

# The Bulldog Bulletin

October 14, 2013

## The Accreditation Visit

### Tales from the team room

College of San Mateo has spent the last two and a half years working on its *Self-Evaluation Report* in preparation for the College's accreditation visit next week. In reality, however, our College has been working on accreditation since the last accreditation visit six years ago.

CSM has worked diligently to establish an environment where we constantly review our institution against the accreditation standards after receiving a warning from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) in 2008. Long gone are the days when colleges only worried about accreditation every six years.

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I made the decision to serve on accreditation visiting teams after CSM was placed on warning. I felt that I needed a better understanding of the process and the only way to gain that understanding was to "get inside the team room" and serve as a member of an accreditation visiting team.

Since 2008 I have served on four visiting teams, including three times as a team chair. I have also served as the team chair on five follow-up visits and I am scheduled to chair a sixth follow-up visit one week after our accreditation visit.

I am glad that I made this choice. I have gained a valuable insight to the process that would not have been possible otherwise. I have also had an opportunity to meet and work with other wonderful faculty and administrators throughout our system who are as passionate about the mission of community colleges as we are. Finally, I appreciate the CSM faculty and administrators who have also participated on accreditation visiting teams. They have been a great resource as we have prepared for our accreditation visit.

As we make final preparations for our visit next week, I thought I would share some of what I have learned as a member of a visiting team:

- 1) *The visiting team members are peers, not judges*  
It is important to remember that the members of the visiting team are no different than us. They are peers who have volunteered a significant amount of their time to review our College in the context of the accreditation standards. They are not here to put our college on sanction. After the visit, team members will return to their own campuses and resume their work as faculty and administrators.
- 2) *Much of the team's work is completed before the visit*  
An accreditation site visit is a whirlwind of activity from the moment the team arrives until the team departs. Accreditation team members receive the *Self-Evaluation Report* about one month in advance of the visit and team members are expected to complete most of their work before the accreditation visit. During the site visit much of the team's work consists of interviewing key college members and committees to confirm what has been reported in the *Self-Evaluation Report*.
- 3) *The College's Self-Evaluation Report is crucial*  
Each team member relies primarily on the information and evidence contained in the *Self-Evaluation Report* in order to judge whether or not the College meets or exceeds accreditation standards. Thus, the *Self-Evaluation Report* and supporting evidence are crucial.

CSM's *Self Evaluation Report* is over 1,000 pages long. However, almost half of CSM's report is a direct result of the additional evidence requirements stipulated by the ACCJC. This policy change was made while our College was in the final stages of writing the report.

Finally, in my experience as a team chair, I have seen colleges fail to provide adequate documentation regarding how they meet accreditation standards. This should not be left for the team members to figure out. That is why we decided to error on the side of caution and provide full documentation regarding our response to accreditation standards.



- 4) *There is more than one way to meet a standard.*  
 Every college has its own way of doing things. The focus of the team will be on whether or not the College meets the standard--not the way in which the standard is met. As a team chair, I have had team members, on occasion, who have had difficulty in making this distinction. It is the job of the team chair to work with the team so that the focus is on whether or not the college meets standards.
- 5) *Be honest*  
 We have worked very hard to meet or exceed accreditation standards over the last six years, and every assertion that we make in our *Self-Evaluation Report* is backed by evidence. There is no need to try to “pull one over” on the visiting team. And believe me, visiting teams know when a college is not 100 percent honest.
- 5) *We should expect to receive some recommendations*  
 No college is perfect and it is common for every college to receive some recommendations from the team, even if the college meets all of the accreditation standards. In fact, we have developed a planning agenda to address areas where we feel that we meet the standard, but that we would like to improve. As a chair, I have always been impressed at how a team can come together after viewing the college through many lenses and develop helpful recommendations.

### A final word:

We all know that there has been controversy regarding ACCJC recently. While I believe that no organization should be immune to feedback or constructive criticism, our focus over this last year has been to prepare fully for the accreditation visit next week.

Thank you all so much for supporting the College’s *Self-Evaluation Report*. Many of you were active participants in the preparation of the report, and others provided constructive feedback along the way. Most importantly, our *Self-Evaluation Report* is merely a reflection of what we do to serve our students and the community day in and day out.

I am looking forward to working with the accreditation visiting team next week and to a successful visit.

## Meetings and Events:

Date	Meeting/Event
10/14	Student Senate Meeting College Heights (10-468) 2:15-4:15
10/14	Meet the Student Ambassadors College Center Terrace (2nd floor) 2:00-3:30
10/15	ASCSM Town Hall with SMCCCD Board of Trustees Candidates College Center (Bay View Dining) 12:00-1:30
10/16	Private University College Fair College Center (Bay View Dining) 10:00-1:00
10/16	CSM Symphonic Band Concert Theatre 7:30-9:00 pm
10/17	Earthquake Preparedness Drill 10:17 am; 7:15 pm
10/18	Institutional Planning & Budgeting College Heights (10-468) 1:00-3:00
10/18	Accreditation Oversight Committee College Heights 3:00-4:00
10/21	CSM Jazz Ensembles Concert Theatre 7:30-9:30 pm
10/22	Autumn Job Fair College Center (Bay View) 10:00-1:00
10/24	Accreditation Team Findings College Center (10-195) 1:00

*Meetings are open to all unless stated otherwise. For a listing of all college events, please refer to the CSM Event Calendar: [collegeofsanmateo.edu/calendar](http://collegeofsanmateo.edu/calendar)*