



**ACCREDITING
COMMISSION
for COMMUNITY and
JUNIOR COLLEGES**

*Western Association
of Schools and Colleges*

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July 3, 2014

Dr. Donald Wallace
Superintendent/President
Palo Verde College
One College Drive
Blythe, CA 92225

Dear President Wallace:

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, at its meeting on June 4-6, 2014, reviewed the Institutional Self Evaluation Report, the Report of the External Evaluation Team that visited Palo Verde College March 10-13, 2014, and the presentation by College representatives.

The Commission took action to **impose Probation** and require the College to submit a Follow-Up Report by **March 15, 2015**. The Report will be followed by a visit by Commission representatives.¹

Probation is imposed when the Commission finds that an institution deviates significantly from the Commission's Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, or Commission policies, but not to such an extent as to warrant a Show Cause order or the termination of accreditation, or fails to respond to conditions imposed upon it by the Commission, including a warning. If the probation is imposed as a result of the institution's educational quality and institutional effectiveness review, reaffirmation is delayed during the period of probation. The accredited status of the institution continues during the probation period.

Palo Verde College should submit the Follow-Up Report by March 15, 2015. The Follow-Up Report should demonstrate that the Palo Verde College has addressed all recommendations, resolved the deficiencies, and now meets the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Commission policies noted below.

Need to Resolve Deficiencies

The Accreditation Standards, as an integrated whole, represent indicators of academic quality and institutional effectiveness. Deficiencies in any Standards will impact quality at an institution, and ultimately the educational environment and experiences of students.

The Commission found Palo Verde College deficient in meeting the following Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies: Eligibility Requirements 8, 10, and 19 and Standards I.A.3-4; I.B.1-6; I.B.; I.B.2-3; II.A.1.a,b,c; II.A.2.a,b,c,d,e,f; II.A.7.b-c; II.B.1; II.B.2.c; II.B.4; III.A.1.b; III.A.1.c; III.C.2; and III.D.1; and the ACCJC Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education.

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Recommendation #1: In order to meet the Standards and as noted in Team Recommendations #1 and #2 and Commission Recommendation #4 (2008), the team recommends the College create a complete blueprint for planning that includes regular review of the mission statement and current institutional plans that collectively describe how the College will achieve its goals. The mission statement should inform overarching plans, such as the education master plan or strategic plan. Overarching plans should drive other long-term institutional plans such as the technology plan and enrollment management plan. These long-term plans should include institution set standards for student achievement and be used to inform annual planning as part of the program review process. Assessment of student learning outcomes and related dialogue should be integral to the planning process, such as by embedding SLO dialogue into program review. (Standards I.A.3-4; I.B.1-6; II.A.2.f; II.B.1; III.C.2; III.D.1; ER.10; ER.19)

Recommendation #2: In order to meet the Standards, the team recommends that the College develop and implement a sustainable assessment plan that ensures the College completes a full cycle of student learning outcome (SLO) assessment that includes discussion of results and action planning at all levels [course SLOs, program SLOs, general education (GE) SLOs, and institutional SLOs] to move to the *Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement Level* of the ACCJC Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness. To complete a full assessment cycle, the College must accelerate its efforts to assess all student learning outcomes for every course, and must demonstrate the following:

- All SLOs included in official course outlines of record are the same SLOs being assessed by faculty and that assessment of all SLOs is completed on a regular basis.
- Faculty are engaged in ongoing dialogue about methods of assessment, results of assessment and plans for quality improvement based on assessment.
- The College maintains records of assessment tools and methods used, assessment samples, assessment results, assessment dialogue and action planning based on assessments, and makes these records easily available.
- Course, program, GE, and institutional SLO assessment data and analysis are integral parts of the program review process and drive efforts to improve course, program and institutional effectiveness.

(Standards I.B; I.B.2-3; II.A.1.a,c; II.A.2.a,b,e; ER.8; ER.10; ER.19)

Recommendation #3: In order to meet the Standards and as noted in Team Recommendations #1 and #2 and Commission Recommendation #4 (2008), the team recommends that the College regularly evaluate and assess all of its processes. Information about the processes used in planning and institutional improvement should be widely disseminated to the campus and community. Sufficient research support and delegation of responsibility is needed to inform the research and planning process and ensure regular implementation of all elements of the process, and to inform decision making at all levels of the College. (Standards I.B.1-6; II.A.1.a,c; II.A.2.a,e,f; II.B.4)

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Recommendation #4: In order to meet the Standards, the team recommends that the College implement a data-informed process to systematically evaluate the methods of teaching of all courses and programs including all instructional modalities [distance education (DE), correspondence education (CE) and face-to-face] to ensure the student learning experience and outcomes are comparable regardless of the method of instruction or delivery. (Standards II.A.1.b-c; II.A.2.a,c,d,e,f)

Recommendation #5: In order to meet the Standards, the team recommends that the College implement a data-informed process to systematically evaluate the instruction methods for all instructional service agreement (ISA) courses and programs to ensure the student learning experience and outcomes meet college standards. (Standards II.A.1.b-c; II.A.2.a,c,d,e,f)

Recommendation #6: In order to meet the Standards and comply with the Commission's Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education, the team recommends that the College establish a policy and process to authenticate the identity of students enrolled in distance education and correspondence education. The process should ensure that a student who registers and receives credit for a course is the same student who participates regularly in and completes work for the course. (Standards II.A.7.b-c; II.B.2.c; ACCJC Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education)

Recommendation #7: In order to meet the Standards, the team recommends that the College develop, implement and evaluate an effective part-time faculty evaluation process. (Standard III.A.1.b)

Recommendation #8: In order to meet the Standard, the team recommends that the College fully implement the agreed-upon process that faculty involvement in SLOs be included as part of the faculty evaluation process and that the College provide evidence that this self-disclosure is effective in producing student learning outcomes. (Standard III.A.1.c)

Under U.S. Department of Education enforcement regulations, the Commission is required to take immediate action to terminate the accreditation of an institution which is out of compliance with any standard. In the alternative, the Commission can provide the institution with additional notice and a deadline for coming into compliance that is no later than two years from when the institution was first informed of the noncompliance.

In exceptional situations, if the institution has done all within its authority to reach compliance on any standard but remains out of compliance, the Commission is permitted by regulations to allocate a one-time, short-term "good cause extension" for the college to reach compliance prior to acting on the institution's termination. The Commission has extended additional time for Palo Verde College to come into compliance for good cause as it will require additional time to fully resolve the deficiencies and meet Accreditation Standards.

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However, continued noncompliance with multiple standards would diminish the appropriateness of such an extension. Palo Verde College should fully resolve the noted deficiencies by **March 2015**.

Federal regulations also require the Commission to post a Public Disclosure Notice (PDN) for institutions placed on Probation or Show Cause, or when accreditation is withdrawn. The PDN is used to inform the public of the reasons for such a severe sanction. The Commission will post the PDN on the College's entry in the Directory of Accredited Institutions online at www.accjc.org. The institution is permitted to post a response to the PDN. Enclosed find the proposed notice for Palo Verde College with this action letter; your comments on it are invited. Please provide the College response for posting, if any, by July 31, 2014.

During its institutional self evaluation, Palo Verde College identified improvement plans for advancing its continuous improvement efforts. The Commission suggests that those plans for improvement be taken into account as the College continues into the next accreditation cycle. In its Midterm report, the College should address steps undertaken in those improvement areas.

As the Commission reviewed the External Evaluation Report and considered the additional documentation presented by the College, and the presentation by College representatives, the Commission made changes to the External Evaluation Report with the concurrence of the team chair. The **final** External Evaluation Report is attached. It provides details of the team's findings with regard to each Eligibility Requirement and Accreditation Standard and should be read carefully and used to understand the team's findings. Additional copies may now be duplicated.

The recommendations contained in the External Evaluation Report represent the best advice of the peer evaluation team at the time of the visit but may not describe all that is necessary to come into compliance. Institutions are expected to take all actions necessary to continuously comply with Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies. The Commission wishes to remind you that while an institution may concur or disagree with any part of the Report, Palo Verde College is expected to use the External Evaluation Report to improve educational programs and services.

The Commission requires that the College give the Institutional Self Evaluation Report, the External Evaluation Report, and this letter appropriate dissemination to College staff and to those who were signatories of the College Self Evaluation Report. This group should include the campus leadership and the Board of Trustees.

The Commission also requires that the College's Institutional Self Evaluation Report, the External Evaluation Report, and this Commission action letter be made available to students and the public by placing a copy on the College website.

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Please note that in response to public interest in disclosure, the Commission now requires institutions to post accreditation information on a page no farther than one click from the institution's home page.

On behalf of the Commission, I wish to express continuing interest in the institution's educational programs and services. Professional self-regulation is the most effective means of assuring integrity, institutional effectiveness, educational quality, and student success.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Beno, Ph.D.
President

BAB/tl

¹Institutions preparing and submitting Midterm Reports, Follow-Up Reports, and Special Reports to the Commission should review *Guidelines for the Preparation of Reports to the Commission*. It contains the background, requirements, and format for each type of report and presents sample cover pages and certification pages. It is available on the ACCJC website under College Reports to ACCJC at: (<http://www.accjc.org/college-reports-accjc>).