

City College of San Francisco to lose accreditation

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The Accreditation Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), which one year ago threatened to revoke the accreditation of the City College of San Francisco if its fiscal house was not rapidly put in order, has officially announced its intention to revoke the academic license of the school.

The City College (CCSF) has aroused the wrath of the accreditation board by moving with insufficient haste to decimate its educational and cultural programs and drastically curtail spending.

Losing accreditation will mean that CCSF will abruptly cease to function as an institution of higher education. Having lost its right to issue diplomas and certificates, the college's undersized staff will have to scramble to assist thousands of students as they seek another avenue to obtain their credentials. The vast majority will inevitably be left with no viable options to continue their education. Furthermore, because taxpayer funds cannot go to unaccredited institutions, the college's funds will virtually evaporate overnight.

City College of San Francisco, in other words, is to be gutted. There is little chance it will continue to exist beyond the coming academic year.

City College is the largest community college in the United States, serving nearly 100,000 students on 12 total campuses around San Francisco. Community colleges are a bastion of education for working people, being significantly less expensive than four-year institutions. They are often a centerpiece of the community, offering not only academic but also cultural and vocational programs. A high proportion of their students work part- or full-time, and many are over the age of 25. Such colleges are used as an affordable and easy-to-access springboard into four-year colleges or universities by millions of students around the state and nation.

The ACCJC's warning to the City College, issued on July 2, 2012, outlined the myriad budgetary shortcomings facing the school. The commission presented a laundry list of 14 problems that had to be fixed within a year to save the institution. These "recommendations" cynically cited the need for increased human resources and leadership—after battered finances had forced the college to reduce its staff to effectively a skeleton crew. In essence, the Committee's demand was that the college must carry out more ruthless budget cuts or else face annihilation. The subtext of the Commission's criticism of the school's budget—that 92% of the budget went to salaries—is that programs must be cut and the professor-student ratio increased.

It is not for lack of will that CCSF's officers have been unable to meet the ACCJC's demands. The budget has been continually slashed, forcing many classes to be abruptly canceled mid-semester. A mere 39 administrators coordinate 2700 faculty and staff.

The political motivation behind the ACCJC's decision is clear. It can be seen in no light other than as a frontal assault on public education, in keeping with the reactionary political climate, exemplified in the evisceration of public education budgets, the vilification of teachers, and the promotion of for-profit charter schools.

The assault on education is nationwide in scope. President Obama, building on the legacy of George Bush, has led the charge. His "race to the top" program pits states against one another in an attempt to drive down the cost, and thus quality, of K-12 education. The program incentivizes "innovation" in education—code for rewarding moves toward privatization, merit pay for teachers and scapegoating of educators for systemically falling student achievement. Obama's initiatives have

been echoed by the moves of California's Governor, Democrat Jerry Brown. His proposed budget for 2013 pushes for charterization of public schools in return for a pittance of spending above the previous level. 2012's Prop 30, touted as the rescuer of the state's beleaguered education system, effectively held the system ransom to the proposed higher sales tax. In the aftermath of the passing of the tax, less than half the funds raised go to education.

The ACCJC reflects the interests of the ruling class and its current campaign against public education. It is not a public body, and its primary officials are essentially perpetual self-appointees. Operated by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, its board combines representatives drawn from public, religious, private and charter schools, along with state education departments. The ACCJC's ability to dominate academic institutions of every level by fiat and ultimatum is being used to make an example of CCSF. The experience demonstrates that even a center of public education as well-established as the City College of San Francisco may be liquidated with impunity.

The accreditation board recently issued a nearly identical sanction to College of the Sequoias in the San Joaquin Valley. About 20 colleges around the state are currently facing actions that may lead to closure.



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