

VVC awaits accreditation ruling

After CCSF ruling, college's accreditation still in limbo

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VICTORVILLE • A judge's ruling to stop a private commission from revoking a Bay Area college's accreditation is unlikely to impact the same agency's looming determination at Victor Valley College, community members and school officials said Saturday.

City College of San Francisco scored a victory Friday when the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges' attempt to revoke the college's accreditation was delayed until a trial can be held to determine if the action is lawful.

VVC officials are currently awaiting a decision by the ACCJC that may put the school on the brink of losing its accreditation, similar to CCSF's situation. The college has been on and off some type of sanction by the ACCJC since 2007.

"This isn't really the judge ordering (CCSF) to stay open, but to preserve the status quo," Victorville attorney Diana Carloni said. "With any government agency, if a person takes too much authority, you have to have a manner to correct it. The city of San Francisco's Attorney Dennis Herrera believes the ACCJC has exceeded that authority. He has a right to correct that, to see if it happened, and he's getting a trial to see if it happened."

Carloni is the leader of a grassroots group that sprang up last year and encouraged the community to get involved in prodding VVC officials to take faster action to remedy accreditation issues. The group wrote letters to the Daily Press and made critical comments at VVC board meetings in an effort to encourage college officials to fix the school's structural deficit and accreditation problems.

Carloni has also served as a volunteer board member for 10 years on the VVC College Foundation, an organization that raises funds and garners private donations for the college. She said she resigned in the spring because she no longer trusted how the college's money was being spent.

"We want the college to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars," Carloni said. "Teachers (at VVC) are not underpaid or overworked. ... I have a lot of passion for this college because I spent a long time trying to improve its programs and raise money for it. And right now I can't raise money for it because I don't trust how money is being stewarded."

According to data from the State Controller's office, VVC's five highest-paid full-time faculty members were paid between \$171,000 and \$181,000 in 2012, with roughly \$25,000 spent on each instructor's retirement and health packages.

Carloni and adjunct VVC professor Lynne Glickstein have argued in the past that the school is overpaying parts of its full-time faculty and that the college's administration had previously failed to remedy its accreditation issues in a timely fashion. Glickstein said the school's troubling structural deficit was partly due to high faculty salaries and benefits packages. VVC officials have countered the claim by saying VVC's full-time faculty are paid on par with other colleges.

Glickstein was more supportive of the college when she spoke to the Daily Press on Saturday.

"Things have changed," Glickstein said. "All that effort was to get the college to move because we realized they weren't moving under (former President Christopher O'Hearn's) leadership and we got them to change, and hopefully it's going to pay off. ... I have the utmost faith in the people that are making the critical decisions and hopefully we're moving forward in a positive way. Change was necessary and I hope we're making strides in a positive way."

The ACCJC's ruling to clear VVC of its probationary issues or place it on show cause status is expected in late January or early February. Show cause status would mean the college remains accredited but has one year to prove it deserves to stay open.

In the San Francisco case, the city's attorney filed a civil suit in August claiming the ACCJC allowed political bias and conflicts of interest to influence its decision to revoke the college's accreditation. One conflict-of-interest issue argued during the CCSF case was that Peter Crabtree, husband of ACCJC President Barbara Beno, was on the visiting evaluation committee at CCSF.

Some locals believe there was a similar conflict of interest when O'Hearn was on the ACCJC's visiting committee that first put VVC on warning in 2007 and then was hired as the school's president. In a board decision, O'Hearn's contract was not renewed when it ended June 30.

"Dr. O'Hearn put us on warning, then he represented us so that he could fix all of our troubles and get us out of unfavorable status if we hired him," Glickstein said publicly in an April board meeting. "Does that not scream 'conflict of interest' to you?"

Despite the turmoil, many close to the situation say they remain optimistic VVC will stay accredited.

VVC Trustee Brandon Wood said Saturday that the school is up to par with the ACCJC's recommendations.

"I believe, and hope, that we will be coming off sanction," Wood said. "This does not mean the work is done, though. If, and when, VVC comes off sanction, steps must be taken to ensure that we never end up back on sanction. While I believe we are moving in the right direction, I know that we have not yet arrived at our ultimate destination."

While VVC officials await the ACCJC's fateful decision, they're not alone. Colleges across the state are under some type of sanction, including VVC's neighbor Barstow Community College. BCC currently stands on warning with four out of 11 recommendations to meet in order to avoid being placed on probation in 2015, according to a BCC news release.

Trustee Joe Brady responded to the claim made by critics of the ACCJC that the commission has overstepped its bounds by sanctioning a high ratio of colleges throughout the state.

"I believe the ACCJC has a definite place within the community college system, and I know people are bucking that because they don't like the outcome of what the ACCJC is willing to do," Brady said. "While I'm not willing to get in the middle of issues within San Francisco, our paramount job as VVC trustees is to ensure our students get the best education for the best price possible, and do whatever we have to, to adhere to ACCJC standards that are set forth."

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