

City College of San Francisco threatened with loss of accreditation

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The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) has announced that it will withdraw accreditation for City College of San Francisco (CCSF) by June 2013 unless the college takes drastic measures to raise tuition and slash wages.

The CCSF is a two-year community college serving about 100,000 students, making it the largest community and junior college in the country. It is generally regarded as exceptionally accessible and affordable for youth and working class individuals. It employs some 2,700 faculty and staff.

The Commission's criticisms have focused primarily on CCSF's fiscal situation. Their reports notes that the college has been deficit spending for several years, has very small financial reserves, has no long-term budgetary plan for regaining positive cash flow, spends more than other community colleges on personnel compensation, and has not moved quickly enough over the past several years to cut its expenses. The commission claims, moreover, that the college lacks the leadership required to implement the necessary measures.

The commission has issued a "show cause" order to the college, placing on it the burden of making the case why it should stay open. It must submit a "Special Report" by October 15 that outlines its plans to meet the commission's recommendations, and a "Closure Report" by March 15, 2013—eight months from now—detailing the college's preparations to shut down. If the commission decides during its meeting in June 2013 that CCSF has not made sufficient progress, it will revoke the school's accreditation, almost certainly causing it to close.

For its part, college administration has indicated its plans to comply completely to the commission's

demands. Lawrence Wong, a trustee on the college's board, responded by saying, "We are going to have to take a hard look at matching our programs to our resources."

CCSF, like community colleges across the state, has been hit hard by budget cuts under Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and now Democratic Governor Jerry Brown. It has lost \$40 million in funding over the past four years. Due to shrinking class offerings, students were turned away from their desired classes over 10,000 times in the 2011-12 academic year.

The new budget being put in place to regain fiscal reserves includes salary cuts, benefit reductions and furloughs for the faculty and staff, to which all the involved unions have already tentatively agreed. There are reports that one campus may be closed and the summer session eliminated.

After the commission's report was released, Fitch Ratings lowered CCSF's credit rating three notches.

The commission's president, Barbara Beno, stressed in a letter to the college's interim chancellor that the issue was not fundamentally reduced funding in itself, but rather that the college has demonstrated a "failure to react to ongoing reduced funding [which] has caused the institution to reach a financial breaking point."

In essence, the ACCJC is angry that City College of San Francisco has not moved quickly and effectively enough to slash its educational programs, reduce compensation for staff and faculty, and raise tuition.

Beno also chides the college for its decentralized decision-making processes, which "creates undue barriers to the implementation of institutional decisions." The college has only 39 full-time administrators, which was itself a response to funding cuts.

The ACCJC is not a public institution. It is one of three private bodies operated by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, which is itself composed of representatives from public, religious, private and charter schools, and state education departments. Nevertheless, a college must be accredited by this institution to receive public funding and for its students to be eligible for financial aid.

In 2006 the commission was publicly embarrassed when it retracted its threat against Peralta and Compton community college districts. Both the president and vice-president of the commission were previously associated with Peralta, and the president of the Peralta board of Trustees told the press that “Barbara Beno has an axe to grind” and threatened to sue the commission.

Teachers and administrators stressed to the media during this time that the ACCJC operates without oversight from the schools it regulates, and is a largely self-appointed body.

More fundamentally, however, the commission is carrying out the dictates of the corporate and financial elite, backed by both big business parties, to enforce drastic cuts on public education institutions throughout the country—and to force the working class to pay for it.



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