

Updates to Our Members

Action Letter Nomenclature:

In the Commission's letters that will convey its actions from January 2018, and in the letters issuing from its subsequent sessions, you will find some small but important differences in the language from that which you have seen in previous letters. Please accept several brief explanations.

The Commission's mission encompasses two goals: To verify institutional quality and effectiveness and to foster continuous improvement. The specific terms that are used to express this dual mission have occasionally been confusing. For example, when peer review teams prepare their reports, they make a number of recommendations in two categories: "Recommendations to meet the Standards" (compliance recommendations), and "Recommendations to improve effectiveness" (improvement recommendations). The confusion has arisen when the Commission, in its formal action, endorses the team's recommendations and includes them in its Action Letter using the same terminology.

A "recommendation" is a term that invites consideration but does not require a response. But when the Commission makes a "Recommendation to meet the Standards," a response is not optional. It has informed the institution that it has been found in noncompliance with one or more Standards and must address the matter within a prescribed period of time. Beginning with this review cycle, the Commission Action Letters will identify compliance findings with the term "Requirement" rather than "Recommendation." Using this term should clarify that a response is expected from the institution.

Role of a Team's Recommendation:

On a related matter, this is a good occasion to clarify the collaborative yet distinctive roles of the peer review teams and the Commission. Teams are trained and sent to the institution as the "eyes of the Commission" to verify and clarify the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER). The team then composes a detailed report on their findings, which includes recommendations. *These are, however, only recommendations.* The team is not vested with decision authority regarding the accredited status of an institution. Its report informs the Commission but does not obligate the Commission. Based on its experience in dealing with many reports over an extended period of time, the Commission may endorse, modify, or delete a team recommendation. The Commission may determine that an improvement recommendation should in fact address compliance – or vice versa. This is in keeping with established protocols and is an important mechanism to ensure consistency. Any changes made by the Commission to the team's recommendations will be noted in the Commission's Action Letter.

The outcome of this is that compliance-related planning by the institution is grounded in the wording of the Commission's Action Letter. The team report remains a vital resource as it provides context and detail to inform the institution's planning. Any variance in wording, however, between the team's recommendations and the Commission's stated requirements should be understood in the context of their distinct roles.

Previously, the Commission detailed in a separate document any changes between the team's wording and that of the Commission. In view of the above explanations, this practice has been discontinued. Please contact your vice president liaison if you have any questions about these changes.

Commission Elections:

At its January session, the Commission elected Dr. Sonya Christian to serve as the Vice Chair of the Commission. She will begin to serve on the Executive Committee in this role in July when Commissioner Ian Walton assumes the role of the Chair. Then, in keeping with ACCJC bylaws, she will assume the role of Chair two years later when Walton concludes his term as Chair. Dr. Christian is the President of Bakersfield College and has served on the Commission since 2015.

Commissioner Erik Skinner, who has represented the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office since 2014, has taken a position at a member college and thus needed to withdraw from his Commissioner role. Chancellor Eloy Oakley has appointed Theresa Tena, Vice Chancellor for Institutional Effectiveness, to succeed Commissioner Skinner.

Watch for an announcement that the 2018 Commission election cycle will soon open. The Commission will be seeking candidates for two open academic positions.

Assessment Leadership Academy:

Sponsored by our colleagues at the WASC Senior College and University Commission, the Assessment Leadership Academy (ALA) has served to enrich assessment practices in the region by developing assessment leaders within our member institutions. Historically, a number of selected participants have come from ACCJC institutions and, in the judgment of the leaders, have added great value to the shared learning experience. The ninth cohort of ALA learners is being formed, with a February 15 deadline. If there are potential participants in your institutions, please forward this notice to them with the registration link: <https://www.wscuc.org/ala/overview>