



**ACCREDITING  
COMMISSION  
for COMMUNITY and  
JUNIOR COLLEGES**

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CLARE GOLDBERG

January 31, 2008

Mr. Gerald Fisher  
Superintendent/President  
Solano Community College  
4000 Suisun Valley Road  
Suisun, CA 94585

RECEIVED  
2008 FEB -6 P 12:23

SUPERINTENDENT  
PRESIDENT  
SOLANO COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE

Dear President Fisher:

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, at its meeting on January 9-11, 2008, reviewed the Progress Report submitted by Solano Community College and the report of the evaluation team which visited on Thursday, November 29, 2007. The purpose of this review was to assure that the recommendations made by the evaluation team were addressed by the institution. The Commission took action to accept the report.

The Commission also acted to issue a **Warning** and to ask that Solano Community College correct the deficiencies noted. The college is required to complete a Special Report in conjunction with the Midterm Report by **October 15, 2008**. The report will be followed by a visit by Commission representatives.

A warning is issued when the Commission finds that an institution has pursued a course of action which deviates from the Commission's eligibility criteria, standards of accreditation, or policy to an extent that raises a concern regarding the ability of the institution to meet accreditation standards. The accredited status of the institution continues during the warning period.

This action constitutes a public sanction as described in the Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions in the Commission's *Accreditation Reference Handbook*. As such, the action will be noted on the Commission's website.

I also wish to inform you that under U.S. Department of Education regulations, institutions out of compliance with standards or on sanction are expected to correct deficiencies within a two-year period or the Commission must take action to terminate accreditation. Solano Community College must correct the deficiencies noted by **January 2009**. While the recommendations listed below were identified as deficiencies by the year 2005 comprehensive evaluation team, the Commission has extended Solano Community College's time to correct these deficiencies for good cause. After a period of instability, the college has hired sufficient administrative staff and achieved greater organizational stability, which should enable it to quickly and fully address these recommendations.

Mr. Gerald Fisher  
Solano Community College  
January 31, 2008  
Page Two

The Special Report of October 15, 2008 should demonstrate the institution's resolution of the recommendations below:

**Recommendation 2: Improving Institutional Planning.** In order to improve institutional planning, the College should clarify and simplify its terminology and processes used in planning so that the vocabulary is more easily understood and accepted institutionally, the planning processes are more integrated, and the plans actually get implemented. (I.A.4, I.B.3, ER 19).

**Recommendation 6: Staffing and Organizational Stability.** The College should continue to focus on prior accreditation evaluation reports and implement the recommendations. Stability in personnel, particularly in leadership positions, fiscal services and human resources will help the College to meet the requirements of Standard III and assure institutional integrity. (III.A, III.D.1, III.D.2, III.D.3)

**Recommendation 7: Fiscal Integrity and Stability.** The College should develop a detailed plan with a timeline and fixed responsibility to address the long-term financial obligations including debt retirement, capital lease options, and establishment of a reserve for retiree benefits. Financial obligations associated with negotiated settlements should be evaluated and managed to determine long-range impact on institutional financial stability. (III.D.1, III.D.2, III.D.3, ER 17)

**Recommendation 8: Leadership.** In order for the Governing Board to focus on the institution's major issues and questions of policy, the Board of Trustees is encouraged to delegate full responsibility and authority to the President to implement and administer board policies and the operation of the College. The institutional leaders should likewise foster empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence through dialogue that builds trust and increases focus on student learning and assessment of learning outcomes, institutional effectiveness, and integrity. (IV.A.1, IV.A.3, IV.B.1.j, IV.B.2.a)

The Commission is concerned that the Board of Trustees of Solano Community College does not "...delegate full responsibility and authority to [the President] to implement and administer board policies without board interference..." as required in Standard IV.B.1.j. The institution is advised that it may want to seek assistance from outside entities such as the Association of Governing Boards or the Community College League of California to develop greater Board member understanding of appropriate board roles and behavior.

Solano Community College's Midterm Report, also due in October 2008, should demonstrate that the institution has resolved recommendations 1, 3, 4 and 5. The institution is hereby reminded that the Commission informed all institutions of its expectation that the work with student learning outcomes be beyond the "awareness" level as described in the Commission's Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness. The College is reminded that its Midterm Report should demonstrate that the institution has moved fully to the "developmental" level.

Mr. Gerald Fisher  
Solano Community College  
January 31, 2008  
Page Three

I have previously sent you a copy of the evaluation team report. Additional copies may now be duplicated. The Commission requires that you give the report and this letter appropriate dissemination to your college staff and to those who were signatories of your college report. This group should include campus leadership and the Board of Trustees. The Commission also requires that all reports be made available to students and the public. Placing copies in the college library can accomplish this. The Progress Report will become part of the accreditation history of the college and should be used in preparing for the next comprehensive evaluation.

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, effectiveness and quality.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Beno, Ph.D.  
President

BAB/tl

cc: Dr. Robin L. Steinback, Accreditation Liaison Officer  
Board President, Solano CCD  
Dr. Linda Spink, Team Chair  
Evaluation Team Members  
Ms. Linda Henderson, U.S. DOE



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MEMO TO: Mr. Gerald Fisher  
Superintendent/President  
Solano Community College  
4000 Suisun Valley Road  
Suisun, CA 94585

FROM: Barbara A. Beno, President *BAB*

DATE: December 13, 2007

SUBJECT: Enclosed Report of the Evaluation Team

RECEIVED  
2007 DEC 18 P 3:24  
SUPERINTENDENT  
PRESIDENT  
SOLANO COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE

Previously, the chairperson of the evaluation team sent you a draft report affording you the opportunity to correct errors of fact. We assume you have responded to the team chair. The Commission now has a final version of the report.

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges follows a policy of providing a copy of the final evaluation visit report to the chief executive officer of the visited institution prior to consideration by the Commission. Please examine the enclosed report.

- If you believe that the report contains inaccuracies, you are invited to call them to the attention of the Commission. To do so, a letter stating recommended corrections should be directed to the ACCJC President and signed by the chief executive officer of the institution. The letter should arrive at the Commission office by **December 18, 2007** in order to be included in Commission materials.
- ACCJC policy provides that, if desired, the chief administrator may request an appearance before the Commission to discuss the evaluation report. The Commission requires that the institution notify the Commission office by **December 18, 2007** or earlier of its intent to attend the meeting. This enables the Commission to invite the team chair to attend. The next meeting of the Accrediting Commission will be held on **January 9-11, 2008** at the San Francisco Airport Westin Hotel. The enclosure, *What To Expect When Attending A Commission Meeting*, addresses the protocol of such appearances.

Please note that the Commission will not consider the institution as being indifferent if its chief administrator does not choose to appear before the Commission. If the institution does request to be heard at the Commission meeting, the chairperson of the evaluation team will also be asked to be present to explain the reasons for statements in the team report. Both parties will be allowed brief testimony before the Commission deliberates in private.

The enclosed report should be considered confidential and not given general distribution until it has been acted upon by the Accrediting Commission and you have been notified by letter of the action taken.

BAB/tl

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Kathy Rosengren, Accreditation Liaison Officer (w/o enclosure)

## **WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN ATTENDING A COMMISSION MEETING**

### **Institutional Interaction with the ACCJC Commission**

When the Commission is deliberating or acting upon matters that concern an institution, it will invite institutions to meet with the Commission in Executive Session. The institution is notified, in advance, of the date of the Commission meeting and must inform the ACCJC office, in writing, not less than 15 days before the Commission meeting if it wishes to appear before the Commission. In the event that an institution chooses to exercise the option, the institution is requested to observe the following procedures for access to Commission meetings.

The Commission needs to make every effort to stay on schedule. An institution is allotted a total of five (5) minutes for its presentation, and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the expected institutional presenter. The CEO is advised to consult with Commission staff if he/she plans to invite other representatives from the institution or has questions about who might be helpful in the presentation. Institutions are encouraged to be prudent in the selection of additional representatives. In the event others attend the Commission meeting with the CEO, the total time allotted to the institution shall not exceed five minutes. In unusual circumstances, the Commission may extend the time allotted to an institution as per the policy on *Access to Commission Meetings*. If the CEO of an institution accepts the invitation to attend, the Chair of the evaluation team or designee is also invited to attend.

On the day of the meeting, and at the appropriate time, staff will escort the CEO and other institutional representatives before the Commission for the CEO's presentation. At the conclusion of the presentation, the institution will be escorted out of the meeting room to allow the Commission to resume its deliberations.

The usual purpose of the presentation by an institution's CEO is to inform the Commission about outcomes and/or activities that have occurred since the team visit and report (for example, a recently completed financial audit, and/or other campus updates) or to provide comments on errors of fact in the team report. If the institution wishes to submit additional material to the Commission, it should exercise care in the selection of material keeping in mind that the Commission cannot read and absorb large amounts of material on short notice. The material should arrive at the Commission office no less than fifteen days prior to the Commission meeting in order to be included in Commission material. While these presentations are not intended for dialog between the Commission and the institution, in some cases, the Commission may have questions for the CEO and the institution's representatives. In every case, the Commission values the opportunity to learn about new information and allow for institutional comment. The Commission considers such occasions beneficial to the process of accreditation.

The CEO will be notified in writing of the action taken by the Commission as soon as reasonably possible. The Commission is mandated by federal law to disclose the actions taken on the accreditation and candidate status of institutions, noting all sanctions and non-compliance actions that are public. The actions will be posted on the Commission website at [www.accjc.org](http://www.accjc.org). All institutions are subject to the *Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions*. Current Commission policies can be found in the *Accreditation Reference Handbook* available online at: [www.accjc.org](http://www.accjc.org).

See also: *Policy on Access to Commission Meetings*

*Code of Commission Good Practice in Relations with Member Institutions*

*Policy Statement on Rights and Responsibilities of Accrediting Bodies and Institutions  
in the Accrediting Process*

DEC 1 0 2007

**Evaluation Report**

**Solano Community College District**

**4000 Suisun Valley Road  
Fairfield, CA 94534**

**A Confidential report Prepared for  
The Accreditation Commission for Community and Junior Colleges  
Western Association of Schools and Colleges**

**This report represents the finding of the Progress Report Visitation Team that visited  
Solano Community College on November 29, 2007**

**Dr. Linda Spink, Chair  
Ms. Mary Ann Breckell**

## Summary of Progress Report Visit

**Institution:** Solano Community College District Progress Report

**Date of Visit:** November 29, 2007

**Team Members;** Ms. Mary Ann Breckell, retired, Vice President Administration,  
Los Angeles Trade Technical College

Dr. Linda Spink, President, Los Angeles Harbor College

### **Introduction:**

A two member team visited Solano Community College District on November 29, 2007 for the purpose of validating the October 15, 2007 Progress Report prepared by Solano Community College District in response to the three recommendations identified by the April 18, 2007 evaluation team. The three Accreditation Team Recommendations were adopted by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges on June 6-8, 2007. At that time, the Progress Report was accepted by the Commission with a requirement that an additional progress report be prepared by the college focusing on three recommendations. A site visit was to be conducted to verify the statements made in the Progress Report.

The Progress Report Visitation team was warmly welcomed by members of the Solano College community that included a student, board members, faculty, staff, and administration.

Upon arrival, the team met with the campus community in an informal continental breakfast. After this, a meeting was held by the chair with the Superintendent/President followed by one with the human relations director, and a meeting was held by the other team member with the Vice President for Administration.

Meetings were held with the administration, accreditation team, members of the Board of Trustees and an open forum was held which three members of the classified staff attended

**Major Findings and General Recommendations of the March 15, 2007 Visitation Team:**

**General Recommendation 6: Staffing and Organizational Stability** The College should continue to focus on prior accreditation evaluation reports and implement the recommendations. Stability in personnel, particularly in leadership positions, fiscal services and human resources will help the College to meet the requirement of Standard III and assure institutional integrity. (III.A, III.D.1, III.D.2, III.D.3)

**General Recommendation 7: Fiscal Integrity and Stability** The College should develop a detailed plan with a timeline and fixed responsibility to address the long-term financial obligations including debt retirement, capital lease options, and establishment of a reserve for retiree benefits. Financial obligations associated with negotiated settlements should be evaluated and managed to determine long-range impact on institutional financial stability. (III.D.1, III.D.2, III.D.3, ER 17)

**General Recommendation 8: Leadership** In order for the Governing Board to focus on the institutional major issues and questions of policy, the Board of Trustees is encouraged to delegate full responsibility and authority to the President to implement and administer board policies and the operation of the College. The institutional leaders should likewise foster empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence through dialogue that builds trust and increases focus on student learning and assessment of learning outcomes, institutional effectiveness, and integrity. (IV.A.1, IV.A.3, IV.B.1.j, IV.B.2.a)

**Findings of the Progress made by Solano Community College to the Recommendations of the March 2007 Accreditation Visitation Team:**

An advance schedule for the day had been planned between the ALO and the team chair.

Outlined below are the findings of the Progress Visitation Team in response to each of the Three General Recommendations:

**General Recommendation 6: Staffing and Organizational Stability:** The sense of change in organizational culture cited by the visiting team of March, 2007 was noted to continue to be in place. There was a clear sense of a more collaborative climate and open dialogue as expressed by the leaders of each constituency group. The search for a college president was conducted through the summer, but no candidate was selected. The Board of Trustees and the interim Superintendent/President came to an agreement that he would serve as the permanent president until June, 2009, when he was planning on retiring. He was appointed to the permanent presidency at the September 19, 2007 meeting of the Board of Trustees, as reported out from closed session. Constituency groups reported being pleased with the decision of the Board of Trustees in this selection.



A search for the vice president of Academic Affairs was conducted simultaneously with the search for the presidency. While a candidate was selected, she then turned down the position as the permanent presidency had yet to be determined. The search was re-advertised after the selection of the President had been completed and interviews had been held. A candidate has accepted the position and is slated to go before the Board of Trustees on the consent calendar December 5, 2007. The search for the Vice President of Student Services was near completion, with the finalist interviews slated for the day after the visiting team was on campus. It is anticipated that both positions will begin January, 3, 2008. The faculty senate president and the faculty union president were pleased with the candidate of choice for the Academic Affairs position, and all were equally pleased with the finalists for the Student Services position.

All Dean Positions have been filled, and the Director of Human Resources has been filled as well. The one position that has not been filled, and for which the search has made little significant progress, is the search for the Director of Fiscal Services. Staff in the business office report significant concerns about this position continuing to be vacant. The college has agreed to hire a Public Information Officer and interviews for the position were underway during the team visit.

It is the sense of the visiting team that the college has made significant progress in securing stability in personnel and therefore has addressed this recommendation.

#### **General Recommendation 7: Fiscal Stability**

The college has continued the progress on capital lease options and debt retirement for the Student Center Revenue Bond. The plan in place outlines the cost per year and the year each debt will be retired. The repayment of both debts each year will have a minimal effect on the college budget.

The planning for the cost of retiree benefits continues to be a problem. The college is part of a Joint Powers Agreement and has deposited \$917,000 in a trust account for retiree benefits. That was done prior to the previous Team's visit. The college is not in agreement with the projection of the costs of retiree benefits and has initiated an additional actuarial study. That study was not completed at the time of this visit. The college indicated that once the cost of the retiree benefits was validated, they would prepare a payment schedule and submit the payment schedule to the Board for approval. At the time of the last visit, one of the ways the college chose to address retiree benefits was to institute an Employee Benefits Cost Committee; this committee has not met in approximately eight to nine months.

The previous Team's concerns regarding long-term financial stability for Solano Community College cited three areas: timeliness of the annual financial statement presented to the Chancellor's Office; implementation of findings and recommendations presented in the annual independent audit; and an increase in enrollment.

## **RESPONSE FROM ACCREDITING COMMISSION (January 31, 2008)**

### **General Recommendation 8: Leadership**

The Board of Trustees was challenged with learning to focus on policy and major decision making and to delegate full responsibility and authority to the Superintendent/President to implement and administer Board policies and the operation of the college. It was the opinion of the last visiting team in March, 2007 that the Board of Trustees continued to be involved in the day-to-day operations of the college. It has made some strides to improve this situation but still intervenes in operations in ways that are not appropriate to the role of the Board.

In March, 2007 the Board of Trustees had a retreat, presented by Dr. Cindra Smith of the Community College League of California. The focus was on Board roles and policy making. In June, 2007 the Board of Trustees approved Board policy 1075, which delegated authority to the Superintendent/President the "executive responsibility for administering the policies adopted by the Board and executing all decisions of the Board requiring administrative action." Three members had also attended the Board training workshop at the CCLC last January, 2007.

A meeting was held with visiting team and the President, Vice President and a member of the Board of Trustees and the college Superintendent/President. The Board members related that they have agreed to regularly ask themselves if they are micromanaging. It was stated that they would have such a discussion every few months, but evidence of this discussion was not found in the minutes. A discussion was held as to how they view their role and whether or not they believed they were following the new policy. They agreed that they do ask themselves this question more often but understand that they still have moments of getting involved too deeply in the operations of the college. The most recent incident was evident in minutes of the October 17, 2007, meeting. An item of \$2,250 for a contract to have an individual help out with the backlog of media cataloging, which was on the consent calendar, was pulled off and rejected by the board. The faculty union and administration had come to a first-time ever MOU to allow this type of activity to happen. Faculty reported feeling frustrated that their work had been for naught. A review of the minutes of the past six months revealed several incidents where it was unclear whether or not the Board was involving itself in day-to-day operations, such as policies as to the community use of the swimming pool or the care of the softball field. Clearly the Board must be responsive to the community when issues are brought to them, but minutes do not reflect these issues being referred back to staff with a report coming back to the Board of Trustees at a later date. Faculty/staff continue to report frustration over this issue.

The Board is looking at this issue and has made strides in the right direction. This is clearly something that they need to keep foremost in their minds as they conduct the business of the Board of Trustees. As they are faced with a change in their own leadership in two months they need to continue to focus on this effort. This recommendation has not been fully addressed.