC reviews and crosswalks USDE regulatory requirements, any changes therein, and related resource documents as part of the current training. ACCJC implemented a federal compliance checklist in fall 2015 that guides a team's work. ACCJC provides chairs with samples of team reports that write effectively to the USDE regulations, and discusses how to complete the federal compliance checklist, at its chair training in July 2016.

- **Distribute training materials to the visiting team chair 3-4 weeks prior to team training**

Each year in summer, ACCJC updates its training materials, and the updating work occurs in early July and early August, around staff vacation schedules. Team training documents are currently distributed to chairs during team training. For fall 2016 we will be able to get them to all team members 2 weeks prior to training.

ACCJC will assess the outcome (e.g., do team members read the materials ahead of the training?) and work to get them to chairs and teams earlier for the spring 2017 training.

We'll try to get the materials done earlier in the summer as we have hired new staff and are increasing our capacity.

- **Provide Chairs with a short assignment prior to Chair Training.**

The ACCJC will explore this in conjunction with the development of training modules as noted above.

Face to Face Training

- **Chair Training should be expanded to two day training and should include experienced team chairs joining on the second day to lead focused and interactive training sessions**

At present chairs receive two days of training, one at chair training and the second at team training. All chairs are also experienced team members.

There have been preliminary discussions with fall 2016 chairs at their July 2016 training. Generally they were not enthusiastic about an additional day of training because of the time commitments. However the experienced chairs indicated a willingness to engage in mentoring activities during an evaluation visit for CEOs on their teams who are potential new chairs.

ACCJC will further explore expanding Chair training to 2 or 1.5 days.

- **The following topics should be included in training: Philosophy of accreditation with an emphasis on assisting colleges in need of improvement, activity for chairs that includes the visit sequence and sample letters, examples of good reports, quality focus essays, organization of the visit, and case studies on a list of topics.**

Current practice is that chairs are currently provided with resource materials for the visit that includes the visit sequence and all the things chairs must do, sample letters, milestones and sequencing of the steps of the visit, examples of good team reports, and elements extracted from good reports.

- **Include small group discussions between new chairs and experienced chairs during chair training.**

It is important to remember that there are not always “new” team chairs being trained; sometimes all chairs are experienced. Chair training occurs in relatively small groups at present.

This seems to be a good idea for learning, and we’ll revise the Chair training to specify the sections that will be interactive and led by experienced team chairs by spring 2017 chair training.

- **After training, assign new chairs to “shadow” experienced chairs prior to a college visit.**

ACCJC will implement mentoring of CEOs who are potential chairs during the evaluation visits beginning in fall 2016. [Additional mentoring activities will be explored for spring 2017 visits, including adding the CEO team member to the pre-visit.](#)

- **The CEO recommendations also included an extensive listing of specific recommendations on the details of training and asked that ACCJC use case studies to train on these topics. Provide case studies demonstrating how to (a through h on page 14 of the Preliminary Recommendations to ACCJC).**

Some of these recommendations are not clear and need further explication by Work Group 1. (Item b is perhaps being misunderstood; we teach teams to *interpret* the standards, not to analyze the standards).

Some of these proposed actions are already standard training for teams. (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h)

Several other Recommendations such as reading and evaluating Institutional Self Evaluation Reports, feedback to chairs, and training on the distribution of the visiting team report and letters is addressed in other sections of this response.

[The ACCJC will continue to engage the CEOs in a discussion of these specific topics and techniques as part of a continuing dialog to improve the training of chairs so that we can understand what they may mean, and then respond accordingly.](#)

- **Include training on how to reflect on successes and challenges of the visit to share with the visiting team (This recommendation is dependent on implementation of changes in focus area IV).**

This will be included as a component of revisions developed in response to recommendations in focus area IV.

- **Repeat training sequence every fourth visit for chairs.**

Under current practice, **all** team chairs are trained each time they are assigned to a comprehensive evaluation team. This helps ACCJC bring all chairs up to current practice, and allows chairs to refresh their skills and understanding of their role. ACCJC is not clear on whether this proposal is to reduce the training for team chairs (something we don't think is wise given the chairs' feedback to our training), and welcomes clarification from Work Group 1.

2. TEAM MEMBER SELECTION AND TEAM MEMBER TRAINING

The ACCJC is committed to improving the selection and training of evaluation team members. In addition to the responses below, this will continue as a part of the improvement dialog with member institutions.

Team Member Selection

- **Standardize the process of selecting team members to assure greater consistency and improve transparency.**

The ACCJC established a protocol for team composition years ago, adapted it to meet USDE requirements in 2013, and uses that protocol to fill evaluation teams. This protocol has been designed to meet the federal requirements as well as the needs of the ACCJC. The protocol provides for both academic and administrative membership of teams. Academic membership includes a minimum of three faculty. In addition to the faculty positions, the team membership protocol provides for a Chair (usually a CEO), another district or college CEO who is a potential future chair, an instructional officer, a student services officer, a business officer, administrative services expertise, a researcher, a librarian, and other team members to meet the needs of the institution being visited. This may include deans and other individuals with expertise in student learning outcomes and assessment, distance education, program review, or career technical education. It may also include a trustee. On occasion colleges may request specific expertise that is provided, as available. The recent addition of the baccalaureate degrees has resulted in the addition of evaluation members with baccalaureate expertise to colleges with relevant degree programs. Commission policy provides that an ACCJC staff member may be assigned to the team.

The ACCJC will try to make the processes and procedures for team composition more readily transparent and accessible. We have identified a number of ways information about the team selection can be provided to the field, including the (new in 2016-17 academic year) letter to the receiving college CEO about key events associated with the evaluation visit, self study training and team training.

- **Provide team selection guidelines specifically for CEOs (of the institutions naming potential evaluation team members) to ensure reliable team member selection processes.**

The ACCJC recognizes that there is a need to provide more information to CEOs when we ask them to recommend evaluation team members. [The ACCJC will revise its current recruiting letters to CEOs to include more specificity about the specialized knowledge, characteristics and expertise desired for team membership.](#)

- **A website link should be made available that informs prospective members about the role of a peer evaluator and a process that allows and encourages volunteers to sign up online.**

[The ACCJC will provide more information on its website about the role of team evaluators and the processes for selection. The ACCJC will also explore the BIO data form that is used to include more information related to desired characteristics.](#)

The ACCJC asks CEOs to recommend potential evaluators, and relies on their judgement as a first screening that the recommended individuals have personal and professional characteristics that would make them good team members. For that reason, an open, online process where un-vetted volunteers could sign up for team service would not work.

[However, we are exploring how to make it possible for persons in the database to update their biographical information online so that our database reflects their most current job title, expertise, education level and workplace/contact information.](#)

Team member training

- **Team training should include online modules or accreditation basics similar to those offered by SACS. Topics should include: institutional effectiveness, instruction and instructional support services, human, technology, physical and financial resources, leadership, and governance.**

The ACCJC has modified its training workshops and is in the process of continuing to refine those processes. This is currently an on-line “Accreditation Basics” course, updated to the 2014 Accreditation Standards, to provide basic information to those interested in Accreditation service. [The ACCJC will explore other options, including modules, on specific topics to expand the current on-line materials.](#)

- **Efforts should be made to invite CEOs and ALOs to join ACCJC staff as presenters at the training.**

Current practice is to have experienced evaluators, including some ALOs, participate with ACCJC staff in the recently revised New Evaluator Training. The new Team Training has specific topics for which experienced evaluators are asked to participate and share experiences.

[Consideration will be given to expanding the inclusion of experienced evaluators in other training sessions.](#)

- **Training time would be more effectively used by allowing team members to engage in case scenarios that demonstrate that standards can be met in a**

variety of ways and are not dependent on solitary and limited practices. Another technique may be the sharing of self evaluation reports that do and do not meet the standards.

In current practice, the “New Evaluator Training” that was conducted in February 2016 included scenarios and enhanced opportunities for interaction. The Team Evaluator training scheduled for late August 2016 also includes this new format that includes the types of situations noted. ACCJC has included examples of both what was effective (in terms of report or recommendation writing) and some, more limited examples of what was not effective.

[This model of using examples will be continued into other training workshops as these events are scheduled through this next year.](#)

- **Emphasize that accreditation process honors and values the peer evaluation process that should result in improvement rather than solely identifying compliance problems and issuing sanctions.**

In current practice, the addition of the Quality Focus Essay is an effort to emphasize improvement in the self evaluation process. Teams are encouraged to comment on the QFE and provide additional perspective to colleges. Compliance will, of necessity, remain an essential component of the Accreditation process. However it is not, nor was it intended to be, the only focus of Accreditation.

[More focus will continue to be stressed in training and other ACCJC events to promote quality improvement as a key outcome of accreditation.](#)

- **Provide exercises to ensure the site visit results are similar regardless of the composition of the team or the chair (inter-rater reliability).**

Accreditation takes a “case” approach to the evaluation of an institution, examining the institution holistically and in light of its mission, its accreditation history, and the unique circumstances at the institution and their impact on its ability to meet standards. There will be differences in outcomes of evaluation based on that methodology alone.

One of the goals of team training is consistency in application of accreditation standards to each institution. The ACCJC has ended the practice of asking teams to reach a conclusion about the accredited status they will recommend to the Commission, and that should eliminate perceived inconsistencies. Current Chair training is emphasizing this consistency. ACCJC would welcome Work Group 1’s ideas about how to improve consistency in application.

- **Provide examples of “evidence that meets and does not meet Standards.” Use Standards that are more frequently identified with problems.**

Under current practice, the training does use samples of information from self study reports. With limited time in training sessions, we provide a few examples and ask

teams to discuss whether those are sufficient, what else is needed, and additional related information can be found in the ISER.

ACCJC would like clarification in order to better address this recommendation. Does Work Group 1 mean self study sections or narrative, or do you mean supporting evidence a college submits?

- **Train team members in etiquette and protocols and the time commitments required of evaluators.**

Summer 2016 chair and team training has added information that emphasizes team member etiquette and consistency through standard protocols for interviewing.

Additional emphasis will be included about the time commitments of preparing for and conducting evaluation visits.

- **Do training in small group settings.**

The team training format has also been configured to facilitate more team interaction. There is a common core to the training that we want all teams to experience, so we will continue to have the larger group meet for part of the training.

The ACCJC will experiment with splitting out team training into smaller groups in spring 2017 by having breakout rooms at the training venues. Currently, 6 or 7 teams train at once. Additional specialized training modules for specific groups such as researchers, SLO experts, and Chief Financial Officers will also be incorporated into the future team training cycle as they are developed.

Area of Focus II: Communications

The ACCJC is committed to ensuring that communication with its members is consistent, clear, and transparent. Efforts will continue to enhance and improve communication.

- **All communication from ACCJC should feature a collegial tone.**

ACCJC has revised all action letters to improve tone beginning with January 2016 letters on comprehensive evaluations, and June 2016 action letters for all other evaluation reviews by the Commission. Staff has revised the cover letter for the Annual Fiscal Report to provide a more collegial tone.

ACCJC has hired a new communications coordinator whose work will ensure communications are appropriately collegial and clear. [Continued feedback from Work Group 1 and member institutions is welcome.](#)

- **Communication should be disseminated to the field with adequate time for review.**

At present, college CEOs are given 5 business days to review the draft of comprehensive team reports. ACCJC has set earlier deadlines for submission of draft reports by chairs to accelerate the review process and ensure that colleges have sufficient time to decide whether to submit a written response or personally address the Commission during a college's review. These revised deadlines have been in place since the Fall of 2015.

- **Avoid sending multiple notices with short time frames. Instead provide a systematic summary of communications (quarterly or semiannual basis).**

Under current practice, ACCJC notices have been designed to ensure that CEOs have current and timely information regarding accreditation related information, USDE news and requirements, etc. ACCJC also publishes a newsletter three times a year (fall, spring and late summer).

The meaning or intent of this recommendation is unclear. Correspondence comes in spurts when events warranting communication occur, and certainly in spring 2016, several events occurred that warranted communication to the field. ACCJC would welcome further dialog on this topic of information sent to the field or to CEOs and is willing to explore other options to improve its communication processes.

- **Improve the ACCJC website to ensure transparency.**

ACCJC plans to overhaul its website this coming academic year. We have hired new staff, including a new communications coordinator, who is starting in September, and will be able to lead the project of redesigning the website.

- **Provide support for institutions seeking guidance on meeting the Standards.**

The ACCJC has also developed a series of Educational Workshops that are focused on specific elements within the Standards, including financial stability and assessment of learning outcomes.

ACCJC staff currently provides counsel and advice to institutions that seek assistance to better understand standards and required practices, and also refers colleges to other experts that we are aware of. Action letters encourage institutions to call ACCJC if they have any questions.

Numerous workshops are being designed for the Annual Conference that will assist institutions to meet the Standards. Additional workshops will be developed as needs are identified. ACCJC welcomes any more specific input from Work Group 1.

- **Develop and publish a strategic plan and give the field an opportunity to be involved in the future direction of the Commission.**

The Commission Evaluation and Planning Committee is working to develop a Strategic Plan and assigned a leader of that effort. The Commission will solicit field input and comment on this Plan.

- **Allow face to face meetings on issues of significance to member institutions.**

Colleges are currently permitted to make appointments to come to ACCJC offices for face to face meetings with staff, as they wish. Staff will also respond to requests that a staff member address the college at its site if appropriate and if schedules permit.

The Annual Conference will be a major opportunity to expand the face to face contact, and we'll be happy to schedule a session that permits conversation with the staff and if desired, some of the Commissioners, on topics of interest to the field. We are also engaged now in planning for the April 2017 annual conference, and ideas for session topics are welcome and should be addressed to Dr. Richard Winn at rwinn@accjc.org.

Face to face meetings can have significant financial implications. Therefore, in addition to fostering face to face events, the ACCJC will also utilize other modalities and technologies to expand communication opportunities. ACCJC will continue to encourage the participation of all of its member institutions and constituencies in conference calls and webinars to foster access for all members and enhanced communication. Technology allows the dispersed ACCJC member institutions to join the conversation without the expense of airline travel to a meeting. ACCJC plans to increase our knowledge and capacity to provide webinars. If there is something more specific that Work Group 1 has in mind, we welcome that information.

- **Sponsor an annual conference for all constituencies and, among the presentations, provide training on federal and other entities that have an impact on Commission operations.**

The first Annual Conference for the ACCJC has been scheduled for April 4-7, 2017. The conference will have numerous opportunities for training that will include the impact of federal regulation. All constituencies are encouraged to attend the Annual Conference. The ACCJC welcomes invitations to present this information in at professional conferences and meeting venues, and has responded to such requests member colleges consistently in the past.

- **Improve overall communications through a variety of mechanisms including member surveys of services and trends that have an impact on regional accreditation.**

The ACCJC is open to a further dialog on this question. It is uncertain as to the broad meaning of "surveys" in this recommendation. ACCJC already conducts surveys of its training events, of the college's experience with a comprehensive review, and of team chairs and team members, and its symposia. Furthermore, the ACCJC will evaluate its Annual Conference.

The Evaluation and Planning Committee of ACCJC is developing ideas for a survey of membership unrelated to training events. It has developed some preliminary

topics for survey items, and welcomes input from Work Group 1 on potential topics for the survey. The ACCJC would be willing to explore all strategies to improve and expand input.

- **Distribute quarterly newsletters and best practices examples.**

ACCJC decided some years ago that it would provide a newsletter **three times a year** after its experimentation with four times a year proved too difficult given the semester schedule, commission meetings, trainings and other events that are scheduled. ACCJC provides a newsletter each fall, spring and summer that is available on the web page that can be downloaded.

ACCJC will provide some exemplar best practices in institutional self study at its annual conference, as part of the augmented training for institutional self evaluation that is scheduled for the annual conference.

ACCJC's annual conference will also include presentations by institutions that demonstrate good practices, and speakers whose expertise will help our region develop and promote good practices.

- **Host/encourage regional discussions about higher education and accreditation.**

ACCJC has done regional workshops in the past and is interested in doing this as topics of interest emerge. Feedback from constituency groups on topics they are concerned with would be appreciated, and ACCJC would be glad to host regional discussions. The Commission can also continue its listening session, particularly on topics that will emerge as part of the ACCJC's strategic plan.

- **Increase contact between ACCJC President and Vice Presidents and institution CEOs and ALOs.**

ACCJC staff are interested in increased contact with institutional CEOs and ALOs. The ACCJC has, and will continue to, respond to requests for visits and presentations as well as other events as schedules permit. ACCJC staff is open to invitations from CEOs, Vice Presidents, and other groups on a local, statewide, or regional basis to discuss Accreditation matters. Invite us, and we'll make every attempt to respond by being there.

With regard to ALOs specifically, ACCJC recognizes the need for more training of ALOs, particularly with the turnover in the ALO assignment in recent years. ACCJC plans ALO training to be a regular part of its preconference workshops, beginning in April 2017 with the first annual conference. ACCJC is also exploring how it can set up an effective ALO list serve managed by ACCJC when its new communications coordinator joins the staff. ACCJC welcomes ideas for the ALO list serve from Work Group 1 and from ALOs, and we'll be surveying the ALOs as to their interest and needs.

ACCJC recognizes that CEOs need training and information on accreditation standards, practices, and on the federal framework for accreditation, which is

changing rapidly. ACCJC would welcome the assistance of the CEO Board and Work Group 1 to set up opportunities for communication and training of CEOs. The California CC CEO's have not invited ACCJC to their annual meeting in two years, so we've lost that venue for communication.

ACCJC also recognizes it needs more opportunity for discussion with CEOs, as the representatives of member institutions. ACCJC is planning to hold a CEO-only meeting at the ACCJC annual conference in April 2017, which will include a general business meeting. We hope the CEO meeting will foster more communication between ACCJC and its member institutions.

ACCJC needs to consider how email conversations and webinars can fit into or generate better conversation and communication with CEOs.

Area of Focus III: Evaluation

ACCJC has long been committed to evaluation and has consistently evaluated its activities for member institutions to ensure they remain effective. Our evaluations show participants have very largely been satisfied with the activities of ACCJC.

The process for the review of the Accreditation Standards (2011 – 2014) was a recent effort to evaluate and improve the accreditation process. However ACCJC recognizes that additional evaluation efforts are needed to enhance and improve the ACCJC and its processes and it is committed to that continued improvement.

- **Create a comprehensive evaluation process of the Commission, involving input and participation from member institutions. Include feedback solicited from events, participants involved in commission processes, and interacting with ACCJC personnel. Surveys should solicit feedback on the experiences, perceptions and satisfaction of the constituents.**
- **The results should be used to update and revise Commission policies, procedures, and templates; develop and implement the Commission's strategic plan; inform the work of various committees (of the Commission); plan Commission staff and retreats; develop an annual budget; inform the annual evaluation of the Commission president and commission staff; modify/enhance training and professional development activities offered by the Commission and share the evaluation results as deemed appropriate.**

The ACCJC currently conducts survey evaluations of all of its training events including team training, ISER training, Chair Training, and others. These evaluations are used on a regular basis to revise and refine the training events.

The ACCJC will continue to refine its evaluation processes for its workshops and other events. The Commission will discuss an expansion of the evaluation process. The Commission Evaluation and Planning Committee has established a goal to

develop a more robust evaluation of the Commission and its work with member institution. The intent of this process will be to improve practices and relationships. We expect to examine evaluations used by some of the other regional accreditors, and to design and implement the larger evaluation by the end of this academic year (2016-17).

Area of Focus IV: Process and Structure of the Visit

The ACCJC is committed to improving the processes of institutional evaluation. The processes and structure of evaluation visits has evolved and the Accreditation Standards and USDE regulations have changed. However the ACCJC is interested in the continued evolution and improvement of the evaluation visits.

Institutional Self Evaluation Report (ISER)

- **Examine and compare the ISER format, content and length.**

The ACCJC has just redesigned the ISER to include a focus on quality improvement, and the Quality Focus Essay which is similar to the work of two other commissions. We are aware of the content differences from some other commissions that have different structures to their standards (some evaluated by an off-site evaluation team, the remaining evaluated by the on-site evaluation team) and ACCJC will examine those more closely to see what might be useful for our region.

- **Prepare clear guidelines and technical assistance to assist college preparing the ISER with necessary evidence for the visiting team.**

ACCJC will review its ISER training and make improvement to address guidelines and technical assistance. Advanced ISER training will be scheduled at the annual conference, beginning spring 2017, and will build on the training offered to institutions two years out from their comprehensive evaluation visit (the ISER training). The ACCJC is also committed to re-writing the *Guide to Evaluating Institutions*, which has used a didactic style, to include more direct description of what is needed to meet standards. That work will be done this academic year (2016-17).

- **Include additional guidelines for multi-college district visits.**

ACCJC will develop additional guidelines for multi-college districts for developing the ISER and the district mapping of key functions that are reviewed in comprehensive evaluation visits.

- **Reevaluate the focus and name of the ISER to align with supporting institutional commitment and improvements.**

Under current (recently added) practice, the Quality Focus Essay to the current format of the ISER is designed to provide additional focus to institutional commitments to improvement. The QFEs will be monitored to continue to refine and improve their use and usability.

- **Require CEOs to participate in accreditation training for college that occurs two years before a comprehensive visit to an institution for which they serve as CEO.**

CEOs are actively encouraged to participate in all institutional training events, especially ISER training. Many CEOs do participate in these events, but others leave it to their subordinates. The CEO Board can also encourage the CEOs to participate.

- **Appoint CEOs to serve in a secondary role on a visiting team at least once in his/her first three years as a CEO, and if successful, within the next three years as a chair.**

Current ACCJC practice is in line with this recommendation. ACCJC usually does invite new CEOs to participate on teams within a few years of their appointment if they are not already known participants in evaluation activities while in jobs prior to becoming CEO. There are some CEOs who have declined all invitations to serve, but many have participated. [We'll commit to keeping a list of new CEOs and calendaring an invitation to them within three years of their appointment, to make sure we invite each one.](#) The ACCJC encourages new CEOs to participate on multiple evaluation teams prior to their appointment as a Chair, although many individuals have other significant experiences in accreditation prior to becoming a CEO.

- **Provide one day's training annually for newly elected trustees, in December or January, and for all trustees two years prior to a comprehensive visit to a college for which they serve as a trustee.**

In the past, the ACCJC has been invited to the annual Trustee Conference and has provided training at these events. [ACCJC would need the assistance of the CEO Board and or Work Group 1 to create a venue in order to provide new trustees with a training event in December of January, and we'd be glad to work to schedule such training, within or outside of the CCLC or CCCT.](#)

The ACCJC is not in a position to require trustee participation in Accreditation training events so we cannot require them to attend training two years prior to their institution's comprehensive visit. [We will schedule a conference session \(s\) for trustees on a topic such as "What to Expect in a Comprehensive Accreditation Evaluation Visit" and if the demand remains strong, continue to schedule that session in future years.](#)

- **Require training for ALOs with a focus on the development of the ISER and require ALOs to serve as a peer evaluator.**

ALO training is scheduled for the annual conference. [Additional ALO training will be conducted at other times.](#) CEOs can assist the ACCJC by recommending ALOs for accreditation visiting teams and actively encouraging their participation in all

available accreditation training activities, including the New Evaluator Training, which is becoming the gateway to opportunities for team service.

Pre-visit

- **Assure all teams are staffed and the team chair has thoroughly reviewed the ISER prior to the pre-visit.**

Under current practice, ACCJC is committed to filling all visiting team positions. All visiting team members are provided with a copy of the college's ISER and team Chairs encourage all team members to read the ISER. Team Exercise 1, which is part of the evaluation team training, requires a review of the ISER in order to respond to the questions in the exercise. Team Assignment 1, which chairs distribute to team members prior to team training, also requires the team members to read the entire ISER.

- **Expand the “intended outcomes” to include a substantive review of the ISER that could result in a discussion of questions raised about the ISER and areas of improvement from the perspective of the visiting team.**

Under current practice, as noted above, the team report is based on the ISER as well as input received during the team visit. Teams are encouraged to review the ISER and identify key questions prior to team training. Team Exercise 1, used during Team Training, has as its focus an overview of the ISER and provides an opportunity for team members to identify key issues.

- **The team should give preliminary feedback to the institution before the scheduled team visit, thereby providing adequate time for the institution to respond to major deficiencies and send a positive message about the intention of the team.**

The Commission is hoping that the new option for its actions on institutions – that permits reaffirmation for a limited term with ability for an institution to correct the more minor areas of non-compliance – will fulfill the institution's needs for time to correct minor problems without receiving a sanction.

At present the ISER is due to the ACCJC 60 days prior to the team visit. In order to address this outcome, a more comprehensive review will be required regarding the process of feedback to institutions. The review would also need to identify required timelines which could require an earlier due date for the ISER and Team Training events that might need to be scheduled during institutional “off-times,” including summer.

As we understand this recommendation, it would require a major change to the structure and timing of the evaluation process. The team assigned to a college would have to make a commitment of team service for a year or 18 months in order to give feedback and also be available to conduct the final review. Colleges would have to agree to an extended timeline for the actual accreditation process, and that has

implications for how an institution would need to update its ISER. This item would need significant consideration by the Commission's Evaluation and Planning and Policy Committees after details are fleshed out. The Evaluation and Planning Committee of the Commission will need to consider whether it wishes to pursue this idea.

- **Give the chair flexibility to include other team members on the pre-visit, especially a team member who has concerns about weaknesses in the ISER.**

This will be considered. It will require modifications to the pre-visit dates or require earlier submission of ISERs by colleges undergoing evaluation (i.e., the whole timeline for Self Study). At present, ISERs are due to the ACCJC 60 days prior to a team visit. It will also require colleges' willingness to cover the costs of additional team members on the pre-visit.

- **ACCJC should thoroughly prepare the college for the team visit so that each knows what to expect at every stage of the process.**

In fall 2015, the ACCJC implemented a (new) letter to the CEO that describes significant elements of the pre-visit, visit, and post-visit interactions that occur between the chair and the CEO. More can be done in ISER training to prepare the college staff for the entire team visit such as describing the process, outlining the events that will occur, as well as other elements of the process. [Fall 2016 ISER training will include enhanced information about the processes.](#)

- **Consider adopting pre-visit practices from other Commissions that allow the colleges more flexibility and time for focusing on critical issues, and assistance that will make a difference in student learning.**

[ACCJC will examine the pre-visit practices of other regional commissions to see whether there are models it wants to consider and adopt in the future \(see Note below\).](#)

Site Visit * (please see the Note below)

- **Simplify the site visit. The present structure requires the team to “prove” the college meets every standard. Consider using a structure similar to other accreditors: one visit (virtual or in person) that focuses on issues of compliance (Pre-visit team) and another visit that focuses on improvement.**

Please note the comment above. The focus on compliance is required, whether it occurs off site (if it can be done that way) or onsite. [The ACCJC will explore what other commissions do and then consider whether an alternative model is desirable and acceptable to member institutions in the future \(see Note below\).](#)

- **Inform the chair of all oral presentations that have to be made, and provide a script so that remarks are consistent and the chair says only what is**

appropriate, including remarks at the beginning of the visit, remarks to commence the open forums, and the exit interview report.

The ACCJC currently provides a detailed script for the team Chair's remarks at the exit forum.

Additional scripts can be developed for the opening meeting, and the open forums to guide the Chairs, although no difficulties have been reported to us. ACCJC will do this for use by the spring 2017 visits.

It occurs to us that this recommendation may represent the concerns of institutions receiving the team visit, rather than the concerns of chairs. If there is a clarification Work Group 1 can provide, ACCJC would appreciate receiving it.

- **Consider increasing the team visit by one day so the team has time to deliberate and opportunity to discuss with the CEO and other college staff the team findings.**

This would require a significant increase to the time commitment and cost of a team visit, a 25% increase in cost to the college, and perhaps some difficulty finding evaluators who can spend an additional day. In addition, the team does not have firm "findings" but only a draft of them, and the final "findings" are made by the Commission at its decision making meeting.

Further discussion related to alternatives to the current evaluation process (noted above) will include this issue (see Note below).

- **Add a formal collegial exit meeting with the leadership team of the college or district to discuss preliminary findings so that the college is aware of deficiencies while the team is there and given opportunity clear up any issues.**

Under current practice, the Team Chair does meet with the institutional CEO to discuss the major findings of the evaluation visit. The institutional CEO also has an opportunity to review the team report as part of the "Fact Check" process. The institutional CEOs are also provided with an opportunity to address the Commission and provide a written report to the Commission to address any issues of concern that they may have. Through these opportunities to check facts and team conclusions, most errors are corrected.

The ACCJC would appreciate further discussion with Work Group 1 on what it has in mind. Is the recommendation suggesting the whole team stays on the visit an additional day awaiting the college's response and a chance to correct facts?

This would be a significant revision to the evaluation process. The team currently leaves the campus with chapters of the Evaluation Team Report only in draft form, and not necessarily yet integrated into a whole and consistent Report. So its findings are somewhat preliminary, and often couched in more broad language, until the chair has an opportunity to integrate the chapters and write a full report.

Those more broad descriptions of findings would not likely be sufficient for the college to rush to change college practice.

- **Review practices of other Commissions and consider adopting practices that would improve effectiveness of ACCJC practices.**

Currently, ACCJC does review some of the practices of the other regional commissions to learn from them and identify what might enhance and improve its own practices. The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions regularly discusses and shares practices among commission staffs.

It would be helpful if Work Group 1 provided more information about its specific concerns in this area (see Note below).

Note: The accreditation process for each accrediting commission is organic; it grows out of the practices and interests of the member institutions over time. These interests are expressive of the distinctive mission and character of member institutions. The structure of accreditation processes are related to the structure of accreditation standards.

As an outcome of its review of standards and practices, begun in 2011 and concluding in 2014-15, ACCJC revised standards and made some significant changes to accreditation processes, including new policy language on Commission actions, a lengthened cycle of accreditation, new midterm reporting requirements and a focus on quality and improvement through the Quality Focus essay and projects.

Some of the recommendations provided by Work Group 1 that reference portions of the accreditation processes of other commissions would require a substantial if not complete rethinking of ACCJC's standards and accreditation processes, and would necessarily occur through broad institutional interactions with the Commission. The recent revisions to accreditation standards and practices were based on a number of hearings and conversations with the entire region. The ACCJC has provided assurances to its member institutions that its new standards and processes will be used for a number of years, at least for the time required for all institutions to be accredited under the new standards. Many institutions engaged in the new process would find it a disservice to have the process significantly changed now.

ACCJC would consider significant changes to its standards and processes when it next undertakes a review of standards, likely in about 7 to 10 years. At that time, discussion with the entire membership would help ACCJC consider evidence for the need for revisions to its structures for accreditation standards or accreditation processes.

Post-Visit

- **Provide opportunity for dialog and discussion beyond the errors of fact limits set forth in the current process.**

Under current practice, ACCJC practice ensures that a finalized team report gets to the college and the Commission in a timely manner, and the procedures afforded to

institutional CEOs to correct errors of fact are pretty extensive. Please see above discussion.

- **Create an opportunity for discussion among the team chair, ACCJC staff, and the college CEO or ALO throughout the process rather than at only particular points in the process.**

The CEO and ALO and Chair are in contact regarding the evaluation team visit, and at this time they pull in ACCJC staff if they need assistance.

Does Work Group 1 think more structured dialog is needed, and if so, about what topics? It would be helpful if Work Group 1 provided more information about its concerns in this area.

- **Share the final team report and action letter with the team chair for distribution to the team members to close the loop.**

The team report is not considered final until after the Commission acts. The action letter and team report are then posted to the college's web page, as required by ACCJC. We are not sure the Team Chair wants the additional work of sending those documents to the team when the materials are available to the public. Can Work Group 1 explain further what purpose the recommendation is meant to serve?

- **Share the rationale for any changes in the team report with the team chair.**

This has been implemented effective last academic year. The rationale for any recommended changes to the team report are shared with the team chair during the review of the draft and must be made by the chair. If changes are made to the team report by staff after submission of the final report, the team chair is consulted. (These are usually editorial changes, changes to clarify language.) If the Commission changes a report after reviewing it, the changes are identified and explained in a preface that is inserted into the final team report sent to the college and posted to the institution's web site.

- **Provide opportunity for the team chair, the institutional leadership team and the ACCJC staff to review and discuss the final decision of the Commission.**

The college currently has the opportunity to discuss the final commission action letter and decision with the ACCJC staff as noted by the last paragraph of the action letter. This paragraph invites the CEO to call the ACCJC if the college wishes to discuss the letter or team report.

[ACCJC can change its practice to invite the team chair, if she/he wishes, to contact the ACCJC staff and schedule a similar discussion. ACCJC will build this into the Chair Manual.](#)

- **Provide verbal or written feedback to the team chair on his/her performance and the performance of the team in the spirit of continuous improvement.**

Under current practice, the Chair is already given feedback on the writing of the team report through interaction with the ACCJC staff during editing of the final Evaluation Team Report.

ACCJC can provide the chair with summary data from the two evaluations of the team and chair performance beginning with fall 2016 visits.

- **Give CEOs and college personnel sufficient time at the Commission meeting to provide a response to the team report. Commissioners need to be mindful of their tone with members who address the Commission.**

Under current practice, although there is a limit on a CEO's initial presentation to the Commission, there is no limit on the amount of time for a CEO to interact with the Commission. This time provided is primarily based on interactions between the CEO and the Commissioners. The Commissioners need to complete their work in the scheduled time for the Commission meeting.

Commissioners have been working consciously to make the meeting a more collegial process for members, and have become more engaging and have tried to maintain a positive tone.

Substantive Change Report

- **Streamline preparation of the Substantive Change Reports by limiting information requested and providing a template developed with input from member institutions and a review of approaches used by other Commissions.**

The ACCJC is in the process of revising the Substantive Change Manual to reflect the changes to the Substantive Change Policy. These changes are designed to simplify and streamline the process. [Feedback on the utility of the revised Manual will be solicited for improvement.](#) ACCJC staff will vet the reporting templates it develops for this new manual with member institutions.

Annual Report/Workload

- **Limit annual reporting to basic data and provide an electronic reporting system.**

The Annual Report is currently submitted electronically.

[The ACCJC will review the requirements of the Annual Report.](#) The Annual Report is designed to assess institutional conditions as required by USDE regulations. Unnecessary and duplicative reporting elements will be eliminated. [If Work Group 1 meant something broader with this recommendation, please give us additional information.](#)

Area of Focus IV: Commission Operations

The ACCJC is committed to improving its operations.

Financial Transparency

- **In conjunction with the annual conference, schedule a CEO Forum.**

A CEO Forum is planned as a component of the Annual Conference and it will include general financial and business information.

Commission Size and Composition

- **Re-define the configuration of the Commission representation by deleting the ACS and WASC and affiliate member categories, and use those positions in a different way.**

The Commission would have to consider this recommendation in its strategic planning, and is not in a position to comment on this recommendation at this time. It has, however, viewed the ACS and WASC member categories as contributing to communication and alignment in the region, and thinks that alignment serves interests of institutions and students.

- **Shift the WASC and ACS positions to non-voting and have them serve as liaisons to the other commissions.**

At present these positions serve a liaison role with their respective Commission. The Presidents of the three Commissions also communicate on a regular basis on areas of shared interest as well as joint work, so Commissioner liaisons are not asked to do all of the work of communicating. Please see the answer immediately above. The Commission policies don't provide for non-voting members to attend closed meetings, and the regulatory requirements of USDE for the accreditation decision making body (i.e., the Commission) and the legal obligations of a Board of Directors of a non-profit entity would preclude having non-voting members of the Commission.

- **Add a CFO position (active or retired) to the Commission membership, with a minimum of two positions.**

The ACCJC has also identified an interest in the addition of a CFO member of the Commission. Actual implementation of this position will require a discussion by the Commission and a change to policy. The relevant Commission committees will be taking up this idea.

- **The Commission should request any reports from ACSCU/WASC to be delivered as part of the open session of ACCJC meetings.**

This is a current and long standing practice at the open sessions of the ACCJC.

Nominating Committee

- **The Nominating Committee's function to identify individuals must be transparent and consistent in selecting well-qualified applicants.**

ACCJC believes the Nominating Committee meets its goals for selecting well-qualified candidates for the Slate from among the nominees. [Beginning with the spring 2017 election cycle, ACCJC can include more information about all of the characteristics it is looking for into the announcement of vacancies \(which begins the nomination process\) and that may result in more or different nominations coming from the field.](#)

- **Take steps to ensure the election process is fair.**

The nomination and election process is described in the Bylaws of the Commission and is followed for each election and the Commission believes it is fair. Perhaps Work Group 1 has something more specific to say about this recommendation?

- **There should be a clear charge and statement for the Nominating Committee. Marketing materials should be developed that provide clear expectations of the Commissioners, including the length of term, number of meetings per year, and anticipated time commitment.**

[ACCJC will review the materials it uses to announce vacancies and seek nominations, as well as the materials it provides to nominees, in order to increase clarity of information already provided on length of term, number of meetings per year, and time commitment for a person elected as a Commissioner.](#)

- **The number of individuals who count ballots should be specified and include one Commissioner, at a minimum.**

Ballots are counted by the Executive Assistant to the President, and checked by the President. Ballots are available to the Commission to review at the next meeting of the Commission. The ballot counting process is a fairly simple process. The current process which provides an opportunity to review the voting ensures accuracy without the undue expense of a Commissioner coming to the ACCJC offices.