ACCREDITING COMMISSION for COMMUNITY and JUNIOR COLLEGES

Western Association of Schools and Colleges

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July 2, 2012

RECEIVED
JUL - 5 2012
SUPERINTENDENT
PALO VERDE COLLEGE

Ms. Denise Whittaker
Interim Superintendent/President
Palo Verde College
One College Drive
Blythe, CA 92225

Dear President Whittaker:

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, at its meeting June 6-8, 2012, considered the Special Report submitted by the College, the report of the evaluation team which visited Thursday, May 3, 2012, and your presentation at the Commission meeting. The Commission took action to continue Palo Verde College on **Probation** and require that the College submit a Follow-Up Report by **November 1, 2012.**[1] That report will be followed by a visit of Commission representatives.

The Commission believes that Palo Verde College has not yet demonstrated that it has sufficient resources to meet Accreditation Standards, and that the institution's continued financial viability is contingent on future events and actions that have not yet occurred. The Commission is concerned the debt obligation that Palo Verde College has incurred may lead to financial instability of the institution despite the institution's several strategies (not all of which have been implemented yet) for reducing expenses while maintaining educational programs and services, finding new revenues, and restructuring debt within a four-year period.

The Commission notes that President Whittaker provided information about many of the steps the institution is taking but that have yet to be finalized. These include the following: The budget for 2012-13 had not yet been finalized. A new college President had not yet been hired, and vacant administrative positions will not be filled until a new president arrives. College plans to balance the 2012-13 budget are based in part on an assumption that a state bond measure passes in November 2012. College economies to reduce expenditures and address debt may be ineffective if the state reduces allocations to the College in the middle of next year.

The College request for an exception to federal regulations limiting the proportion of correspondence students to 25% of an institution's total students has not yet been ruled upon, and a denial will affect the institution's ability to enroll its target number of students. The institution is considering actions to increase its reserves to 7% because 5% is insufficient to cover a payroll period, but the actions have not yet been taken.

Ms. Denise Whittaker
Palo Verde College
July 2, 2012

The Commission requires that a Follow-Up Report be submitted that demonstrates the institution meets the Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards noted below. Furthermore, the Report should include in its evidentiary materials a comprehensive pro-forma budget, and other financial statements necessary to demonstrate that the College will be able to meet debt service requirements on the Certificates of Participation (COP), the Supplemental Employee Retirement Plan (SERP) and other long-term debt.

> **Eligibility Requirement 5: Administrative Capacity**
> The institution has sufficient staff, with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support its mission and purpose.

The Commission requires Palo Verde College to provide an analysis of its remaining administrative staffing, and the workload and responsibilities assigned to that staffing.

> **Eligibility Requirement 17: Financial Resources**
> The institution documents a funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to support student learning programs and services, to improve institutional effectiveness, and to assure financial stability.

> **Standard II.A, B, and C Student Learning Programs and Services**
> The institution offers high-quality instructional programs, student support services, and library and learning support services that facilitate and demonstrate the achievement of stated student learning outcomes. The institution provides an environment that supports learning, enhances student understanding and appreciation of diversity, and encourages personal and civic responsibility as well as intellectual, aesthetic, and personal development for all of its students.

The Commission requires Palo Verde College to provide an analysis of its staff, educational programs and services as reconfigured after the loss of 30% (as reported by the College President) of its personnel.

> **Standard III.A Human Resources**
> The institution employs qualified personnel to support student learning programs and services wherever offered and by whatever means delivered, and to improve institutional effectiveness.

With regard to Standard III.A, the Commission is concerned by the recent 30% reduction in staff at the College and requires that the College evaluate the impact of this reduction on educational quality and institutional effectiveness overall (see also Eligibility Requirement 5).

Standard III.D (all) **Financial Resources**
Financial resources are sufficient to support student learning programs and services and to improve institutional effectiveness. The distribution of resources supports the development, maintenance, and enhancement of programs and services. The institution plans and manages its financial affairs with integrity and in a manner that ensures financial stability. The level of financial resources provides a reasonable expectation of both short-term and long-term financial solvency. Financial resources planning is integrated with institutional planning.

The Commission requires that Palo Verde College's Report demonstrate that the institution meets all of Standard III.D and provides appropriate evidentiary documentation.

Standard IV.B.1.c. Board Governance
The governing board has ultimate responsibility for educational quality, legal matters, and financial integrity.

The Commission requires that the College Report demonstrate that the policies regarding governance and shared decision-making are completed, and that the College submit evidence that the governing board has clearly defined responsibility for fiscal integrity. For example, this evidence could include policy language, annual calendars of board decision-making activities, and minutes showing governing board discussion of budget and the financial condition of the institution.

I wish to inform you that under U.S. Department of Education regulations, institutions out of compliance with Accreditation Standards or on sanction are expected to correct deficiencies within a two-year period or the Commission must take action to terminate accreditation. Palo Verde College must correct the deficiencies by **June 2014** or the Commission will be compelled to act.

The Special Report will become part of the accreditation history of the College and should be used in preparing for the next comprehensive evaluation. I have previously sent a copy of the May 2012 Special Visit Team Report. Additional copies may now be duplicated. The Commission requires that you give the College's Special Report, the Special Visit Team Report of the evaluation team that visited on May 3, 2012, and the Commission action letter appropriate dissemination to your College staff and to those who were signatories of your College Report. This group should include the campus leadership and the Board of Trustees. The Commission also requires that the College's Special Report, the Special Visit Report of the evaluation team, and this Commission action letter be made available to students and the public. Placing a copy on the College website can accomplish this.

Ms. Denise Whittaker
Palo Verde College
July 2, 2012

The Commission staff is available to provide assistance or consultation should the college have any questions about the Commission's action and requirements. Please call our office to ask for assistance.

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

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Beno, Ph.D.
President

BAB/tl

cc: Mr. Brian Thiebaux, Accreditation Liaison Officer
President, Board of Trustees, Palo Verde Community College District
Mr. W. Andrew Dunn, Team Chair

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[1] Institutions that will be 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).

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES
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ABOUT THE PUBLIC DISCLOSURE NOTICE

What is a Public Disclosure Notice (PDN)?
Federal regulations require that accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education provide to the public a brief statement summarizing the reasons an accreditor has taken action to impose Probation, order Show Cause, or terminate accreditation. The regulations also require the accreditor to provide to the public the institution's official comments, if any, in response to the Commission's action. The Commission is required to provide this notice regardless of whether the public, or any member thereof, requests the information. These regulations went into effect July 1, 2010 and apply to all Commission actions since that date.[1] In collaboration with the other regional accrediting commissions, the Commission is using a PDN format that is relatively consistent across all accrediting regions.

How is the Public Disclosure Notice made available to the public?
The Commission makes the Public Disclosure Notice available to the public by posting it with the institution's entry in the online **ACCJC Directory of Accredited Institutions** located at www.accjc.org. If an institution provides a response to the PDN, that response is also posted in the same location. All Notices and institutional responses will be removed from the online ACCJC Directory when an institution is removed from Probation or Show Cause or one year after the institution's accreditation has been terminated.

When must the institution provide its Response to the Public Disclosure Notice?
The Public Disclosure Notice and the institution's response must be posted no later than 60 days following the Commission action. In order to achieve this deadline, the institution's response must be received by February 28 for January Commission Meeting actions and by July 31 for June Commission Meeting actions. If the institution wishes to make an official response to the Public Disclosure Notice, the response should be sent by email attachment to accjc@accjc.org, or mailed to ACCJC, 10 Commercial Blvd. Suite 204, Novato, CA 94949.

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Public Disclosure Notice

for

Palo Verde College

(July 2, 2012)

This Notice has been developed for use in responding to public inquiries about accreditation status, consistent with the Commission's policies on public disclosure. It should be read in conjunction with the Statement of Accredited Status for ***Palo Verde College****. This Notice has been reviewed by* ***Palo Verde College****, and the institution has been notified of the opportunity to submit a response to this notice. If the College has responded to the Public Disclosure Notice, an electronic link to the institutional response will be found on the ACCJC website at: www.accjc.org in the Directory of Accredited Institution, with the information for* ***Palo Verde College.***

Accreditation by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (the Commission or ACCJC) certifies that a college has been found to meet rigorous requirements for quality and that there are reasonable grounds for believing it will continue to meet them. The Commission's requirements can be found on the ACCJC website at: www.accjc.org under Eligibility Requirements & Standards (*or click here*). The accreditation process requires an institution to open itself to examination by a group of professionals who evaluate the degree to which an institution meets the Standards. The Standards set requirements for quality that cover many aspects of the college, including: instruction, student support services, library and learning resources, physical environment, technology services, financial management, institutional governance, institutional integrity and honesty, and achievement of institutional mission. Accreditation is awarded only after an institution demonstrates that it complies with Accreditation Standards, Eligibility Requirements and Commission policies. The Commission reviews the overall quality of each institution every

Probation is imposed when 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, the institution may be placed on probation. The Commission will specify the time within which the institution must resolve deficiencies. If probation is imposed as a result of the institution's comprehensive review, reaffirmation of accreditation is delayed during the period of probation. The accredited status of the institution continues during the probation period.

The Commission took this action because it determined that **Palo Verde College** is out of compliance with elements of the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, or Commission policies described below. The full text of the Eligibility Requirements and Standards can be found on the ACCJC website at: www.accjc.org under Eligibility Requirements & Standards (*or click here*).

Standard III.A. Human Resources: "The institution employs qualified personnel to support student learning programs and services wherever offered and by whatever means delivered, and to improve institutional effectiveness. Personnel are treated equitably, are evaluated regularly and systematically, and are provided opportunities for professional development. Consistent with its mission, the institution demonstrates its commitment to the significant educational role played by persons of diverse backgrounds by making positive efforts to encourage such diversity. Human resource planning is integrated with institutional planning."

Standard III.D. Financial Resources: "Financial resources are sufficient to support student learning programs and services and to improve institutional effectiveness. The distribution of resources supports the development, maintenance, and enhancement of programs and services. The institution plans and manages its financial affairs with integrity and in a manner that ensures financial stability. The level of financial resources provides a reasonable expectation of both short-term and long-term financial solvency. Financial resources planning is integrated with institutional planning."

Standard IV.B.1.c. Board and Administrative Organization: "The governing board has ultimate responsibility for educational quality, legal matters, and financial integrity."

Eligibility Requirement 5 Administrative Capacity: "The institution has sufficient staff, with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support its mission and purpose."

which specifies the next steps the institution must take, provide a detailed description of the reasons for Probation. All institutions are required to make the evaluation team reports and the action letters available to the public. This is usually accomplished by placing these documents on the college website, and the public is directed to seek these documents from the institution directly. Colleges are invited to prepare a response to this notice, and this information may be posted on the college website.

Current Status and Expected Accreditation Activities

Palo Verde College will be monitored by the Commission and required to submit a Follow-Up Report to the Commission in October 2012. The Commission will conduct a team visit to assess the institution's compliance with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, or Commission policies, and the team will write a report. The Commission will review both reports at its meeting in January 2013. If the Commission determines that **Palo Verde College** has demonstrated sufficient compliance with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, or Commission policies, the Commission may act to remove Probation. If the Commission determines that sufficient progress to demonstrate compliance with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, or Commission policies has not been made, the Commission may take further action as permitted under the Commission's "Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions." The Commission policies can be found in the *Accreditation Reference Handbook* which is located on the ACCJC website at: www.accjc.org under Publications and Policies / All Commission Publications and Policies (*or click here*).

Helpful Resources for Understanding this Notice

The following resources provide additional information that may be helpful in understanding the Commission's actions and the accreditation status of Palo Verde College:

- A "Statement of Accreditation Status" for Palo Verde College is available upon request from the Commission office.

- The Commission's Accreditation Standards can be found on the ACCJC website at: *www.accjc.org* under Eligibility Requirements & Standards *(or click here)*.

- "Informing the Public About Accreditation," published by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, provides additional information on the nature and value of accreditation. It is available at (http://www.chea.org/public_info/index.asp),

the ACCJC website at: www.accjc.org under Publications and Policies / All Commission Publications and Policies (*or click here*).