

Workgroup II Update March 2017

[Accreditation Workgroup II \(WGII\)](#) has been meeting since May 2016 to pursue its charge of *pursuing a model for regional accreditation that aligns all segments of higher education in the Western region.*

Activities of early meetings were documented in the [September 2016 report to the California Community Colleges Board of Governors](#). WGII members did extensive research and developed a “roadmap of options” that defined steps required, timelines, pros, cons, and other resources required for four possible options:

- 1) Stronger relationship between ACCJC and WASC Senior (WSCUC)
- 2) Two-year colleges can choose an Accreditor (ACCJC or WSCUC)
- 3) Single Accreditor for Western Region
- 4) Relationship with another accreditor (not WSCUC)

After six months of meetings, research, consultation with accreditation experts and the U.S. Department of Education, and deliberation over a number of options and scenarios, **WGII members reached unanimous agreement that the long-term needs of our students, colleges, and communities, especially in California, would best be served by affiliation with a single accreditor that encompasses all segments of higher education for the Western region.** This is viewed as a long-term goal that, if adopted, would be gradually phased-in, in process that would take up to a decade to complete.

WG II outlined the background and rationale for this consensus in its [February 2017 Report to the California Community Colleges CEOs](#) (authored by Drs. Constance Carroll and Cheryl Marshall). This report was distributed to all CEOs prior to and discussed during the 2017 CEO Symposium in Solvang. The discussion also referenced slides 25-36 of the [2017 CEO Symposium Accreditation History & Update](#).

WG II members shared key reasons for identifying a unified higher education accreditor as the best long-term goal for California community colleges and our region:

- **Shared students, goals, standards, communities served**
- **Common focus on student success, stewardship, quality, improvement** (similar accrediting standards; opportunity for communities of practice/shared learning communities)
- **Strength in unity facing accountability, accreditation challenges** (national threats to institutional self-evaluation, regional peer-review)
- **Strength in diversity and breaking down barriers between higher education segments** (overcome limitations of insularity, homogeneity of CCC focus; all 5 other U.S. regions have a single higher education accreditor)
- **Blurred lines between higher education segments** (CSU doctorate, university associate degrees, community college baccalaureate; overlap between public/private/online/competency-based)
- **Stronger alignment needed to meet needs of workforce and students** (large CCC transfer populations to UC/CSU; pathway to baccalaureate for high proportions of traditionally underrepresented students in CCCs; over 2,000 Associate Degrees for Transfer)
- **Unified and integrated higher education system provides best potential future for students** (model the pathways to which most students aspire in their stated educational objectives)

Our CEO Symposium in Solvang offered the opportunity for an extended, thoughtful, and candid discussion of possible directions, options, and concerns. At the end, there was a straw poll, with 75 CEOs

expressing concept of approval of WGII continuing to pursue the option of joining the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), and 6 CEOs not favoring that direction.

What also was clear from our discussion was that, ultimately, CEOs of member institutions would make the decision as to which model is best and, if choosing the single accreditor model, whether to pursue WSCUC membership. The decision would involve CEOs consulting with their boards of trustees and appropriate constituencies after receiving adequate information for decision-making.

WG II is working to help CEOs address two sets of questions to be considered before a final decision can be made:

- 1) Conceptual: What is the best model for higher education accreditation alignment for the Western region for the long-term good of our institutions and students?
- 2) Implementation: What would be required in terms of logistics, steps, resources, approvals and timelines, should the choice be made to pursue WSCUC membership?

Next steps include developing a *Frequently Asked Questions* document and outline of a potential pathway to a single accreditor, defining a stepwise approach with attention to details, logistical balance, collaboration, and requirements. These documents will be made available for continuing deliberation over the next few months. Further discussion also is ensuing with our community college colleagues from Hawaii and Western Pacific islands to assure inclusion of their perspectives.

WGII recognizes that this is a critical decision for all of us to make, as it will define the future of higher education accreditation in our region and respectfully offers its [report](#) and recommendation for review and discussion among the higher education constituents of the Western Region. Should anyone have questions or recommendations, we invite feedback to any [WG II member](#).