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January 8, 2018

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges  
Attn: Stephanie Droker, Ed.D., Vice President  
10 Commercial Boulevard, Suite 204  
Novato, CA 94949

Via email: [sdroker@accjc.org](mailto:sdroker@accjc.org)

Dear Dr. Droker,

I am writing with regard to one item in the evaluation team's draft report. We believe our response might assist the Commission at its January meeting.

I must say at the outset that the visit was very successful, and we appreciated the collegiality and professionalism of the team members. The chair was exceptionally organized and focused, and led her group through the interviews in a manner that gave the college opportunity to share our ongoing work and extensive data. We were fortunate to have such good colleagues visit us, and we applaud their commitment to program and campus improvement.

There is only one issue in the draft report with which we have substantive disagreement. This is in the area of online education, and the visiting team's view that they did not have access to an adequate number of courses to assess whether or not there was sufficient contact between faculty and students. Insofar as this is an issue we attend to on a regular basis, we believe the draft report misses the mark in this particular.

I can make several points here:

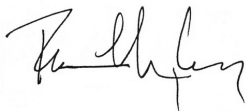
- Initially, the peer review team requested "system administrator" level access to the course management system (CMS), which is the highest access possible. Only a handful of trained personnel have that level of access as a security and system integrity measure. As an alternative, we provided the team with login credentials to courses to which faculty volunteered access.
- Login credentials (user name and password) permitted the team to view 17 unique courses and a total of 22 sections volunteered by faculty. Our system allows us to verify exactly how many credentials are offered, and when those credentials are used to access the system.
- Fifteen courses were accessed by the credentials assigned to the visiting team. The draft report (p. 15) states that the team could access only 10 courses for review.
- Advance access was provided on Sept. 30, just over a week prior to the visit, to five volunteered courses at the request of the team.

- Our documentation demonstrates that the total time members of the accreditation team was logged into courses was **3 hours and 20 minutes**.
  - 1) **Oct. 2** -- 7:48-7:48 p.m. = **1 minute**
  - 2) **Oct. 9** -- 9:58-9:58 a.m.; 10:10-10:11 a.m. = **2 minutes**
  - 3) **Oct. 11** -- 8:58-9:48 a.m.; 10:25-10:40 a.m.; 12:00-1:10 p.m.; 2:28-3:30 p.m. = **3 hours, 17 minutes**
- If the team experienced access or technical issues and had communicated that, we would have addressed them immediately. However, these concerns were not mentioned when two team members toured the Media and Learning Center -- following the final access time above -- with the Associate Vice President of Instruction. During that tour, team members also spoke briefly with Online Education Center staff and the faculty coordinator, mentioning no concerns.
- We also offered, via email exchange in advance of the site visit, to have the evaluation team view courses alongside an instructional designer in the Online Education Center during their time on campus. During the site visit, no meetings were scheduled nor requests made to do so.
- With regard to the issue of adequate contact, timing is key. The week of the visit was only the second week of the term. Activities such as discussions of course materials were just getting underway. It would have been helpful for visiting team members to speak with online faculty so as to understand their approaches to substantive interaction.
- Substantive interaction can be demonstrated in a number of ways in an online course. Due to the way in which the Canvas course management system is constructed, chats with students, email communications, and assignment assessments are only visible to teachers and students.
- Finally, unpublished future modules or activities cannot be seen until faculty publish these elements of their course, so it may initially appear that there is minimal interaction at a particular point in time.

My apologies for the extensive detail, but – as in so many of any college’s operational issues – the details matter in assessing whether a particular issue merits note in the final report on reaffirmation. In this area of instruction, we really do pay close attention to the question of interaction, and I would not want our faculty and staff to think that the Commission thought otherwise.

If there is anything else we can help clarify, please be in touch. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Brian Murphy  
President