**An Update on the Baccalaureate Pilot Program and ACCJC**

September 2016

John Stanskas, ASCCC Vice President

The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges has been working for the last two years to support the pilot colleges implementing the CCC baccalaureate degrees authorized on September 28, 2014 when Governor Brown signed SB850 (Block, 2014) into law.  Progress was documented two *Rostrum* articles from 2015, “Defining the CCC Bachelor’s Degree [[1]](http://www.asccc.org/content/update-baccalaureate-pilot-program-and-accjc#_ftn1)” and “Results of the Baccalaureate Degree Taskforce Survey to the Field [[2]](http://www.asccc.org/content/update-baccalaureate-pilot-program-and-accjc#_ftn2)”.

A series of resolutions passed by the delegates to the Fall 2015 ASCCC Plenary Session (F15 9.01, 9.02, 9.04, 9.05, 9.06, 10.01) set the minimum standards for baccalaureate degrees that we, as faculty, expect in the areas of defining upper division coursework, defining the number of upper division units required, expectations for general education, and minimum qualifications for faculty to teach upper division courses.  The ASCCC then worked with the CCC Chancellor’s Office to create *The Baccalaureate Degree Pilot Program Handbook* [***[3]***](http://www.asccc.org/content/update-baccalaureate-pilot-program-and-accjc#_ftn3), which was approved by the Board of Governors in March 2016.  The handbook reflects the advice and judgment of the faculty in areas of program development, minimum qualifications, and student success.

*Regional Accreditation Concerns*

In January 2016, soon after a first reading by the Board of Governors made the *Baccalaureate Degree Pilot Program Handbook* a public document, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) posted a draft policy on Accreditation of Baccalaureate Degrees [[4]](http://www.asccc.org/content/update-baccalaureate-pilot-program-and-accjc#_ftn4).  The Chancellor’s Office reached out to ACCJC in an attempt to reconcile the differences between the system’s recommendations and those outlined in the draft policy.  In March, after the second reading and adoption of the handbook by the Board of Governors, ACCJC issued a statement indicating they wished to work with representatives from the colleges [[5]](http://www.asccc.org/content/update-baccalaureate-pilot-program-and-accjc#_ftn5) to receive input regarding accreditation processes.  In that spirit, the pilot college chief executive officers, the Chancellor’s Office, and the ASCCC all reached out together to improve ACCJC’s draft policy.  From March through June 2016, these combined system voices repeatedly requested a meeting, a dialog, or any rational exchange of ideas.  Instead, ACCJC responded with a webinar that, while publicly posted, contains factual misinformation and does not include the comments submitted by participants during the webinar.  CCC System representatives also took part in one phone meeting in late May, during which representatives from the ACCJC explained their policy and were unable to provide any documented rationale for their decisions.  An ACCJC representative asserted that the policy is the direct result of conversations with the federal Department of Education, but no written documentation detailing these conversation or conclusions drawn from them was ever released.  The system’s representatives repeatedly pointed out that ACCJC’s policy is the most proscriptive in the country and represents a level of rigidity and inflexibility not found by any other regional accreditor.  In fact, some degree programs accredited under WASC-Senior (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) are not in compliance with the policy adopted by ACCJC.   Unfortunately, the community college system’s accrediting body continues to turn a deaf ear to the system and its leaders.  ACCJC accredits 132 colleges; the California Community Colleges represent 113 of those, yet ACCJC remains unresponsive to the system’s concerns.

*Differences between the CCC and ACCJC Policies*

ACCJC’s policy and that adopted by the California Community College System contain several differences.  The relevant aspects of the ACCJC policy are as follows:

1. ACCJC requires 40 semester units of upper division
2. ACCJC requires 36 units of general education, of which at least 9 units must be of upper division general education.
3. ACCJC requires a master’s degree to teach upper division.  Specifically, the language states,

*Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:*

*The qualifications for faculty teaching upper division courses in the baccalaureate degree include the requirement for a master’s degree (or academic credentials at least one level higher than the baccalaureate degree) or doctoral degree, in an appropriate discipline.*

*In cases where no Master’s degree is available for the field of study, the qualifications for faculty teaching upper division courses in the baccalaureate degree include a bachelor’s degree in the discipline or closely related discipline, and a Master’s degree in any discipline, and demonstrated industry work experience in the field for a minimum of six years, and commonly required industry-recognized certification or professional licensure.*

*The Commission may require some faculty in non-career technical education baccalaureate programs to have the recognized terminal degree in the field of study.*

California community college faculty recommended and the system adopted a minimum of 24 units of upper division coursework and a general education pattern following IGETC or CSU-GE Breadth for lower division in addition to six units of upper division.  In addition, the system recommendation was that the minimum qualification to teach upper division is a bachelor’s degree and six years of experience working in the field for CTE programs that do not generally require a master’s degree.  The recommendations from the system were developed after nearly a year of research across the country and evaluating other regional accreditors’ expectations and requirements.  The flexibility built into the recommendations accounts for degrees that may be very heavy in lower division course work such as chemistry or dental hygiene, general education patterns that permit student movement throughout the system and to other systems, and standard expectations for faculty preparation in fields where no master’s degree program exists and industry expertise and experience are integral to a functional program.

*Where Do We Go From Here?*

For the moment, the Academic Senate and the Chancellor’s Office will strive to help pilot colleges offering the baccalaureate degree determine how to comply with both the ACCJC recommendations and those adopted by the Board of Governors.  To that end, a meeting of faculty leaders and program implementers will take place in September at the Chancellor’s Office.

In the longer view, the system is pursuing two tracks regarding accreditation.   With the endorsement of the Board of Governors, the system’s chief executive officers have created two separate task forces.  The first task force, with Academic Senate participation, is working to improve the processes of our current accreditor, ACCJC, to better serve the colleges.  The second task force is evaluating the system’s options regarding regional accreditation that aligns the three systems of public higher education in California [[6]](http://www.asccc.org/content/update-baccalaureate-pilot-program-and-accjc#_ftn6).  The difficulties with ACCJC regarding the baccalaureate degree policies are one more example of why faculty must support both task forces in their efforts to ensure that our institutions are able to meet the needs of their students and their communities.

The articles published in the Rostrum do not necessarily represent the adopted positions of the academic senate. For adopted positions and recommendations,