

VVC's slow response may spell trouble

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VICTORVILLE • After being placed on accreditation probation in June 2011, it took Victor Valley College five months to hire an independent consulting firm to help.

And now with the Oct. 15 deadline looming, some are asking if the college has enough time to make the changes needed to save its accreditation status.

“The question is why and who is responsible for the delay, since we received the first probation notice on June 30, 2011?” wrote Trustee Joseph Brady in an official letter to board president, Joe Range.

The Board of Trustees unanimously voted to enter into a contract with Professional Personnel Leasing Inc., a firm that advises community colleges in California on accreditation issues on Nov. 1, 2011, for costs not to exceed \$126,360. Just 14 days after PPL was authorized to begin work, its consultant, Dr. Matthew Lee, submitted a comprehensive 64-page report to the college detailing eight recommendations and solutions. VVC President Dr. Christopher O’Hearn said the college began working on the issues the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges noted immediately after receiving its probationary status.

“The work that we’re doing to satisfy the ACCJC has been ongoing. We’ve been addressing their concerns for a long time and we have had an ongoing process in place for quite some time. We are just not now starting to scramble around,” O’Hearn said. “We’ve been working on this since the beginning.”

Brady, however, wrote that he believes it was a lack of cohesive leadership that caused Lee to not be able to begin his work until five months after being placed on probation.

“Periods of time are relative,” O’Hearn said. “We had to analyze the best direction to take first and the board only meets once a month or so, and we had to do our homework to find the best agency we could to deal with the problems. That’s not a leadership problem, that’s leadership in action.”

O’Hearn said the trustees were not all in favor of hiring a consultant originally, which he says further delayed the process. He added that the delay was also due in part because the consultant was going to be paid a large sum of money for his services, and that they wanted to choose the appropriate candidate carefully. Lee has an industry reputation that preceded him and came highly recommended to the college from other institutions.

In addition to citing a lack of ownership by VVC, Brady points out in the same letter that O'Hearn served as a leader on a visiting accreditation team that critiqued the college in 2005 when the school had its first brush with accreditation issues. O'Hearn was indeed on a visiting accreditation team, which begs the question only he can answer: How did it get to this point?

"The crux of this answer is that the standards have changed since then," O'Hearn said. "The requirements are different now, the expectations are different. The ACCJC has been under increasingly more pressure from the Department of Education to hold colleges to certain standards. They are not being as lenient now."

O'Hearn said he will not engage in finger pointing, but holds that climbing the precipitous hill to full accreditation will be a collective effort that leaves administration, faculty and staff no choice but to work together.



Joseph Brady



Joe Range



Christopher O'Hearn