



REPORT OF THE WASC TEAM

SPECIAL VISIT

To Teachers College of San Joaquin

Visit Date: October 2-4, 2013

Team Roster

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The team evaluated the institution under the 2008 WASC Senior College and University Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission.

The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WASC website.

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Section I – Overview and Context

A. Description of the Institution and Visit

Background information.

Teachers College of San Joaquin (TCSJ) was founded in 2009, and operates within the San Joaquin County Office of Education in Stockton, CA. It offers graduate level credential programs in teaching and administration, a Masters of Education degree with four specializations, and two non-degree programs in education. The mission of TCSJ is to “develop a workforce of teachers and school leaders who are comfortable with collaboration, understand the need to prepare students for both work and higher education, and have the skills to develop, implement and sustain innovative educational ideas” (TCSJ Catalog, 2013; TCSJ Special Visit Report, p. 3). TCSJ currently serves more than 450 graduate students from across Northern California. Program development, teaching, and learning are guided by the principles of rigor, relevance, relationships, and reflection (TCSJ Catalog).

Recent accreditation history, and summary list of the issues.

In February of 2011, the Commission received the WASC team CPR report for Teachers College of San Joaquin (TCSJ) and approved proceeding with the EER visit for candidacy with the potential for initial accreditation. The September 2011 report of the EER team found TCSJ to have “...a sound educational offering, a cadre of highly dedicated faculty and students, and committed to continuous improvement”. Following the EER visit, the Commission acted in March 2012 to grant TCSJ initial accreditation with an off-site review scheduled in fall 2016, and a visit in spring 2017.

The Commission also acted to request a Special Visit in fall 2013 to review progress on four issues:

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1. Board structure.

The unique development of TCSJ meant that it did not initially have an independent governing board as required in CFRs 1.3, 3.8, 3.9, related Guideline (Handbook of Accreditation, 2008, p. 19), and Policy the on Independent Governing Boards. At the time of the EER visit, the team found that steps were being taken by the Superintendent and Board to realign responsibilities so that the five SJCOE board members would also have governing responsibility for TCSJ.

The Commission letter of March 6, 2012 stated that in accordance with Guidelines for CFRs 3.8 and 3.9 (Handbook of Accreditation, p. 19) the SJCOE board should be familiar with expectations and responsibilities of college and university governing boards, including having a meaningful role in the selection and evaluation of the CEO; creating mechanisms for assessing board governance responsibilities; and using the results to enhance board effectiveness.

2. Financial account systems and auditing.

At the time of the EER, the team found financial accounts of TCSJ to be blended with those of the County Office of Education, and therefore financial reports were of limited informational value for on-going governance and management of TCSJ (CFRs 1.8, 3.5). The Commission letter of March 6, 2012 asked that TCSJ separate its financial accounts and records from the SJCOE and retain a qualified firm to conduct an independent audit of TCSJ finances.

3. Strategic planning.

The EER team commended TCSJ for the representative and collaborative process used in creating a strategic plan and incorporating the mission and core learning outcomes to inform the plan. The Commission action letter (March 6, 2012, p. 4)

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requested TCSJ to incorporate six elements in its strategic plan, and use results from data analysis to inform each priority. The six elements to be included are: specific priorities; targets; milestones; a timeline; consideration of resources needed to support implementation; and lines of responsibility (CFRs 4.1-4.3).

4. Faculty diversity.

At the time of the CPR report, TCSJ had identified faculty diversity as an area in need of attention. By the time of the EER visit, the team found that goals and benchmarks for faculty diversity had been incorporated into the strategic plan. The Commission letter of March 6, 2012 acknowledged the small number of TCSJ faculty and the challenges in hiring diverse faculty, but urged continued attention to increasing faculty diversity (CFRs 1.5, 2.1, 2.10, 2.13, 3.2).

B. The Institution's Special Visit Report: Quality of the Special Visit Report and Supporting Evidence

The Special Visit Report was well written and evidence-based. It included the required data exhibits to support assertions in the report. The team found there was broad involvement of all stakeholders in the preparation of the Special Visit Report. Specifically, input came from students, faculty, administrators, the governing board, advisory board, Diversity Task Force, and SJCOE Chief Business Officer. Three separate committees within the TCSJ community worked separately and then together to purposefully gather, analyze, and report findings that contributed responses to the four focus issues in the report, and to the TCSJ 2012 action plan.

The report directly addressed each of the four recommendations identified by the Commission for attention in the action letter of March 6, 2012, though progress in accomplishing Commission requests for each issue was uneven. The report employed meaningful findings from program review reports, faculty and student feedback, financial reports, and enrollment numbers.

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Actions to move forward showed TCSJ is using evidence to inform action. The TCSJ report accurately described its actions to date on the four issues identified in the WASC action letter.

Pre-visit activities.

The team received the TCSJ Special Visit report and other supporting documents on August 12th, 2013. Team members made individual notes, which were aggregated and shared prior to a team conference call on September 3rd. The team discussed the TCSJ report, and identified specific issues and clarifying questions in preparation for interviews.

The team met the evening before the visit to review the major issues to be explored, review questions to be asked of TCSJ personnel at scheduled meetings, and review decision options following the visit.

Visit activities.

The team interviewed the President, Dean, ALO, Governing Board, leadership teams, adjunct faculty, Diversity Task Force, advisory board, students, the TCSJ Manager of Student Accounts, and the Deputy Superintendent of Business Services for SJCOE who performs many of the functions of financial management for TCSJ. The team shared and discussed at length among themselves information from interviews, and where questions arose, talked further with TCSJ personnel. In addition, while on site, the team reviewed binders of material prepared by TCSJ such as the Personnel Manual and minutes from TCSJ meetings.

Section II – Team Analysis of the Issues

A. Issue: Board Structure

Evidence reviewed.

The evidence reviewed included:

- The March 6, 2012 Commission action letter
- EER team report
- TCSJ Special Visit Report
- Governing Board Bylaws

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- Email correspondence between TCSJ and WASC staff
- TCSJ website
- Interviews with TCSJ personnel
- WASC Independent Governing Board Policy

Analysis of evidence.

In its March 2012 Action Letter, the Commission asked for the Special Visit team to review the progress TCSJ has made on implementing a new governing Board structure. In Fall 2011, Teachers College of San Joaquin created a five-member independent governing board that assumed legal and fiduciary responsibility for the college (CFR 3.9). Despite the continued identical membership with SJCOE's Board, the agendas, meetings, deliberations and decisions are independent as evidenced through an on-site meeting with three Board members and a comprehensive review of Board minutes. The Board's authority is currently focused on mission and purpose; approval of changes to academic programs, budget, tuition and fees and financial oversight; policy approval; awarding of honorary degrees; and college advocacy in regard to matters of public policy (TCSJ Special Visit Report, p. 7).

A review of materials provided to the team showed that quarterly meetings of the Board are scheduled and open to the public. The President and Dean prepare board meeting agendas and materials, and the Board Chair conducts meetings. Agenda items are both informational and action-item oriented. Board policy includes a conflict of interest code, and a quorum is articulated as a majority of the board's membership.

In Fall 2011 in consultation with WASC staff, TCSJ developed board bylaws and policies to independently govern the college. Changes in bylaws resulted in at least two extant versions. The bylaws provided to the team, dated December 20, 2012 were missing key provisions that were shared with WASC staff by email on February 20, 2012. The table below shows the differences.

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Governing Board Bylaws	February 15, 2012 version	December 20, 2012 version
Article III	The TCSJ Governing Board membership shall consist of five members of the San Joaquin County Board of Education.	The TCSJ Governing Board shall consist of the members of the San Joaquin County Board of Education.
Article V.3	Annually the Board will conduct a performance review of the President and inform the County Superintendent of its findings.	Missing from Dec 2012 version.
Article V.4	The Teachers College of San Joaquin Governing Board meetings will be facilitated by the Chair, who will be elected by the Board membership.... The Secretary will be elected by the Board membership.	Missing from Dec 2012 version.
Article VI	There will be three committees of the Board: Finance, Audit and Academics...	Committees will be formed, as needed, and will be designed for specific functions to reflect the goals and strategies developed by the TCSJ Governing Board
	The County Superintendent will apprise the TCSJ Board on the selection, hiring and evaluation of the President of TCSJ.	Missing from Dec 2012 version.

In a follow up meeting, the Dean stated that during administrative personnel changes at TCSJ, the December 20, 2012 bylaws were inadvertently presented to the board and passed by the board rather than the February 15, 2012 version of the bylaws, which had been agreed upon with WASC staff.

The December 20, 2012 version of the bylaws were included with the TCSJ Special Visit Report, and are what is shown on the TCSJ website (TCSJ Governing board bylaws). During the visit, the Dean created a redline version of the December 20, 2012 bylaws to highlight what had been in the February 15, 2012 version. The team recommends that the President of TCSJ work with WASC staff to clarify what should be included in Governing Board bylaws to conform to WASC Standards (CFR 3.9) and the Policy on Independent Governing Boards.

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The Commission action letter (p. 2) requested the governing board to create “mechanisms for assessing how well the board performs its governance responsibilities”. The team was concerned to see no evidence of such mechanisms.

Article VI of the February 15, 2012 bylaws stipulated three committees for the governing board: Finance, Audit, and Academics to comply with WASC’s Policy on Independent Governing Boards. The TCSJ Special Visit Report (p. 8) stated the committees would be placed on the September 2013 Board agenda; however no action had been taken at the time of the visit. In meetings with the President, Board members, and Dean, uncertainty was expressed about how a small, five-member Board might staff Board Committees. The Board Chair stated that, given the Board members’ responsibilities as the SJCOE Board, the added workload of committees would only be experienced as cumulative. The team recommends that the committees be established with membership augmented by drawing from non-Board members with relevant expertise.

The team’s review of the President’s job description found an absence both of clearly articulated responsibilities, and of a role definition in scope and scale that would not be typical in higher education institutions. Mechanisms for evaluating the President have not yet been developed (CFR 3.9; WASC Independent Governing Board Policy, p. 5).

Findings and conclusions about progress in addressing board structure.

Bylaws for the TCSJ Governing Board have been developed. The TCSJ President will work with WASC staff to resolve discrepancies between versions so that bylaws meet WASC Standards (CFRs 1.3, 3.8, 3.9 and related Guideline) and the Policy on Independent Governing Boards.

Mechanisms for assessing how well the board performs its governance responsibilities have yet to be developed (WASC Independent Governing Board Policy, pp. 6-7).

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The governing board has not yet resolved the issue of creating committees for finance, audit, and academic affairs (WASC Independent Governing Board Policy, pp. 2, 6).

The job description for the president of TCSJ is lacking in clarity, scope, and scale for a typical institute of higher education (WASC Independent Governing Board Policy, pp. 7-8).

Mechanisms for evaluating the President have yet to be developed (CFR 3.9; WASC Independent Governing Board Policy, p. 5).

B. Issue: Financial Accounting Systems and Auditing

Evidence reviewed.

The evidence reviewed included:

- The March 6, 2012 Commission action letter
- EER team report
- TCSJ Special Visit Report
- TCSJ financial statements
- 2011 audit by the firm of Crowe Horwath, LLP
- Phone interview with Crowe Horwath, LLP, October 1, 2013
- Interviews with TCSJ and SJCOE personnel

Analysis of evidence.

In its March 2012 Action Letter, the Commission asked for the Special Visit team to review the progress TCSJ has made on “separate financial accounts systems and the independent audit”, underscoring a call in the 2011 EER team report for TCSJ to “complete the transition for separate financial accounts within the SJCOE accounting system and arrange for annual independent audits of TCSJ accounts” (2011 EER Team Report, p. 29). The 2011 team noted that TCSJ also should comply with the Commission Policy on Institutions with Non-educational Components. Further, the EER team noted that this separation of accounts, along with regular reports to the TCSJ Board, has the important purpose of accurately reflecting the financial condition of TCSJ as a separately accredited entity. These accounts should indicate both stand-alone financial viability, and be structured to meet the financial planning and management needs of a graduate institution of higher education (CFR 3.5).

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In response to the Commission's request, TCSJ (through the Business Office of SJCOE) engaged Crowe Horwath, LLP, an outside accounting firm, to complete a separate audit for FY2011. The second, separate audit for FY2012 will be completed this fall by the firm Christy White and Associates, LLP. The change in auditors stems from the regular practice of bidding for audit services by the SJCOE.

Findings and conclusions about progress in addressing financial accounting systems and auditing.

The team was pleased to find that audits provide evidence that TCSJ has successfully addressed the Commission's concerns, appropriately separating TCSJ's financial accounts from the SJCOE. In addition, the TCSJ Board has reviewed and approved the FY2012 audit, and has reviewed and approved the unaudited closing FY2013 accounts (CFR 3.9).

C. Issue: Strategic Planning

The TCSJ Special Visit Report showed the strategic planning process to be representative and collaborative, and that the mission and core learning outcomes informed the plan. Administrators including the Governing Board, full and part-time faculty, and students contributed to the planning (TCSJ Special Visit Report, p. 5).

Evidence reviewed.

The evidence reviewed included:

- The March 6, 2012 Commission action letter
- EER team report
- TCSJ Special Visit Report
- Interviews with TCSJ personnel

Analysis of evidence.

The Commission action letter (March 6, 2012, p. 4) requested TCSJ to incorporate six elements in its strategic plan, and use results from data analysis to inform each priority. The six elements are numbered below, each followed by a description of the action taken by TCSJ.

1. Incorporate specific priorities into the strategic plan.

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TCSJ's strategic plan shows three specific priorities. They include:

- a. A transformative, relevant, innovative 21st century learning environment;
- b. Operations and governance that support and promote growth; and
- c. Broadening and expanding financial resources (TCSJ Special Visit Report, p. 15).

2. Identify targets for each priority.

Targets for each of the three priorities are clearly identified (TCSJ Special Visit Report, pp. 22-27).

3. Identify milestones for targets within each priority.

Milestones are stated, but the team suggests more specific, observable measures be articulated where applicable so that it is clear when milestones are achieved. For example, in the plan for Priority One, Academic engagement for success, in the section Staff and Faculty Evaluation (p. 27, right column), what evidence might demonstrate that a culture of reflection and continuous improvement has been achieved?

4. Identify a timeline for accomplishing initiatives in each priority.

Initiatives in each priority have a general timeline for being accomplished in a fiscal year (TCSJ Special Visit Report, pp. 22-27).

5. Show an estimate of resources needed to support plans for initiatives in each priority (CFRs 4.1-4.3).

The team was concerned that the TCSJ Special Visit Report did not include an estimate of resources needed for initiatives in any of the three priorities.

6. Identify lines of responsibility for carrying out each initiative (CFRs 4.1-4.3).

The team was concerned that the TCSJ Special Visit Report did not include assigned lines of responsibility for elements of strategic initiatives.

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Interviews with TCJS administrators showed a clear understanding of the need for significantly greater detail to be added to strategic plan targets. Changes of personnel in key leadership positions during the past year and a delay in filling support positions resulted in a pause in detailed strategic planning. Administrators pushed back development of the strategic plan to fall 2013 and spring 2014, and will then involve faculty in expanding each box within the strategic plan charts (TCSJ Special Visit Report, pp. 22-27) to include more specific timelines, identification of resources, and lines of responsibility.

Findings and conclusions about progress in addressing strategic planning.

There is a need for the TCSJ strategic plan to include an estimate of resources and lines of responsibility (CFRs 4.1, 4.2).

D. Issue: Faculty Diversity

Evidence reviewed.

The evidence reviewed included:

- The March 6, 2012 Commission action letter
- EER team report
- TCSJ Special Visit Report
- Interviews with TCSJ personnel
- TCSJ committee minutes

Analysis of evidence.

The March 2012 WASC action letter noted that “progress needs to be made in the recruiting and retaining a faculty that more closely reflects the diversity of the student body and the general Stockton community”. The Commission further recognized that “TCSJ has a small faculty made up of expert-practitioners and that its pool of prospective faculty members is limited to those currently teaching or serving as administrators in school districts.” Despite these challenges, the Commission urged continued attention to increasing faculty diversity (CFRs 1.5, 2.1, 2.10, 2.13, 3.2). The Commission action letter echoed the 2011 EER team report, which

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recommended “continued efforts to achieve greater faculty diversity so that representation more closely resembles the population served” (2011 EER Team Report, p. 29).

In response to the Commission’s request, TCSJ has made progress in addressing this issue. Based on interviews with the leadership team, faculty, students, Governing Board, and upon review of documents, TCSJ has analyzed data, discussed at length the representation of different groups within the student body, faculty, staff and Governing Board (CFS 3.3). Additionally, TCSJ has begun several initiatives to bring about greater faculty diversity.

TCSJ convened a Diversity Task Force in 2012 to develop a plan for their students to receive instruction from a faculty who were more reflective of gender, ethnicity, and beliefs of the student body. As part of the plan, the task force recommended a database of experts that faculty could bring in to classes for support and enrichment of curricula. Interviews during the visit confirmed that faculty members embraced the plan for a database of experts at their winter 2012 faculty meeting, and the compiling of the database was begun in summer 2013.

Additionally, two subcommittees, one made up of students and the other comprised of faculty, have been convened to augment the efforts of the TCSJ Diversity Task Force. Interviews with the students and faculty, and a review of the Diversity Task Force’s minutes indicated that specific agenda items included review of demographic comparison data, and review of the strategic plan (CFR 3).

The Diversity Task Force further recommended continued focus on recruiting faculty who more closely reflect the diversity of the TCSJ student body and the San Joaquin County K-12 student population. The TCSJ Special Visit Report (p. 30) noted that the Hispanics comprised a significantly higher proportion of TCSJ student compared to the faculty. A review of the TCSJ proposed strategic plan includes goals and benchmarks for hiring diverse faculty to more closely reflect the ethnicity of TCSJ students (CFR 1.5). Over the next four years, the goal

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is to increase the overall proportion of Hispanic faculty by 27%. As of July 2013, five new faculty of color had been hired: two Hispanics, one Asian, and two from India (CFR 3.2). As of the October 2013 site visit, TCSJ has identified key education stakeholder groups that can be of assistance in recruiting a more diverse practitioner faculty. Interviews with the leadership team indicated that two new positions are posted, each having faculty recruitment responsibilities as part of their job description (CFR 3.3).

Findings and conclusions about progress in addressing faculty diversity.

The team was pleased to find that five new faculty of color have been hired, and that TCSJ has identified key education stakeholder groups who can be of assistance in recruiting a more diverse practitioner faculty. Interviews with the leadership team indicated that two new positions are posted, each having faculty recruitment responsibilities as part of their job description (CFR 3.3).

TCSJ has successfully given attention to increasing faculty diversity. As the diversity initiatives move from planning to practice, the team encourages TCSJ to continue to advance toward having a faculty that more closely reflects the diversity of the student body and general Stockton community.

Section III – Findings and Recommendations

Commendations

The team found much for which to commend Teachers College of San Joaquin (TCSJ).

1. TCSJ administrators, staff, and faculty are meaningfully engaged in developing students to become high quality educators and school leaders (CFR 1.5). The commitment of faculty to quality teaching was very evident and captured in a statement by an adjunct faculty member who said, “We teach our students as if they were family members”.

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2. The team was impressed with the deep commitment of TCSJ faculty to the college's educational purpose and mission, and that they regularly engage in collaborative conversation about academic quality (CFR 3.11). TCSJ faculty live out the core learning outcome of "providing rigorous, relevant, and innovative educational experiences for all students". Throughout the whole of TCSJ, there is evident pride in advancing students towards excellence as educators.
3. TCSJ clearly wants to develop its unique structure within the context of WASC's policies and procedures (CFR 1.9). The team heard repeatedly in interviews that TCSJ views the accreditation process as an opportunity to learn how they might more effectively carry out their mission.
4. TCSJ has responsibly and transparently established separate financial accounts that will better inform management of resources for teaching and learning, strategic planning, and enabling students to access financial aid (CFR 3.5). It was evident that this task had been embraced with great seriousness and a focus on meeting WASC's policies and standards.
5. TCSJ has been responsive and made progress toward addressing the issue of "increased diversity within the faculty". The formation of the TCSJ Diversity Task Force and identifying diversity as a priority in the Strategic Plan are indicators of initiatives that will help advance the diversity goals of the college (CFR 3.2).

Recommendations

Based on a thorough review of evidence prior to and during the visit, the team recommends

1. TCSJ develop a strong higher education identity and culture that includes leadership whose primary or full-time responsibility is focused on matters related to governance, Board development, accreditation, strategic and business planning, academic quality,

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financial success and diversification of funding streams (CFR 3.10). The team found TCSJ in transition moving from its P-12 roots to becoming an institution of higher education. The current leadership has worked primarily in a P-12 environment with limited administrative experience in a college or university setting. To take TCSJ to the next level, senior leadership and the Governing Board will need to fully embrace a culture of higher education and become more familiar with best practices and process for colleges and universities.

2. The President of TCSJ work with WASC staff to clarify what should be included in Governing Board bylaws to conform to WASC Standards (CFR 3.9) and the Policy on Independent Governing Boards. The team also recommends that, in line with WASC Independent Governing Board Policy, the Board establish at minimum three committees: audit, academic affairs, and finance committees, with membership augmented by drawing from non-Board members with relevant expertise.
3. TCSJ make systematic, deliberate progress in the three priorities identified in the strategic plan (TCSJ Special Visit Report, pp. 22-27) by refining time lines, identifying measures for each initiative, adding estimates of resources to complete each initiative, and adding lines of responsibility (CFRs 3.5, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3).
4. TCSJ make systematic, purposive efforts to assess and plan for the long-term financial sustainability of TCSJ (CFR 3.5). Estimates of resources for fiscal stability may include using a range of enrollment projections (partially identified in TCSJ's Priority Two, Operations and Governance) in more specific planning of TCSJ's Strategic priority Three, Fiscal Stability (TCSJ Special Visit Report, pp. 25-27).

References

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