

October 13,2008

President Barbara Beno, ACCJC
10 Commercial Boulevard, Suite 204
Novato, CA 94949

Ms. Lurlean Gaines, Chair, and Commissioners of the ACCJC
10 Commercial Boulevard, Suite 204
Novato, CA 94949

Re: Amendment of ACCJC Standards III.A.1.c. and II.A.6.

Dear President Beno, Chair Gaines, and Commissioners of the ACCJC:

I write this letter as President of the California Federation of Teachers, AFT/AFL-CIO. As you are well aware, the Accrediting Commission for the California Junior Colleges (ACCJC) serves an important function by virtue of California law. In particular, the State has dictated that,

“Each community college within a district shall be an accredited institution. The Accrediting Commission for California Junior Colleges shall determine accreditation.”
(5 Cal. Code Regs. § 51016)

In conferring this important responsibility on the ACCJC, the State of California and the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges expect that the ACCJC will fulfill an important state objective, providing education through accredited public community colleges. ACCJC may or may not be a quasi-governmental entity, but either way it must respect State laws when fulfilling its functions.

Of particular importance to the California Federation of Teachers, and its constituent locals, is the Educational Employment Relations Act, California Government Code section 3540 *et seq.* The Act, as you know, provides a framework for collective bargaining for employees in the California Community Colleges.

One of the most important rights faculty have is to negotiate with their employer over evaluation procedures, criteria and standards. In fact, this right is so important that the Legislature deemed it worthy of explicit enumeration within the Act. In addition, pursuant to the EERA, academic freedom policies are negotiated at community colleges.

In recent years, considerable controversy has existed within the community colleges over the issue of Student Learning Outcomes or SLOs. It is an understatement to say that many within the college community, faculty and administrators alike, feel the ACCJC has gone too far in its demands regarding SLOs, especially when they intrude on negotiable evaluation criteria and violate principles of academic freedom.

Not long ago, the CFT invited comment from its faculty unions about SLOs, and their impact on their local colleges. Of particular concern to CFT is the propensity with which accreditation teams from the ACCJC have indicated to the colleges that they should “develop and implement policies and procedures to incorporate student learning outcomes into evaluation of those with direct responsibility for student learning.” This directive is based on ACCJC Accreditation Standard III.A.1.c., which states,

“Faculty and others directly responsible for student programs toward achieving stated student learning outcomes have, as a component of their evaluation, effectiveness in producing those student learning outcomes.” (ACCJC Accreditation Standard III.A.1.c.)

Another standard has been used by accreditation teams to justify changes in faculty work such as syllabi. This standard, which has interfered in faculty’s academic freedom rights, states:

“The institution assures that students and prospective students receive clear and accurate information ... In every class section students receive a course syllabus that specifies learning objectives consistent with those in the institution’s officially approved course outline.” (ACCJC Accreditation Standard II.A.6.)

We believe both of these standards, as written and as applied, intrude on matters left to collective bargaining by the Legislature. For a time, we recognized that the ACCJC’s inclusion of these standards might have been considered to be mandated by the regulations and approach of the U.S. Department of Education.

Now, however, with the recently re-enacted Higher Education Act, the Federal mandate for the SLO component has been eliminated for community colleges and other institutions of higher education. I’m sure you are aware that Congress passed, and the President signed, legislation amending 20 U.S.C. 1099 (b), to provide that the Secretary of Education may not “establish any criteria that specifies, defines, or prescribes the standards that accrediting agencies or associations shall use to assess any institution’s success with respect to student achievement.” [See Higher Education Act, S. 1642 (110th Congress, 1st Session, at p. 380)]

Given this amendment, it is CFT’s position that the ACCJC has no statutory mandate which prescribes inclusion of the above-referenced standards dealing with faculty evaluations, and syllabi.

Under the EERA, absent mandatory proscriptions in the law, each and every aspect of evaluation is negotiable. See, e.g., *Walnut Valley Unified School District* (1983) PERB Dec.

No. 289, 7 PERC ¶ 14084, pp. 321-322; *Holtville Unified School District* (1982) PERB Dec. No. 250, 6 PERC ¶ 13235, p. 906. The Legislature reaffirmed the negotiability of evaluation procedures and criteria when it adopted A.B. 1725 in 1989. (See Cal. Ed. Code § 87610.1, 877663(f)). The Legislature did specify that community college evaluations procedures must include a peer review process and, to the extent practicable, student evaluations. (See Cal. Ed. Code § 87663(g)). However, it did not mandate SLOs.

Accordingly, the CFT wishes to inquire as to what actions ACCJC intends to take to conform its regulations to the requirements of State law, and to recognize that the adoption of any local provisions which include faculty effectiveness in producing student learning outcomes, should be entirely a matter of *collective bargaining negotiations*. And, similarly, that the ACCJC cannot mandate inclusion of information in syllabi which faculty, by reason of academic freedom and tradition, are entitled to determine using their own best academic judgment, or through the negotiations process. Of course, in negotiations over evaluation, the law also provides that faculty organizations shall consult with local academic senates before negotiating over these matters.

While ACCJC is free to *encourage* colleges and their faculty organizations to negotiate over this topic, it is not free to mandate or coerce the adoption of such standards by sanctioning colleges which do not adopt standards that ACCJC would prefer in these areas. Given its state function, ACCJC must respect the negotiations process mandated by state law, and academic freedom rights adopted by contract or policy.

California's public community colleges are an extraordinary public resource, and the Legislature has seen fit to decree that when it comes to faculty evaluation, that process shall be subject to collective bargaining. With the adoption of the landmark bill A.B. 1725 almost 20 years ago, the Legislature came down squarely on the side of faculty determining, with their employers, the method and content of their evaluations. This system has worked exceptionally well for almost 35 years.

Given the change in Federal law, the CFT calls upon ACCJC to take prompt and appropriate action to amend its standards to respect the boundaries established by the Legislature and not purport to regulate the methods by which faculty are evaluated or determine their course work such as syllabi.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Marty Hittelman, President
California Federation of Teachers