



ACCREDITING COMMISSION for COMMUNITY and JUNIOR COLLEGES

Western Association of Schools and Colleges

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To: All Chancellors, Superintendent/Presidents, Presidents, and Accreditation Liaison Officers

From: Barbara A. Beno *Barbara A. Beno*

Subject: C-RAC Project on Graduation Rates

Yesterday, the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) issued a press release, embargoed until midnight, describing a decision by the regional accreditors to look more closely at institutions whose graduation rate, as contained on the [College Scorecard](#) and measured by the federal Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS), falls below 25% for four-year degree granting institutions, and 15% for two-year degree granting institutions. That news has hit the press this morning, and I am sure you have seen mention of it or read some of it. The [press release](#) itself can be found on the Accrediting Commission for Junior Colleges (ACCJC) website.

Our collective decision to take a deeper look at institutions falling below the trigger graduation rates is to ensure that the institutions are doing their best to promote student success. Part of our deeper examination of these institutions will be to look at the accuracy of the Scorecard data, look at alternative data (e.g., the six-year graduation rate) or additional data (e.g., transfer rates, certificate completion rates) that help measure student success. We will also look at the contextual conditions at colleges, and at the needs of the students the colleges serve in an effort to unpack the factors that lead to the IPEDS rates, and to identify meaningful metrics that can be used to evaluate institutional success at achieving mission. ACCJC will also work with institutions to explore their potential changes designed to increase graduation rates.

We all know that the Scorecard data are not highly accurate or complete, and that the IPEDS graduation rate represented there is not a fully representative metric for open access institutions. C-RAC has been reviewing the Scorecard over the last year and a half, has provided feedback to the United States Department of Education (USED) on the problems with the data, in hopes that the data quality will improve. At the same time, the Scorecard is being used by USED officials, members of Congress, press and policy-influencers to discuss the overall success of America's higher education system, and to make comparisons among institutions. Some of those using this data believe it should be used as the basis for deciding accreditation status. Accreditors are unwilling to use these data as "bright line" indicators, and as our press release indicates, will use the data as "triggers" to prompt a closer look.

Nineteen ACCJC institutions have a graduation rate of 15% or less. Over the next year, ACCJC will be working with these institutions to examine student success. At the end of the year, C-RAC will create a report on what all the regional accreditors find.

Our next Newsletter will include a longer article on the Scorecard Project. In the meantime, please feel free to call or write to ACCJC and me with any questions you have. I also advise you to watch the higher education press, as you will likely see other parties (e.g., USED, Congress) speaking about the utility of the Scorecard data.

As a higher education community, we know that educating a student is a complex process, and may not be a straightforward march toward graduation within the IPEDS timeframe. We also know that there are other forms of student success that benefit students and society – short term job training, enhanced job and communication skills that improve lives, broadened intellect and critical thinking that make our students/citizens better able to contribute to their families, communities and society. Higher education has been rather silent as the Scorecard data was developed. It is time we developed some meaningful measures, and some contextual information, that can inform USED, Congress and policymakers about the importance of open access higher education. I look forward to working with you on that.

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