

VVC has company

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We used this space Tuesday to wonder why Victor Valley College students are protesting an investigation by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, watchdog measuring the performance of the state's junior and community colleges.

As we noted, the ACCJC has about 25 percent of the 112 two-year schools in California on accreditation watch in one form or another, and officials at ACCJC tell us that problems at those schools mostly concern financing. Which is also the case at VVC.

VVC is having financial difficulties because, in our view, past administrations and boards of trustees failed in their duty to keep the school on a sound financial footing, especially since the Great Recession began back in 2007. We also believe that the California Teacher Association's members at the school have played a very large role in this failure; the union has over the years has been instrumental in electing trustees who've pandered to union demands for higher salaries and more generous benefits.

Which gets us to a Nov. 12 story in the Wall Street Journal regarding another school the ACCJC has on probation, and threatens to close if it doesn't rapidly repair its finances.

That would be City College of San Francisco. According to the Journal, a state-appointed trustee named Robert Agrella "is in a race against time to slim down the bureaucratic behemoth with 80,000 students and 1,900 faculty before it implodes."

The Journal says the ACCJC found the school had failed to reduce spending amid state funding declines while keeping too little money in reserves. City College has \$10 million in savings and \$850,000 set aside for emergencies, but ACCJC found the school faces long-term problems "if it doesn't change ... spending patterns."

At City College, while the state cut funding for community colleges by \$1.5 billion between 2007 and 2012, City College failed to adjust (think VVC). As of mid-2012, the Journal says, "the college was spending 92 percent of its \$190 million annual budget on salary, benefits and retirement, leaving little money for other items." Agrella says that needs to come down to about 80 percent if the school is to survive.

There are other similarities between City College and VVC. "(P)rompted by the teachers union," the Journal said, San Francisco's city attorney has sued to stop (ACCJC) from shutting the school down. The Student Senate for California Community Colleges (SSCCC) is the union-oriented group protesting the ACCJC's actions regarding VVC. And City College also has its student protesters. One, Sara Bloomberg, 28, is a part-time student. She's quoted by the Journal as say, "(L)ots of students aren't happy that there is a special trustee."

Of course they're not happy. Mr. Agrella is working to save City College, which in the short term may create hardships for both students and the school's faculty. We suspect such hardships may be in the offing at VVC, too.

Steve Williams