

***Testimony Before
NACIQI in Washington, DC
December 16, 2015
On behalf of Brice W. Harris
Chancellor of the California Community Colleges***

Good morning. My name is Brice Harris and I have the honor of serving as Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, representing more than 2 million students in 113 colleges. My purpose for being here today is to oppose the request by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges to expand its scope of recognition. Currently the ACCJC is recognized to accredit two-year institutions that offer the first bachelor's degree by means of substantive change review. This is sufficient for the short-term purposes of California community colleges. We would urge that no change be made to that scope of recognition so as not to endanger our bachelor's degree pilot program now under way.

Unfortunately, we cannot support the expansion of ACCJC's scope of recognition to accredit colleges that grant multiple bachelor's degrees. In fact, we cannot support any expansion of the commission's scope of recognition. We do not take this position lightly, and it should not be interpreted as resistance to peer evaluation and accountability. Our colleges are fully committed to the ideals and values of regional accreditation and to continuous institutional quality improvement.

Our opposition to ACCJC's request is driven by overwhelming evidence that our system no longer believes the commission will accredit colleges in a consistent, collegial, fair and transparent manner. In August, a task force on accreditation that I convened concluded that the California Community College system and its member institutions have lost confidence in the ACCJC. The document drew upon five previous reports prepared since 2009 by different organizations, including the California state auditor, that have exhaustively documented ACCJC shortcomings, such as inconsistent treatment of colleges, lack of alignment with other regional accreditors, unclear expectations and inadequate training. Between 2009 and 2013 the ACCJC's sanction rate was 53 percent, compared to an average of 12 percent by the other regional accreditors.

Since August, there has been overwhelming endorsement of the task force findings and recommendations. Chief among those in support are the statewide boards representing chief executive officers, faculty, trustees, students, chief instructional officers and many more.

In short, there is widespread consensus among our colleges that the ACCJC is no longer a reliable authority regarding the quality of education or training provided by the colleges it accredits, which goes squarely to a standard before you today, 602.16(a)(1)(i).

I would also add that as our colleges expand their mission and begin granting bachelor's degrees, we feel it is more appropriate to receive peer review from professionals in four-year institutions to ensure quality for our students.

In closing, I would ask that you not approve the ACCJC's request for an expanded scope of recognition, as we are pursuing a new model of accreditation for California community colleges.