



**ACCREDITING  
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for COMMUNITY and  
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February 3, 2009

Dr. W. David Pelham  
Superintendent/President  
Cuesta College  
P. O. Box 8106  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93403-8106

Dear President Pelham:

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, at its meeting on January 7-9, 2009, reviewed the institutional Self Study Report and the report of the evaluation team which visited Cuesta College on Monday, October 13-Thursday, October 16, 2008. The Commission also considered the testimony provided by President David Pelham. The Commission acted to issue a **Warning** and to ask that Cuesta College correct the deficiencies noted. The college is required to complete a Follow-Up Report by **October 15, 2009**. That report will be followed by a visit of Commission representatives.

A **Warning** is issued when the Commission finds that an institution has pursued a course of action which deviates from the Commission's Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, or policy to an extent that gives concern to the Commission. The accredited status of the institution continues during the warning period. However, the institution's accreditation will not be reaffirmed until the conditions which warranted the warning are resolved.

I also wish to inform you that under U.S. Department of Education regulations, institutions out of compliance with standards or on sanction are expected to correct deficiencies within a two-year period or the Commission must take action to terminate accreditation. While the deficiencies associated with the current team's Recommendation 2 were also identified by the 2002 comprehensive evaluation team, the Commission has extended Cuesta College's time to correct these deficiencies, but the institution must take appropriate steps to quickly resolve these deficiencies.

The Follow-Up Report of **October 15, 2009** must demonstrate the institution's resolution of the recommendations noted below:

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**Recommendation 1: Mission Statement**

To improve, the team recommends that the college integrate more frequent reviews of the mission statement as it implements other institutional planning activities. (Standard 1.A, 1.A.1, 1.A.3.)

**Recommendation 2: Planning and Assessment**

To meet standards, the team recommends that the college complete the strategic plan, institute an ongoing systematic evaluation process that communicates and clarifies the assessment tools used to measure the effectiveness of ongoing planning, program review, resource allocation processes and student learning outcomes. (Standard 1.B, 1.B.3, 1.B.4, 1.B.6, 1.B.7.)

With regard to Recommendation 2, the Commission is concerned that Cuesta College has not sustained the momentum noted by the visiting team in April 2008 and needs to increase its efforts and fully meet all parts of Standard I.B.

**Recommendation 3: Student Learning Outcomes**

a. To meet standards, the team recommends that the college ensure that student learning outcomes are fully institutionalized as a core element of college operations, with specific focus on curriculum, program development, libraries and on-line resources.

b. Additionally, it is recommended that the college develop a policy for program discontinuance and a policy for academic freedom. (Standard II.A.1., II.A.1c., II.A.2., II.A.2.a., II.A.2.e., II.A.2.f., II.A.6.b., II.A.7., II.C.1.b., II.C.1.c., II.C.2.)

With regard to Recommendation 3a, the Commission is concerned that without aggressive work on the part of Cuesta College, it will fall behind in the development of student learning outcomes and be unable to meet the Commission's deadline of 2012 for full compliance with these standards. The institution's own report that the elimination of a critical staff position has slowed down its work is cause for concern about whether the institution has the capacity to meet the standards.

**Recommendation 4: Library and Learning Support Services**

To meet the standard, the team recommends the college and its libraries develop and implement an on-going formal assessment of their library services, on-line services, and student learning outcomes. (Standard II.C.1.b., II.C.1.c., II.C.3.)

**Recommendation 5: Human Resources**

To meet standards, the team recommends the college define and establish the assessment mechanisms to effectively produce and assess student learning outcomes. (Standard III.A.1.c.)

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**Recommendation 6: Technology Resources**

To meet standards, the team recommends that the college establish a process for regular and systematic planning, acquisition, maintenance and replacement of its technology infrastructure, existing and newly acquired technology and equipment to meet institutional needs; and that the process is integrated with other college planning and resource allocation. (Standard III.C.1.c., III.C.1.d.)

**Recommendation 7: Financial Planning and Stability**

To meet standards, the team recommends that the college review and assess its long range financial and capital planning strategies to ensure sufficient funding levels for ongoing operations. The team also recommends that the college and college foundation review and communicate the fiscal status of investments and implement appropriate protections to secure fiscal solvency. (Standard III.D.1.c., III.D.2.a., III.D.2.d., III.D.2.e., III.D.3.)

**Recommendation 8: Board of Trustees Evaluation and Policies**

To meet standards, the team recommends that the Board of Trustees conduct its annual self-evaluation no later than June 2009 and yearly thereafter. Also, the team recommends that a process and timeline be established for regular review of current board policies and development of new policies as needed. (Standard IV.A.1., IV.A.3., IV.B.1.b., IV.B.1.e., IV.B.1.g., IV.B.1.j., IV.B.2.a.)

**Recommendation 9: Leadership and Governance**

To meet standards, the team recommends that the Board of Trustees delegate full responsibility and authority to the Superintendent/President to implement and administer board policies and the effective operation of the institution. To improve college decision making and institutional effectiveness, the team recommends that the college review and establish ongoing assessment of its college governance structures, processes, roles and responsibilities. (Standard IV.A.1., IV.A.2., IV.A.2.a., IV.A.3., IV.A.5., IV.B.1., IV B.1.b., IV.B.2., IV.B.2.a., IV.B.2.b., IV.B.2.c.)

A **final copy** of the team report is enclosed. Please discard any earlier drafts you may have. The Commission requires you to give the team report and this letter dissemination to your college staff and to those who were signatories of your college Self Study Report. This group should include campus leadership and the Board of Trustees. The Commission also requires that the team report and the Self Study Report be made available to students and the public. Placing copies in the college library can accomplish this. Should you want the report electronically to place on your web site or for some other purpose, please contact Commission staff.

The recommendations contained in the evaluation team report represent the observations of the evaluation team at the time of the visit. The Commission reminds you that while an institution may concur or disagree with any part of the team report, the college is expected to use the report to improve the educational programs and services of the institution.

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All colleges are required to file a Midterm Report in the third year after each comprehensive evaluation. Cuesta College should submit the Midterm Report by **October 15, 2011**. The Commission will send a reminder to the college about the Midterm Report; a description of reporting requirements can be found on the Commission's website.

The college conducted a comprehensive self study as part of its evaluation. The Commission suggests that the plans for improvement of the institution included in that document be taken into account in the continuing development of Cuesta College. The next comprehensive evaluation of the college will occur during **Fall 2014**.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to remind you that federal legislation affecting accrediting agencies requires that accredited colleges conduct systematic assessment of educational outcomes (see especially Standards One and Two). A further requirement is that accrediting agencies pay close attention to student loan default rates.

On behalf of the Commission, I wish to express continuing interest in the institution's educational programs and services. Professional self-regulation is the most effective means of assuring integrity, effectiveness and quality.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Beno, Ph.D.  
President

BAB/tl

cc: Dr. Anna Greiner, Accreditation Liaison Officer  
Board President, San Luis Obispo County CCD  
Dr. Frances White, Team Chair  
Evaluation Team Members  
Ms. Linda Henderson, U.S. DOE