

# ACCREDITATION: AN UNOFFICIAL GUIDE



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## **INTRODUCTION**


### **Who is this guide for?**

This guide is for everyone at City College of San Francisco—all district employees and especially students and faculty.

### **Why read this guide?**

In talking with many in the City College community about accreditation, we have noted not only differing opinions but also an incredible number of questions and a lot of confusion, even in some cases about basic information. We compiled this guide to provide you with some starting facts and information to help you assess and acquaint yourself with CCSF's current accreditation process.

Our goal was to provide something educational and accessible for all of CCSF's stakeholders. This is not a comprehensive or an official guide, and it is not by any means a full accounting of everything there is to know or consider about CCSF, the ACCJC, or the College's response to its "show cause" sanction.

The first three chapters are aimed at providing facts and context about accreditation—in general as well as at CCSF. Because CCSF is an educational institution that values dialogue and critical thinking, you'll also find discussion questions we hope will foster deeper discussion (look for the ). In chapter four, we include some of our union's perspectives and analysis. You'll also find an appendix with more resources.

*But first, there are questions we should get out of the way:*



## **Some burning questions & answers**

✓ **Will my coursework still count? Will my classes transfer?**

Yes. The course credits you earn at CCSF will count and will continue to transfer as they do now.

✓ **What about financial aid?**

Financial Aid is not in jeopardy as long as the college remains accredited.

✓ **When will we know the ACCJC's decision about CCSF's accreditation status?**

The ACCJC has several options at this point: re-affirm the College's accreditation, withdraw accreditation, or change the College's current "show cause" sanction to probation or warning, which would give CCSF an additional year to address the ACCJC's recommendations. However, the College does not expect to hear from the Commission until early July, 2013.

✓ **Is City College going to close?**

No! No one wants that to happen, and everyone agrees that CCSF is too important to the Bay Area to lose.


✓ **But what if CCSF loses accreditation?**

If ACCJC were to withdraw the College's accreditation, CCSF would likely remain open in some form, such as under the oversight of another community college district. However, we believe this worst-case scenario is improbable—and everyone at CCSF is working hard to prevent it!

## **CHAPTER 1: Accreditation & the ACCJC**


### **What is accreditation and why is it important?**

Accreditation is the process for evaluating an institution of higher learning and assuring the American higher education community that the education provided meets acceptable levels of quality. It is intended to help colleges improve. By assessing according to reasonable standards, accreditation ensures that the education received at an institution of higher education is valuable to the student who earned it, that the units earned are transferable, that the student is eligible for financial aid, and that students' credentials can be accepted as legitimate.

 Do you feel that CCSF's accreditation process has resulted, or will result, in improved educational quality?

### **What is the ACCJC?**


The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) is authorized by the California Community College Board of Governors to be the accreditation agency for California's community colleges. The ACCJC is one of three accrediting bodies overseen by a corporate entity, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Though it receives its authority through the U.S. government, ACCJC refers to itself as a private organization.

 What kinds of accountability are most appropriate for oversight organizations?

### **How is the ACCJC funded?**


Colleges themselves fund the accreditation process; this means that state funding and taxpayer dollars constitute the vast majority of ACCJC funding. Annual membership dues for colleges, which rose 9% this year, range from \$6,047 to \$32,253. Additionally, ACCJC and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges have received grant funding from private foundations, including the Lumina Foundation and the Gates Foundation. (Note: Estimates of the overall costs of the accreditation process to colleges, particularly those on

sanction, are much greater. See Ch. 3 for an estimate of CCSF's costs.)

 Do you think private foundation funding may have an influence on standards and criteria?

### **What is the relationship between the U.S. Department of Education and the ACCJC?**

ACCJC's authority is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). The DOE does not accredit colleges and/or programs. Rather, an advisory panel of the DOE called the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) grants federal recognition to accrediting agencies. Currently, the ACCJC is undergoing a review of their status as a recognized Accrediting Agency by NACIQI. ACCJC must submit its own self-evaluation for NACIQI's review in June 2013. NACIQI's action on ACCJC will take place Fall 2013.


 What role(s) has the federal government played in higher education and in all of public education over the last decade?

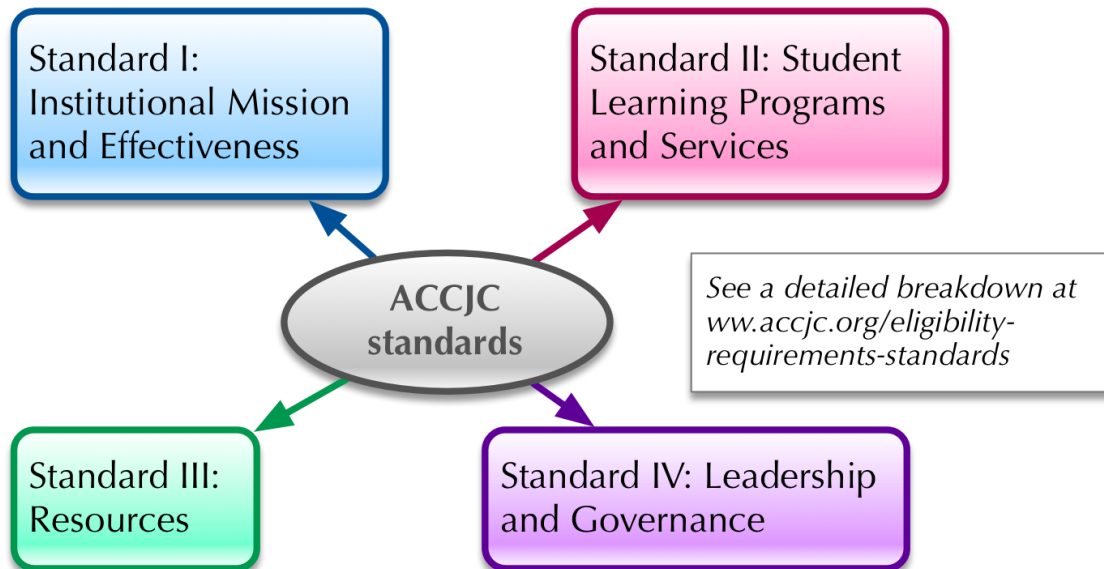
## **CHAPTER 2: The accreditation process**


### **How does the ACCJC evaluate colleges?**

Accreditation, though it is an ongoing process, occurs on a six-year cycle. The steps in the process include • self-evaluation, • an on-site visit from a team of peers, and • a report from the team that goes to the ACCJC Commission, which then • determines the institution's accreditation status. A college begins by examining itself and preparing a report detailing how well and to what degree it meets the eligibility criteria, standards, and policies set out by the Commission. The self-study report represents the college's honest appraisal of how it is doing regarding accreditation expectations. A team then visits the college to assess its adherence to standards and policies. (See Ch. 3, "A Guide to talking to the visiting team," for more about the April visit at

CCSF.) Following the visit, the team submits a report and confidential recommendation to the Commission for consideration. The ACCJC then meets to decide on the institution's accreditation status and any required follow-up leading to the next comprehensive review.

 Do you feel that this evaluation process has been beneficial for students, faculty, staff, and the college community as a whole?



 Do you think these four categories cover the full scope of CCSF's values and services?

### **Who visits the colleges?**

A visiting team consisting of up to a dozen administrators, faculty, and sometimes trustees from community colleges is selected from a pool of peer evaluators who have been recommended by ACCJC member institutions. Team members have been trained by Commission staff in their roles and responsibilities as representatives of the Commission while conducting the evaluation visit.

### **What is self-evaluation?**

Self-evaluation is an extensive, college-wide research and feedback project by which a college examines itself in preparation for ACCJC's assessment. A college makes

plans to implement improvements within the context of the ACCJC policies, eligibility requirements, and the four standards. The ACCJC asserts that self-evaluation must have widespread involvement of faculty, staff, administration, students, and trustees to ensure that its conclusions are accurate and authoritative and reflect what the college is and what it wants to become.



Were you involved in CCSF's self-evaluation process?  
Do you feel the process fostered authentic involvement from all CCSF stakeholders?

### **What are SLOs and ILOs?**

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are part of a method required by accreditation to measure what students should have learned or should be able to do after taking a class or program. Similarly, Institutional Learning Outcomes are used to measure broad expectations for students who complete their educational goals at a college. These metrics require colleges to document assessment and improvement plans to evaluate the institution's success in helping students achieve these stated outcomes.




Are there ways to assess educational progress that you feel are more effective than others? To what extent do you believe it is possible to "measure" education?

### **What is a sanction?**


Sanctions are issued by the Commission if it concludes that an institution is in serious non-compliance with one or more Commission Standards. Sanctions are intended to apply pressure on the institution to bring itself into compliance. ACCJC issues sanctions based on documentation and data gathering, reviews of policy and procedures, and adherence to ACCJC required practices, such as Measurable Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). During the period of sanction, the accreditation of an institution continues. The ACCJC has three sanction levels: Warning, Probation, and Show Cause.



 Does the pressure that sanctions are intended to apply seem likely to position colleges to make smart changes and educational improvements?

### **What is a “show cause” sanction?**

“Show cause” is the ACCJC’s most severe sanction short of revoking accreditation. It requires a college to “prove” that it should maintain accreditation.

 How has the threat of losing accreditation impacted CCSF? How have you reacted to the severity of this sanction, and how have you seen others react?

### **What is a “Closure Report”?**

The Closure Report required of colleges on “show cause” sanction outlines plans to ensure that students complete their educational programs and have continued access to their records in the future, provisions for faculty and staff, and provisions for the disposition of assets. It can be found as part of CCSF’s March 15<sup>th</sup> “Show Cause Report.”

## **CHAPTER 3: Accreditation at CCSF**

### **CCSF’s sanction history**

**Prior to July, 2012:** No sanctions

**July 2012:** ACCJC issued “show cause” sanction and made fourteen recommendations. **The report issued with the sanction did not criticize the quality of education, teaching, or learning at City College of San Francisco.** In fact, the Commission praised the college for its high-quality educational opportunities, including accessibility, diversity, and commitment to students.

The 14 criticisms fell into three major areas:

- **Finances:** The Commission slammed the College for poor fiscal planning. (Even so, it indicated no misuse of funds.) The Commission disapproved of 92% of general funds going to personnel costs and argued that there had not been sufficient cuts or cancelled

classes to respond to the loss of millions in state funding between 2009–2012.

- **Decision-making**: The Commission deemed planning, leadership, and governance within the College to be inefficient and was concerned by what it perceived to be too few administrators.
- **Measurements**: The Commission was not satisfied with the demonstration and documentation of assessment metrics at the College (SLOs and ILOs).



Given that CCSF had never been sanctioned before, why do you think the Commission moved it moved directly to the most severe “show cause” sanction?

### **How has CCSF responded to the sanction?**

CCSF’s March 15 self-evaluation report to the ACCJC (see links) details an incredible amount of activity to respond to the Commission’s concerns. These are some of the actions that the College has taken:

- Instituted Accreditation Workgroups, with hundreds of CCSF employees, working on each of the ACCJC recommendations.
- Documented vigorous activity demonstrating and deepening implementation of SLOs.
- Implemented new enrollment management practices.
- Implemented wide range of efficiencies (such as web-only grading for faculty).
- Brought in state “Special Trustee” and interim administrators, consultants.
- Restructured academic programs, replacing many faculty Department Chair positions with administrators.
- Restructured shared governance system.
- Closed three instructional sites.
- Laid off staff and faculty, imposed wage cuts.
- *And more: See the links section (Ch. 4) to download the College’s full report.*

## **CCSF Accreditation Timeline**

July 2012

ACCJC sends "Show Cause" letter requiring CCSF to prove why it should keep accreditation.

September  
2012

CCSF Board of Trustees votes to bring in a state-approved "Special Trustee."

September  
2012

State's Financial Crisis Management Team (FCMAT) provides report on College finances.

October  
2012

CCSF submits "Special Report" outlining its plans to meet the Commission's recommendations.

March 2013

CCSF submits comprehensive self-evaluation/"show cause" report (including the required "closure plan"), addressing ACCJC recommendations.

April 2013

Site visit from ACCJC evaluation team of administrators, faculty, and trustees from other community colleges. They examine what the college has done to address the ACCJC's recommendations and assess the factuality of the March 15 Show Cause Report.

April-May  
2013

Following the site visit, the team submits a report of their findings to the Commission and makes a confidential recommendation to the Commission indicating their thoughts on CCSF's accreditation status.

June 2013

Commission meets to review and decide on CCSF's progress and accreditation status.

July 2013

Accreditation Ruling: ACCJC makes final decision to re-affirm or deny CCSF's accreditation.

## **A guide for talking to the Visiting Accreditation Team**

It is worth noting that the visiting evaluation team does not issue sanctions; rather, it makes recommendations to the Commission. It is the ACCJC commissioners who made the decision to put the college on Show Cause last year. They will decide what happens to CCSF this summer.

During the April site visit to CCSF, ACCJC team members may request a meeting with you, drop by your class or office to observe, or stop you in the hallway to ask if you know about the accreditation visit, are familiar with the sanction, changes and improvements at the College, and process. They may want to assess your general level of awareness on accreditation issues or ask you more specific questions.

We encourage you to treat the visitors with respect and openness. The function of the site visit is to verify CCSF's progress and ensure that the March 15<sup>th</sup> report accurately reflects the process.

Review extensive information from CCSF's workshops to help prepare for the visiting team, available on the CCSF website through this link: [tinyurl.com/VisitingTeamPrep](http://tinyurl.com/VisitingTeamPrep)

### **This visit is a constructive opportunity:**

- For everyone, especially the visiting team, to see that we're working hard for our college.
- To remember that there exist competing visions of what's best for CCSF, but that nonetheless, *We Are All City College*.
- To respectfully discuss your concerns about the impact that the "show cause" sanction and subsequent administrative actions are having on CCSF.
- To make it clear that our college community is "all in" for CCSF!

### **What is the cost of accreditation for CCSF?**

In 2011-12, prior to ACCJC's "show cause" sanction, CCSF incurred approximately \$140,000 for accreditation-related costs. These included the annual dues for ACCJC membership at \$29,321; costs for the team visit, including lodging at over \$20,000; compensation for the consulting writer of the self-evaluation report at \$63,000; and nearly \$5,000 in office and printing expenses. Following the sanction in July of 2012, accreditation-related spending went up significantly because, as at other colleges on sanction, a large number of consultants were hired to address the sanction and related issues. In the seven months following the sanction, at least \$250,000 in new and mounting consultant costs impinged on the College's budget. That figure does not attempt to capture the thousands of employee hours, 2012-13 annual dues, or spring 2013 evaluation team visit.



How might the total quantitative and qualitative costs of accreditation at CCSF be measured?

## **CHAPTER 4: Additional resources**

### **You have a voice through the Third Party Comment process**

*We believe stakeholders should have a legitimate avenue for providing feedback to and on the ACCJC.*

If you feel the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) has been unfair in assessing CCSF, has violated its policies or the law, or should not have placed CCSF on "show cause," you can file a "third-party comment" or complaint with the ACCJC. The Department of Education requires recognized accrediting agencies to accept, consider, and respond to complaints against them.

Furthermore, the ACCJC itself is up for "re-accreditation" by the U.S. Department of Education. File your "third-party" comment with the DOE expressing your views of ACCJC as they undergo their accreditation process.

A third party is anyone—an employee, student, community organization, or any other person or entity besides the district itself.

**Comments must be submitted to the ACCJC and DOE by May 1<sup>st</sup> 2013.** Use the official ACCJC third-party “comment form,” available from ACCJC through this link: [tinyurl.com/3rdPartyComment](http://tinyurl.com/3rdPartyComment) (Attach additional pages to the form, if necessary.)

**Mail your comments or complaints to each of the addresses below:**

Accrediting Commission for  
Community and Junior Colleges  
10 Commercial Blvd., Suite 204  
Novato, CA 94949

Kay Gilcher, Accreditation  
U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Postsecondary Education  
1990 K Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 200

### **Additional links**

- **CCSF Accreditation Information** (includes the March 15 self-evaluation report, ACCJC’s July Show Cause report, and much more):  
[www.ccsf.edu/accreditation](http://www.ccsf.edu/accreditation)
- **CCSF info on SLOs:** [www.ccsf.edu/slo](http://www.ccsf.edu/slo)
- Accreditation work by the **CCSF Academic Senate:**  
[tinyurl.com/AcSenAccredResponses](http://tinyurl.com/AcSenAccredResponses)
- **CCSF Visiting Team Prep:** [tinyurl.com/VisitingTeamPrep](http://tinyurl.com/VisitingTeamPrep)
- **ACCJC:** [www.accjc.org](http://www.accjc.org)
- **ACCJC’s self-guided online workshop:**  
[tinyurl.com/AccredBasicsWorkshop](http://tinyurl.com/AccredBasicsWorkshop)
- **ACCJC Third Party form:** [tinyurl.com/3rdPartyComment](http://tinyurl.com/3rdPartyComment)
- **WASC:** [www.wascweb.org](http://www.wascweb.org)
- **DOE:** [ope.ed.gov/accreditation](http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation)
- **Save CCSF Coalition:** [www.saveccsf.org](http://www.saveccsf.org)
- **AFT 2121:** [aft2121.org](http://aft2121.org)

## **CHAPTER 5: Our Union: A Voice for Quality Education**

### **Who we are:**

AFT 2121 is the faculty union at City College of San Francisco. We represent full- and part-time counselors, librarians, and instructors. Through 35 years of collective bargaining, our contract has emerged as a nationally recognized model for:

- Equity and respect for part-time faculty, including pro-rata pay, health benefits, and reemployment rights.
- The protection and growth of the college's full-time faculty core, creating full-time faculty through consolidation of positions.
- Improved funding and equity for noncredit programs and noncredit faculty.

These changes created a more stable faculty, greater access for students, and the ability for faculty to contribute more to the College. *These gains have made us a better workplace and stronger college overall—and a better place for learning and teaching to take place.*

For the last 5 years, faculty and other workers have made repeated sacrifices to help CCSF through budget cuts, agreeing to multiple wage reductions, furloughs, and other savings.

### **What we know about CCSF's accreditation:**

We want an accredited City College! We believe that our college can retain accreditation and be improved by an authentic decision making process that includes the voices of students, workers, and the San Francisco community.

Since July, hundreds of CCSF employees have spent thousands of hours to make significant improvements to our college and address the ACCJC's recommendations. Smart, transparent changes and reforms are required to make more efficient use of resources *and* have less damaging impacts

on the students and the workers who serve them.

We believe the accreditation process should be used to improve the quality of education, not to diminish educational choices for students, impose austerity, or make collective bargaining more difficult. As a community college we must make choices that enhance access to, and the quality of, the educational experience.

CCSF has new funding through a parcel tax, approved by 73% of San Francisco voters. Proposition A funds and other resources should be allocated to adequately support the classroom, counseling, and other student services—as voters intended!

San Franciscans deserve a comprehensive community college with room for all. CCSF is one of the most important working class institutions in San Francisco. Our college is for part-time students, older students, first-generation and transfer and re-entry students, veterans, and English language learners-- everyone. City College is the institution that offers second chances to so many people!

### **AFT 2121 priorities:**

- Defend access to affordable quality public education!
- Keep City College accredited; it's too important to lose!
- CCSF administration needs to make constructive choices, not reckless choices!
- Faculty and staff deserve fair treatment; attacks on working conditions threaten quality education at CCSF.
- Use Prop A funds as promised to San Francisco Voters!

This booklet was inspired by a guide to accreditation put together at Cuesta College when it was on a “show cause” sanction (it has since been moved off “show cause” to “warning”—congratulations to Cuesta!). It includes information and language from that guide, the ACCJC, DOE, and CCSF websites, and other research from AFT 2121. We have made every effort to be accurate; any errors are our own and purely incidental. If you need more booklets or want to get involved, email [organize@aft2121.org](mailto:organize@aft2121.org).