

## U.S.Department of Education Staff Report

to the

Senior Department Official on Recognition Compliance Issues

### Recommendation Page

1. **Agency:** WASC Accrediting Commission For Community and Junior Colleges ( 1952 / 2017)  
(The dates provided are the date of initial listing as a recognized agency and the date of the agency's last grant of recognition.)
2. **Action Item:** Petition for Continued Recognition
3. **Current Scope of Recognition:** The accreditation and preaccreditation ("Candidate for Accreditation") of community and other colleges with a primarily pre-baccalaureate mission located in California, Hawaii, the United States territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, which offer certificates, associate degrees, and the first baccalaureate degree by means of a substantive change review offered by institutions that are already accredited by the agency, and such programs offered via distance education and correspondence education at these colleges. This recognition also extends to the Committee on Substantive Change of the Commission, for decisions on substantive changes, and the Appeals Panel.
4. **Requested Scope of Recognition:** The accreditation and preaccreditation ("Candidate for Accreditation") of community and other colleges in California, Hawaii, the United States territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, which have as a primary mission the granting of associate degrees, but which may also award certificates and other credentials, not to exceed the bachelor degree level, where the provision of such credentials is within the institution's mission and, if applicable, is authorized by their governmental authorities, and the accreditation of such programs offered via distance education and correspondence education at these colleges. This recognition also extends to the Committee on Substantive Change of the Commission, for decisions on substantive changes, and the Appeals Panel.
5. **Date of Advisory Committee Meeting:** 07/30/2019
6. **Staff Recommendation:** Renew the agency's recognition for five years and approve the agency's request for an expansion of scope.
7. **Issues or Problems:** None

### Executive Summary

#### PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE AGENCY

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC or the agency) is an institutional accreditor. The agency's institutions are voluntary members that offer two-year educational programs and award associate degrees. The institutions include community colleges, private religious institutions, for-profit and independent nonprofit vocational institutions, and independent junior colleges.

The agency has approximately 130 accredited member institutions. The member institutions are located in California, Hawaii, the United States territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The majority of the agency's member institutions offer at least some courses via distance education.

The agency's recognition enables its institutions to establish eligibility to receive Federal student assistance funding under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (Title IV). The agency must meet the Secretary's separate and independent requirements.

#### Recognition History

The agency was one of the three original commissions that made up the Western College Association (now the Western Association of Schools and Colleges), which was first recognized by the U.S. Commissioner of Education in 1952. In 1962, the Commissioner of Education recognized the present commission separately. Since that time, the agency has been periodically reviewed and has been granted continued recognition.

ACCJC was last reviewed for renewal of recognition at the fall 2013 meeting of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional

Quality and Integrity (NACIQI or the Committee) That review also included a request for an expansion of scope. Both NACIQI and Department staff recommended to the senior Department official an expansion of scope to include the first baccalaureate degree by means of substantive change, to continue the recognition of the agency and require it to come into compliance within 12 months, and to submit a compliance report that demonstrates the agency's compliance with the 15 issues cited in the staff report. The senior Department official, Acting Assistant Secretary Brenda Dann-Messier, concurred with the recommendations. ACCJC disagreed with the findings in two sections (602.13 and 602.15(a)(3)) and appealed the decision regarding those sections to the Secretary.

The compliance report regarding the 13 sections of the Secretary's Criteria for Recognition that were not appealed by ACCJC and a request for an expansion of scope were reviewed at the fall 2015 NACIQI meeting. Both NACIQI and Department staff recommended the denial of the requested expansion of scope to include baccalaureate degrees, a limitation to the current baccalaureate degrees already approved, and to continue the agency's recognition and require it to come into compliance within 12 months, and to submit a compliance report that demonstrates the agency's compliance with the seven issues cited in the staff report. Department staff recommended a 12-month good cause extension, whereas NACIQI recommended a six-month extension. The senior Department official, Acting Assistant Secretary Lynn B. Mahaffie, concurred with the recommended findings, and denied the expansion of scope request, limited the agency's current scope with respect to baccalaureate degrees to only those degrees currently approved, found the agency out of compliance with seven sections (four of which were related to the expansion of scope request), granted continued recognition of the agency under a good cause extension, and required that it come into compliance within six months and submit a compliance report.

On January 4, 2016, then Acting Secretary John King affirmed the decision concerning the two sections, 602.13 and 602.15(a)(3), that ACCJC had appealed. The Secretary also granted continued recognition pending the submission of a compliance report on Sections 602.13 and 602.15(a)(3) within 12 months.

The compliance report regarding the three sections that were under the good cause extension and the two section appealed by ACCJC, as well as a request to lift the limitation to the agency's current scope with respect to baccalaureate degrees to only those degrees currently approved, were reviewed at the February 2017 NACIQI meeting. Both NACIQI and Department staff recommended to accept the report and lift the limitation. The senior Department official, Assistant Secretary Holly L. Ham, concurred with the recommended findings.

In conjunction with the agency's petition for recognition, Department staff reviewed the agency's supporting documentation, request to for an expansion of scope, and observed a commission meeting in June 2018 and a site visit in October 2018.

Since the agency's last review in February 2017, the Department has received no complaints.

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## PART II: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The agency meets the requirements of the Secretary's Criteria for Recognition.

## PART III: THIRD PARTY COMMENTS

### **Staff Analysis of 3rd Party Written Comments**

Three written third-party comments were received regarding this agency. All of the comments reflected positive views regarding the agency, and the commenters are members of the faculty and/or staff of California community colleges.