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ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR  
COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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## **CORE INQUIRIES**

American River College  
4700 College Oak Drive  
Sacramento, CA 95841

The Core Inquiries are based upon the findings of the peer review team that conducted Team ISER Review on February 22, 2022.

Dr. Kristin Clark  
Team Chair

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American River College

Peer Review Team Roster

**Team ISER Review**

February 22, 2022

Dr. Kristin Clark, Team Chair West Hills Community College District Chancellor	Dr. Angelica Suarez*, Vice Chair Orange Coast College President
<b>ACADEMIC MEMBERS</b>	
Dr. Michael Cawdery Leeward Community College Professor, Teacher Education	Ms. Catherine Indermill* Mendocino College Professor of Psychology
Ms. Evelyn Lord Laney College Head Librarian	Dr. Michael Reese Los Angeles Trade-Technical College Vice President of Academic Affairs
Dr. Julia Wendt Victor Valley College Department Chair and Faculty	
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE MEMBERS</b>	
Dr. Daphne Dionisio Glendale Community College Interim Manager of Accreditation and Institutional Effectiveness	Mr. Bill McGreevy Grossmont College Vice President of Administrative Services
Dr. Robert Pimentel Fresno City College Vice President, Educational Services & Institutional Effectiveness	
<b>ACCJC STAFF LIAISON</b>	
Dr. Gohar Momjian Vice President	

*\*These individuals served on the district team.*

## Summary of Team ISER Review

INSTITUTION: American River College

DATE OF TEAM ISER REVIEW: February 22, 2022

TEAM CHAIR: Dr. Kristin Clark

A 10-member accreditation peer review team conducted a Team ISER Review of American River College on February 22, 2022. The Team ISER Review is a one-day, off-site analysis of an institution's self-evaluation report. The peer review team received the college's institutional self-evaluation report (ISER) and related evidence several weeks prior to the Team ISER Review. Team members found the ISER to be a comprehensive, well written document detailing the processes used by the College to address Eligibility Requirements, Commission Standards, and Commission Policies. The team confirmed that the ISER was developed through broad participation by the entire College community including faculty, staff, students, and administration. The team found that the College provided a thoughtful ISER containing several self-identified action plans for institutional improvement. The College also prepared a Quality Focus Essay.

In preparation for the Team ISER Review, the team chair attended a team chair training workshop on December 1, 2021 and held a pre-review meeting with the college CEO on January 11, 2022. The entire peer review team received team training provided by staff from ACCJC on February 3, 2022. Prior to the Team ISER Review, team members completed their team assignments, identified areas for further clarification, and provided a list of requests for additional evidence to be considered during Team ISER Review.

During the Team ISER Review, team members spent the morning discussing their initial observations and their preliminary review of the written materials and evidence provided by the College for the purpose of determining whether the College continues to meet Accreditation Standards, Eligibility Requirements, Commission Policies, and US ED regulations. In the afternoon, the team further synthesized their findings to validate the excellent work of the college and identified standards the college meets, as well as developed Core Inquiries to be pursued during the Focused Site Visit, which will occur during the week of October 10, 2022.

Core Inquiries are a means for communicating potential areas of institutional noncompliance, improvement, or exemplary practice that arise during the Team ISER Review. They describe the areas of emphasis for the Focused Site Visit that the team will explore to further their analysis to determine whether standards are met and accordingly identify potential commendations or recommendations. The college should use the Core Inquiries and time leading up to the focused site visit as an opportunity to gather more evidence, collate information, and to strengthen or develop processes in the continuous improvement cycle. In the course of the Focused Site Visit, the ACCJC staff liaison will review new or emerging issues which might arise out of the discussions on Core Inquiries.

## Core Inquiries

Based on the team's analysis during the Team ISER Review, the team identified the following core inquiries that relate to potential areas of clarification, improvement, or commendation.

<b>Core Inquiry 1:</b> The team would like to understand what action for improvement the institution takes when it does not meet its own institution-set standards.
<b>Standards or Policies:</b> Standard I.B.3
<b>Description:</b> <p>The team reviewed the College's ISER and evidence including a Presentation of Student Achievement Data, Institution-Set Standards (ISS), the ACCJC Annual Report, and minutes from the Institutional Effectiveness Council. Although the ISS data was reviewed by the Institutional Effectiveness Council during their examination of the ACCJC Annual Report, the council minutes showed no evidence of action taken or plans made when the institution-set standards were not met.</p> <p>Additionally, ISER evidence consisting of screenshots of the portal for annual unit planning and program review states that the department-set standards data are only for course completion. Therefore, department-set standards do not include all applicable institution-set standards.</p>
<b>Topics of discussion during interviews:</b> <p>The role of the Institutional Effectiveness Council in establishing and assessing ISS, and actions taken when institution-set standards are not met.</p>
<b>Request for Additional Information/Evidence:</b> <p>N/A</p>
<b>Request for Observations/Interviews:</b> <p>Members of the Institutional Effectiveness Council (i.e., chair/co-chair, or others involved in working with institution-set standards, such as Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, Faculty Coordinator of Program Review)</p>

**Core Inquiry 2:** The team reviewed the evidence in the ISER and would like to further understand the college’s role in using the facilities master plan and long-range capital plan to support institutional improvement goals for new facilities and equipment, which includes projections of the total cost of ownership.

**Standards or Policies:** Standard IIIB.4

**Description:**

The team could not find evidence of total cost of ownership being projected when planning for new facilities and equipment. While the college provided information showing how it plans for facilities maintenance in the “Five-Year Capital Outlay Plan” and “Scheduled Maintenance/Special Repair Projects,” it was not clear whether the college includes a total cost of ownership for new facilities and equipment. Furthermore, it is unclear if the College’s physical resources planning is the direct responsibility of the District or the College or a cooperation between the two entities. In addition, this information was not provided as evidence in the District or ARC’s Facilities Master Plan.

**Topics of discussion during interviews:**

Total cost of ownership for new facilities and equipment

**Request for Additional Information/Evidence:**

Examples of total cost of ownership being projected for planning new facilities and equipment.

**Request for Observations/Interviews:**

Persons/Councils responsible for planning new facilities and equipment at college and/or district level.

**Core Inquiry 3:** The Team was impressed with the institution's commitment to diverse student views and their participation in informing and shaping college practices as evidenced by the Student Design Team initiative. The team would like to learn more about this initiative.

**Standards or Policies:** Standard IVA.2

**Description:**

The team reviewed evidence in the ISER and the website that describes the student design team: *A diverse group of ARC students will help inform the future direction of the college and improve our student-facing programs, services, processes, tools, and communication.* Additional evidence was provided by the supervisor of the Beaver Cares Basic Needs program.

**Topics of discussion during interviews:**

- The origin of the Student Design Team idea
- Ways the student team has provided insight and perspective to the College
- Outcomes that have resulted from the student team's efforts
- Characteristics/conditions that enable ARC to implement this initiative

**Request for Additional Information/Evidence:**

Status reports/updates on Student Design Team

**Request for Observations/Interviews:**

- Individuals responsible for the implementation of the Student Design Team
- Students who participate on the Student Design Team

**Core Inquiry 4:** The Team would like to know how the college ensures that it follows required policies/processes on distance education and publication of SLOs (Student Learning Outcomes) on syllabi.

**Standards or Policies:** Standard II.A.3 and Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education

**Description:**

The team reviewed the sample of distance education courses provided by the college, the Curriculum Committee Standards for Regular Effective Contact and Regular and Substantive Interaction in Online Classes, and LRCCD Policy 7145 – Distance Education.

The team did not see the application of regular and substantive interaction in the majority of the courses reviewed. In addition, SLOs were not consistently included in syllabi. In both instances, the institution does not appear to be following its policies and procedures.

**Topics of discussion during interviews:**

- Processes for regular and substantive interaction in distance education courses
- Processes for inclusion of SLOs on syllabi for all courses

**Request for Additional Information/Evidence:**

Review another sample of distance education courses from a subsequent term (Spring 2022)

**Request for Observations/Interviews:**

Individuals/Committees responsible for ensuring the implementation of distance education policies and procedures and compliance with syllabi requirements.

## District Core Inquiries

Based on the team’s analysis during the Team ISER Review, the team identified the following core inquiries that relate to potential areas of clarification, improvement, or commendation.

<p><b>District Core Inquiry 1:</b> The team would like to better understand how the Board ensures a regular cycle of review of its board policies to ensure their effectiveness in fulfilling the district’s mission and revises the policies as necessary.</p>
<p><b>Standards or Policies:</b> IV.C.7</p>
<p><b>Description:</b> The team reviewed the college’s ISER, which indicated that policies and regulations are created and amended to address changes in law, District operations, and the needs of students. The evidence supports the ISER’s statement that “<i>On a quarterly basis, the general counsel informs the board of the need to update policies or regulation.</i>” The team also confirmed that the Board reaffirms all Board Policies and Administrative Regulations in batch form (1000-9000). The Board has Board Policy 3112, which addresses the process for adoption of policies.</p> <p>However, in a random sampling of the Board Policies and Administrative Regulations online, the team found Board Policies that had not been updated since the 1980s and 1990s. The team would like to better understand how the Board ensures a regular cycle of review of its Board Policies and Administrative Regulations to confirm their effectiveness in fulfilling the District’s mission.</p>
<p><b>Topics of discussion during interviews:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cycle for the regular assessment and revision of Board Policies and Administrative Regulations.</li></ul>
<p><b>Request for Additional Information/Evidence:</b></p>
<p><b>Request for Observations/Interviews:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Individuals responsible for ensuring the regular updating of Board Policies and Administrative Regulations (e.g., Board Office).</li></ul>

**District Core Inquiry 2:** The team would like to deepen its understanding of the specific delineation of college and district roles and responsibilities in order to better understand the following:

- The interface between district level governance and college level governance
- The autonomy of the colleges
- The functions carried out at the district office
- The impact of completed reorganizations on the colleges and the district office
- The analyses being done for planned reorganizations

**Standards or Policies:** IV.D.2, IV.D.3, IV.D.4, IV.D.7

**Description:**

- a. The Functional Map uses the accreditation standards to identify primary, secondary, and shared responsibilities between the District and the College. While this approach provides a high-level view of responsibilities relative to each accreditation standard, it does not identify the actual functions and operations performed by the District Office making it difficult to determine the delineation of responsibilities. There are references to District reorganizations and centralizations, but it is not clear what the impact on the delineation of responsibilities is.
- b. The team read the references to the 80/20 resource allocation formulas; however, it is not completely clear what would happen in the event the district experiences a revenue reduction in terms of impact on personnel and the colleges.
- c. The team did not see a district-level decision making guide that would help clarify the roles of the various districtwide committees.
- d. District governance and structure are discussed at the Chancellor’s Cabinet. However, it is not evident how improvements are made as a result of these discussions.

**Topics of discussion during interviews:**

- a. Delineation of responsibilities between the District and the colleges.
- b. Resource allocation mechanisms.
- c. The evaluation of district/college delineations, governance processes, and improvements.
- d. How the colleges place items of interest on the agenda of the Chancellor’s Executive Staff meetings.

**Request for Additional Information/Evidence:**

- a. Brief description of the functions carried out at the district office.
- b. Minutes of Chancellor’s Cabinet meetings when District governance and structure were discussed.
- c. Agendas of Executive Staff meetings where college-initiated items of interest were discussed.
- d. Evidence of examples of any changes made in District governance.
- e. Example of how the 80/20 allocation formula works in the event of a reduction in revenue.
- f. Reports or analyses done leading to completed reorganizations, such as the centralization of the Public Information Officers and the Philanthropy office.

g. Analyses of proposed reorganizations such Admissions and Records and Financial Aid.

**Request for Observations/Interviews:**

- Members of the Chancellor's Executive Staff
- Members of the Chancellor's Cabinet
- Members of District Academic Senate and other district-level participatory governance committees/councils (e.g., Technology, Curriculum, Research)