



Ventura County Community College District

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July 26, 2012

The Honorable Vincent J. O'Neill, Jr.
Presiding Judge, Superior Court of California
County of Ventura
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Re: Ventura County Grand Jury Report dated May 31, 2012
Educational Inconsistencies within the VCCCD

The Honorable Vincent J. O'Neill, Jr.:

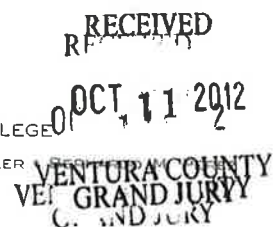
INTRODUCTION:

The Ventura County Community College District (herein referenced as VCCCD) Board of Trustees, College Presidents of Moorpark, Oxnard, and Ventura, and Academic Senate Presidents of Moorpark, Oxnard and Ventura are in receipt of the subject report prepared and filed by the 2011-12 Ventura County Civic Grand Jury.

For the past several years the VCCCD Board of Trustees has identified student success as one of their strategic objectives to "provide quality educational programs and services without barriers to ensure student course, degree or certificate completion and successful four-year college transfer or employment." This was formally adopted June 2010, reviewed in June 2011 and adopted as an Objective in October 2011. The Board has developed several objectives to meet that goal and they receive annual updates of progress toward that end. At the Board planning session of June 26, 2012, the colleges provided data to the Board that demonstrates districtwide improvement in persistence and completion rates by our students. The data shows an increased number of degrees, certificates, and transfers being completed.

The VCCCD is comprised of three independently accredited institutions. As such, and in accordance with the California Education Code, California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 5, and Assembly Bill (AB) 1725, the development of curriculum within each college is initiated and updated by the faculty of each respective institution.

Additionally, the colleges meet the Instructional and Student Services Standards set forth by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) and its Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior College (ACCJC). While the Grand Jury Report noted that the colleges are on sanction by the ACCJC, these sanctions are not levied based on any inability on the part of the colleges to maintain the standards regarding instruction and student services.



RESPONSE:

The Board of Trustees, College Presidents, Academic Senate Presidents, and District administration have thoroughly reviewed the report and have jointly prepared the following response.

Paragraph two of the Summary of the Report is inaccurate in stating that "...Students need to attend two or three campus to achieve full-time status 12 units or more)..." and that "...many students [are required] to navigate through all three colleges of the District." Institutional research data for the spring 2012 semester demonstrates that 93% of the district's 32,844 students obtained 100% of their required coursework solely from the college of their choice in the district.

REGARDING FINDINGS:

- FI-01 The Certificate programs at each of the VCCCD colleges differ in nomenclature for no apparent reason (Course numbering system). (FA-02); **and**
- FI-02 The Associate of Arts and the Associate of Science Degrees at each of the VCCCD colleges vary in nomenclature and in some cases unit value assigned to the same courses. The Grand Jury finds no apparent reason for these differences. (FA-03); **and**
- FI-05 The nomenclature is different for many courses with similar content across the VCCCD colleges for no apparent reason. (FA-08)

RESPONSE TO FINDINGS FI-01, FI-02, AND FI-05:

There are reasons for those differences. The ACCJC assesses and accredits individual colleges and districts as a whole are not accredited. Therefore, Moorpark College, Oxnard College, and Ventura College are separately accredited institutions and are recognized as such. The VCCCD is comprised of three independently accredited institutions. As such, the development of curriculum within each college is initiated and updated by the faculty of the respective institution. California Education Code, CCR Title 5, AB 1725 (1988), and the ACCJC clearly indicate that faculty have the primary role in the development of curriculum as well as its integrity. The faculty identify the content and unit value for the course at each individually accredited college, in accordance with the needs of the institution and the local community it serves. As a result, the course numbers, course names, unit numbers, and degrees differ among the colleges. There is no state or Accreditation requirement for uniform course number among independently accredited colleges, nor is there any expectation that this will take place at either the community college, state college or state university levels. As part of the Accreditation process, the ACCJC has verified that the faculty has played an appropriate role in curriculum development at all three colleges.

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REGARDING FINDINGS:

- FI-03 The Articulation Agreement for the California State University system at each of the VCCCD colleges varies in nomenclature used for no apparent reason. (FA-05-06); **and**
- FI-04 The Articulation Agreement for the University of California (IGETC) system at each of the VCCCD colleges varies in nomenclature used for no apparent reason. (FA-05-06)

RESPONSE TO FINDINGS FI-03 AND FI-04:

The ACCJC assesses and accredits individual colleges as opposed to districts. Moorpark College, Oxnard College, and Ventura College are independently accredited institutions. The colleges are recognized as such when establishing articulation agreements with individual campuses within the California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) systems. There are twenty-three (23) colleges within the CSU system and ten (10) universities within the UC system. Each of these thirty-three (33) institutions has its own course numbering system (and some differing unit values) for courses they hold in common in addition to courses, degrees and programs that may be unique to each of their campuses. Each independent college or university within the California State University or the University of California systems requires separate articulation agreements with each of the separately 112 accredited community colleges within the California Community College (CCC) system.

It is for this reason that each of the independently accredited colleges in the Ventura County Community College District has employed Articulation Officers, who are members of the Counseling Faculty, to establish articulation agreements with each of the state colleges and universities (as well as with many private institutions). In fact, each of the three Articulation Officer's Faculty at the three colleges, along with discipline Faculty, have established a table of equivalencies to assist counselors and students in identifying courses that are comparable in content and that may be used at more than one institution for degree or certificate completion purposes.

SB1440 (2010) required each California Community College to establish at least two (2) transfer degrees between themselves and the California State University system (CSU) over a multi-year implementation schedule. To facilitate this directive, so-called "Transfer Model Curriculum" (TMC) were developed collaboratively between the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) and the CSU Academic Senate. VCCCD has adopted twenty-four (24) such degrees, which have been approved by the state Chancellor's Office of the CCC, to create a more seamless transfer for students from community colleges to CSU in impacted majors. While some community colleges have only approved the bare minimum of two transfer degrees as required by statues, the VCCCD is one of the community college districts with the highest amount of transfer degrees approved or pending approval from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.

Several additional TMC/SB 1440 degrees are scheduled for development. The development and approval of these degrees is consistent with the Board Goal 1.a. which states that "Students are serviced more efficiently by expedited movement through District programs resulting in associate, transfer, and CTE degree and certificate completion. Student learning opportunities are enhanced by implementing system-wide efficiencies. Associate degree programs contain no more than 60 units with an appropriate mix of general education, core discipline, and exploratory elective courses."

REGARDING FINDING:

FI-06 The VCCCD does not reflect the student/counselor-ratio as proposed by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges. (FA-07)

RESPONSE TO FINDING FI-06:

The data provided in the Report (number of full-time counselors) is inaccurate. The number is understated as it does not include counselors funded from categorical sources. California has no legal mandate for a specific ratio of counselors to students; in fact, the number of counselors needed depends on the manner in which counseling services are provided. Counseling service may be provided online (such as through DegreeWorks, a newly implemented web-based academic advising and degree audit system), in large or small groups, within the formal structure of a class, individual appointment, etc. Furthermore, the number of counselors is supplemented by available categorical dollars to augment services to special populations. Importantly, the CCC Board of Governors has not adopted the statewide ASCCC's proposal regarding a student to counselor ratio. While accreditation standards require that student support services be provided, they do not dictate the manner in which they are provided, which, as stated above, guides the number of counselors needed.

REGARDING FINDING:

FI-07 The Grand Jury finds that there is an inconsistency in the Assessment Program across the three colleges of the VCCCD. (FA-09)

RESPONSE TO FINDING FI-07:

CCR Title 5 determines the significant role that faculty play in the development of assessment tools for advisement of students into English, math and reading courses. Although the faculty at Oxnard College and Ventura College have identified separate assessment instruments for this purpose, both of these institutions honor the scores obtained at the other institution for advisement purposes. The self-placement system used by Moorpark College is not recognized at either Oxnard College nor Ventura College, and in the rare instance where a Moorpark College student elects to take English, math or reading at one of the other two colleges, he or she would be required to take the assessment examination that was not required at Moorpark College.

REGARDING FINDING:

FI-08 Students entering the VCCCD are facing obstacles to pursuing higher education by the inconsistencies within the administration of the academic programs of the District. (FA-02-09)

RESPONSE TO FINDING FI-08:

There is no evidence that students are facing obstacles due to inconsistencies within VCCCD regarding the administration of academic programs. There are no inconsistencies in the administration of academic programs. There are variations in the courses offered and the content of courses within the academic curriculum. Each college is independently and separately accredited with curriculum developed by separate faculty to serve their communities. There is no legal requirement or expectation that independent colleges will have identical curriculum. These variations are similar to the way there are variations within the administration of each of the ten (10) incorporated cities within the County of Ventura yet each city provides a baseline of similar services in addition to the unique services deemed necessary to the communities that each institution serves, as do our colleges.

REGARDING FINDING:

FI-09 The inconsistencies in the education programs across the VCCCD indicate a failure in governance with respect to the Board of Trustees. (FA-01-06, FA-08-09)

RESPONSE TO FINDING FI-09:

The Board of Trustees has adopted Student Success as its most important Strategic Objective. The Board receives periodic updates on the progress made toward this goal. Variations in the educational programs are a result of the fact the VCCCD is composed of three, independently and separately accredited colleges with curriculum developed by separate faculty with each specific community in mind and fully in accordance with Education Code, CCR Title 5, and accreditation standards. These variations are a product of adherence to law, regulation and accreditation standards in conjunction with responsiveness to the various communities VCCCD serves, and do not indicate a failure in governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R-01 That the VCCCD Board of Trustees establish a policy that courses with the same content have the same nomenclature and unit value across the VCCCD. (FI-01-FI-05)

This recommendation will not be implemented as it is not consistent with Education Code, CCR Title 5, AB 1725, and ACCJC accreditation standards. The Board, however, will continue to develop Strategic Goals and Objectives to ensure student success that will be implemented by the faculty, staff and administration in accordance with all intents and purposes of the Education Code, CCR Title 5, AB 1725, and ACCJC accreditation standards. There is no legal requirement or expectation that independent colleges will have identical courses with the same nomenclature and/or unit value.

- R-02 That the VCCCD Board of Trustees establish a policy that nomenclature and unit value be consistent for all general education breadth requirements associated with Certificates and AA/AS Degrees and, likewise, for articulated transfer courses, for CSU and UC systems.

This recommendation will not be implemented as it is not consistent with Education Code, CCR Title 5, AB 1725, and ACCJC accreditation standards. The Board, however, will continue to develop Strategic Goals and Objectives to ensure student success that will be implemented by the faculty, staff and administration in accordance with all intents and purposes of the Education Code, CCR Title 5, AB 1725, and ACCJC accreditation standards. There is no legal requirement or expectation that independent colleges will have identical courses with the same nomenclature and/or unit value.

- R-03 That the VCCCD Board of Trustees establish a policy that each college in the VCCCD system use the same assessments for English/reading and math with the same placement outcomes. Skills assessment tests must represent the entire VCCCD. (FI-07)

This recommendation will not be implemented at this time, but there may be changes in the future. Assembly Bill (AB) 743 requires the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to establish uniform assessment tests for English, Math, and English as a Second Language (ESL). The common assessment tools will be made available to all 112 campuses to use in determining whether individual students should enroll in college-level courses or if they should first take basic skills classes. The CCCCCO, in collaboration with the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, is in the process of planning for implementation, which includes the selection of the common assessment tools and other archiving standards for system information access. The VCCCD colleges will follow implementation directives as they become available from the CCCCCO.

- R-04 That the VCCCD Board of Trustees adopt the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges' recommendation for counselor-to-student ratio. (FI-06)

This recommendation will not be implemented for the reasons we provided in FI-06 above, in addition to the fact that this recommendation is not specified in Education Code, CCR Title 5, AB 1725, or ACCJC accreditation standards. The Board, however, will continue to develop Strategic Goals and Objectives to ensure student success that will be implemented by the faculty, staff and administration in accordance with all intents and purposes of the Education Code, CCR Title 5, AB 1725, and ACCJC accreditation standards. There is no legal requirement or expectation that independent colleges will have an identical amount of counselors, librarians or instructors. These remain decisions of local control best determined by each independent campus within the VCCCD.

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Honorable O'Neill, we trust the aforementioned explanations have provided you and the 2011-12 Ventura County Civil Grand Jury a clear understanding about the VCCCD operations, state laws and regulations relevant to community colleges, and standards required by our regional accreditor, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior College (ACCJC). The VCCCD Board of Trustees, faculty, staff and administration take great pride that each of our three independently accredited colleges puts the students' best interests first.

Respectfully submitted,



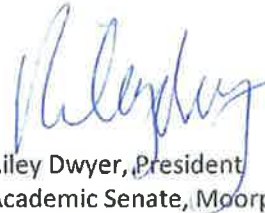
Stephen Blum, Chair
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