

**RECEIVED**

**APR 22 2014**

*Accrediting Commission for  
Community and Junior Colleges*

**Follow-Up Report**

Santa Barbara City College  
721 Cliff Drive  
Santa Barbara, CA 93109

A Confidential Report Prepared for the Accrediting Commission  
For Community and Junior Colleges

This report represents the findings of the team that visited

Santa Barbara City College  
on  
April 1, 2014

Dr. Raúl Rodríguez, Chancellor  
Rancho Santiago Community College District, Chairperson

**Santa Barbara City College  
Team Roster**

**Dr. Raúl Rodríguez (Chair)**  
Chancellor  
Rancho Santiago Community College District

**Dr. Armine G. Hacopian**  
Member, Board of Trustees  
Glendale College

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

During a period that can only be described as one of the most tumultuous in the history of Santa Barbara City College, a third party filed a complaint on June 28, 2011 with the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, against Santa Barbara City College (SBCC). The complaint alleged that actions and behaviors of the Board of Trustees of SBCC caused the college to be out of compliance with several of the Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards. The Commission reviewed the institution's response to the complaint and investigated and evaluated the complaint. The Commission acted in June of 2012 to impose a sanction of **Warning** on the college. The three Commission Recommendations arising out of that action were:

**Commission Recommendation 1:** In order to meet Accreditation Standards, the Board of Trustees should receive additional and topic-specific training from "outside experts" on the appropriate roles of the Board and Superintendent/President, and the requirements of Standard IV. This training should be agendaized and occur at a public meeting. The Board should further demonstrate compliance with these roles and responsibilities in its processes for Board evaluation and the Superintendent/President's evaluation. (Standard IV.B.1.d, g and j)

**Commission Recommendation 2:** In order to meet Accreditation Standards, the Board should revise its code of ethics policy to align with Accreditation Standards and policies (and the legal requirements of the board), identify a procedure, and the person(s) responsible for enforcement of the policy. The Board should also rectify its own behavior to comply. (Standard IV.B.1.h)

**Commission Recommendation 3:** In order to meet Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards, the Board of Trustees should re-direct its focus to creating an environment for empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence. Through established governance structures, processes, and practices, the Board should work with administrators, faculty, staff, and students for the good of the institution. The Board should focus its work toward ensuring that it works in a collegial manner to support the accomplishment of the college mission and improvement of student learning programs and services. (Eligibility Requirements 3, 4, and 21; Standards IV.A.1; IV.A.2.a and b; IV.A.3; IV.A.4; IV.A.5; IV.B.1; IV.B.1.a, b, e and j; and IV.B.2.a through e)

On April 30, 2013, a three-member team visited Santa Barbara City College to conduct a special evaluation visit. After receiving the Special Evaluation Report from that team, the Commission acted to remove SBCC from **Warning**. However, the Commission directed the college to prepare a Follow-Up Report by March 15, 2014 that would provide evidence of sustained resolution of the three Commission Recommendations. The Commission appointed a two-member team to conduct a Follow-Up Visit on April 1, 2014 to verify the evidence presented in the SBCC Follow-Up Report. The conclusion of the team, as documented by this Follow-Up Visiting Team Report, is that the SBCC

Board of Trustees has sustained the improvements that were noted in the 2013 Special Evaluation Report and has not only sustained those improvements but has continued to make progress on all three Commission Recommendations.

## FINDINGS

### **Commission Recommendation 1**

*In order to meet Standards, the Board of Trustees should receive additional and topic-specific training from “outside experts” on the appropriate roles of the Board and Superintendent/President, and the requirements of Standard IV. This training should be agendaized and occur at a public meeting. The Board should further demonstrate compliance with these roles and responsibilities in its processes for Board evaluation and the Superintendent/President’s evaluation. (Standard IV.B.1.d, g, and j)*

### **Evidence and Analysis**

The SBCC Board of Trustees has participated in topic-specific training from “outside experts” in two ways. (Standard IV.B.1.a; IV.B.1.e; IV.B.1.f; IV.B.1.h) First, there have been specific training activities that have occurred at regularly scheduled board meetings or at special board study sessions. Second, the majority of the board members have also attended professional conferences and workshops. The trustees participated in various sessions at these events on relevant topics, such as effective trusteeship and board roles and responsibilities. In addition, at least one, and possibly more, of the trustees are participating in the Excellence in Trusteeship program being sponsored by the Community College League of California.

The SBCC Board of Trustees, in collaboration with the Superintendent/President, has put together a Board Development Program. The current plan consists of the following activities: each December the SBCC Board is scheduled to review its Board policy on ethics; an outside expert will also conduct a review with the Board on the Brown Act each year; during election years, the Superintendent/President will organize and deliver a comprehensive orientation program for prospective trustees; and, special study sessions will be conducted throughout the year to provide the Board with additional training activities. It is commendable that the Superintendent/President and the SBCC Board of Trustees have committed to an ongoing schedule of training activities. At the same time, the team would like to see a plan that contains specific responsibilities and outcomes for the board as a result of these activities. For example, it could be that each of the trustees makes a commitment to complete the online ACCJC training module or to enroll in and complete the Excellence in Trusteeship program mentioned above, or some other specific outcome. In the team’s view, it is important to develop a training schedule, but even more important to tie it to specific goals and outcomes to document continual improvement.

The team verified that the SBCC Board of Trustees is continuing to conduct its annual self evaluation and review. (Standard IV.B.1.d; IV.B.1.e; IV.B.1.g) The team also verified that the evaluation process for the Superintendent/President is being conducted

according to board policy and in a timely manner. (Standards IV.B.1; IV.B.1.j) In fact, the evaluation process for the Superintendent/President is noticed on multiple meetings which allow the board and the Superintendent/President the latitude to discuss the issues in a more methodical and unhurried manner.

The SBCC Board of Trustees is setting its annual goals appropriately and coordinating them with the annual and long-range goals of the Superintendent/President.

**Conclusions:**

The team verifies that the SBCC Board of Trustees has sustained compliance with all elements of Commission Recommendation 1. The Board and the Superintendent/President have implemented a Board Development Program that contains topic-specific training from “outside experts” and that does focus on the requirements of Standard IV, as well as on the roles and responsibilities of board members and the Superintendent/President. The processes for the Board of Trustees’ self-evaluation and that of the Superintendent/President continue to meet the requirements of this recommendation and of the Standard.

**Commission Recommendation 2**

*In order to meet the Standards, the Board should revise its code of ethics policy to align with Accreditation Standards and policies (and the legal requirements of the board), identify a procedure, and the person(s) responsible for enforcement of the policy. The Board should also rectify its own behavior to comply. (Standard IV.B.1.h)*

**Evidence and Analysis:**

The Board approved an amended version of Board Policy 2715: Code of Ethics/Standards of Practice on July 25, 2013, which had previously been revised in March of 2012. The new changes to the policy consist of a reorganization of the material according to thematic headings. Per one of the board goals, the college has been undertaking a review of all of the board policies. The college has subscribed to the Community College League of California service that provides examples of model policies to member colleges. The college expects to have reviewed all of their policies by the time of the next comprehensive accreditation site visit in fall 2015.

Since the complaint against the college was filed in 2011, the Commission has sent out three teams on site visits to the college. From the time of the first site visit to the current visit, there has been a remarkable turnaround in the climate of the college. This tangible and wholly positive change in climate is due to several factors. However, the various testimonies by constituent representatives to the current team attribute this change chiefly to the outstanding working relationship that has developed between the Superintendent/President and the SBCC Board of Trustees. This working relationship derives out of mutual respect and trust between the Superintendent/President and the SBCC Board of Trustees. The Superintendent/President is appropriately assertive in reminding trustees when situations arise where they may be tempted to cross the boundary between policy and operational decision making. For their part, the SBCC Board of Trustees has modified their behavior in a manner that demonstrates that they comprehend and respect

the proper division of responsibilities between the board and the Superintendent/President.

Multiple examples of evidence were provided to the team from constituent representatives concerning the improved and appropriate behavior of the board. One example had to do with the review of administrative procedures. There was a longstanding practice by the SBCC Board of Trustees, which preceded the current board, to review administrative procedures. At most colleges, a board will create, adopt, and review board policy, but administrative procedures are generally considered to be the guideline as to how to implement board policy. As such, it is typically delegated to the CEO and the administration. The SBCC Board of Trustees recently decided that it no longer needed to review administrative procedures and the Board delegated this responsibility to the Superintendent/President.

Another example had to do with a recent situation at a board meeting. The college had previously made the decision to eliminate the intercollegiate men's tennis team. As so often will happen in such situations, the supporters of the tennis team packed a board meeting to put pressure on the board to reinstate the team. To their credit, the SBCC trustees resisted the temptation to intercede in this situation and recognized that it was a matter that was both a departmental and curricular issue and not a policy issue.

There were other examples that were given. However, the main issues are that the board clearly has a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities than they did in the past. They understand the institution better and how it functions. They treat one another and anyone who comes before them with civility, attentiveness, and respect. The trustees engage in congenial dialogue and don't resort to hostility or confrontation. The team saw firsthand evidence of the change in culture among the Board of Trustees by viewing video recordings of previous board meetings. Everything that we heard from speaking with the constituent representatives was verified in our review of those board meetings.

### **Conclusions:**

The SBCC Board of Trustees has accomplished what more than one constituent representative described as an "impressive transformation". They are living by their code of ethics and are functioning in a highly effective, inclusive, and supportive manner. Many members of the college community stated that they had never seen the Board of Trustees operating at such a high level. They have clearly maintained compliance with Commission Recommendation 2 and have continued to progress beyond this recommendation.

### **Commission Recommendation 3**

*In order to meet Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards, the Board of Trustees should re-direct its focus to creating an environment for empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence. Through established governance structures, processes, and practices, the Board should work with administrators, faculty, staff, and students for the good of the institution. The Board should focus its work toward ensuring that it works in a collegial manner to support the accomplishment of the college mission*

*and improvement of student learning programs and services. (Eligibility Requirements 3, 4, and 21; Standards IV.A.1, IV.A.2.a and b; IV.A.3; IV.A.4; IV.A.5; IV.B.1; IV.B.1.a, b, e and j; and IV.B.2.a through e)*

**Evidence and Analysis:**

As noted in the previous section, the Board of Trustees has transformed its behavior by acting in a manner congruent with best practices for a Board of Trustees. This Board now clearly understands its roles and responsibilities. (Standard IV.B.1.f) The working relationship between the Superintendent/President and the Board President is outstanding and has certainly enhanced this process.

While the Board has continued to improve its performance and to move to a new level of maturity as a board, the pivotal role of the Superintendent/President in this transformation must be acknowledged. Because the Superintendent/President fully understands her roles and responsibilities, she has been able to firmly guide the Board when it was necessary to do so. This is a skill that should not be underestimated. The Superintendent/President is more than capable of overseeing the operations of SBCC and of leading this college. It is a tribute to the Board of Trustees that they recognize this fact and are letting the Superintendent/President do her job. It is especially commendable because it is often difficult for trustees who come to the community colleges from other sectors where they have been involved in situations where they are expected to direct operations to let go of that element, but, after some difficult episodes, this Board has accomplished that transition.

One piece of evidence cited in the college report describes the awarding of the Aspen Institute Prize to the college as somehow tied to behavior of the SBCC Board of Trustees. In fact, on page 18 of the college report, the following quote appears:

“Such an honor could not be achieved absent a board committed to empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence.”

The team disagrees with this statement in that an award such as the Aspen Institute Prize is awarded based on past performance as there is always a lag time for the data being considered in the evaluation. Although the team believes the SBCC Board is now creating an environment of empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence, it is a stretch to say that the awarding of the Aspen Prize is evidence that the past behavior of the SBCC Board of Trustees contributed to that honor as it is conceivable that even a college with a somewhat dysfunctional board could perform in certain benchmarks at a high enough level to win such an award.

The ability of the SBCC Board of Trustees to change their behavior and create an extremely positive climate is partly attributable to the leadership of the Superintendent/President, as noted above. At the same time, some individuals interviewed by the team also cited the Commission’s action to impose a sanction on the college as a strong motivator for the board to modify their behavior. Though the sanction may have had an effect, the Commission did act to remove the sanction. With the removal of the sanction,

the Board had a choice. The trustees had multiple options. The fact that they made a conscious choice to continue to expand on the progress they had previously made cannot be underestimated. The SBCC Board of Trustees is composed of smart, savvy, and experienced members. In a short time, they have gone from being a board that was putting their college at risk to a board that exemplifies a level of thoughtfulness, cooperation, and consideration that is rare. The SBCC Board of Trustees is well on its way to becoming a model governing board in all respects.

**Conclusions:**

Through the various interviews conducted by the team and by the review of all other evidence, the team verified that governance and decision making at SBCC are functioning at an all time high. One person described it as a “golden era” for SBCC. That is, in this person’s view, the college participatory governance process is working as smoothly and collaboratively as it ever has at any time in the past. The team agrees with that assessment and lauds the SBCC Board of Trustees for sustaining improvements and the Superintendent/President and the college community for responding to and supporting the SBCC Board of Trustees as it made this remarkable transition. The SBCC Board of Trustees has continued its compliance with Recommendation 3 and, once again, has surpassed this recommendation by the impressive progress that they have made.