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Contact:

Tere Fluegeman

SOCCCD Public Affairs, 949.582.4920

District to Address Commission's Recommendations

Accredited Status Continues for Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College

Mission Viejo, CA - February 3, 2011 - South Orange County Community College District (SOCCCD) learned today from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) that it has acted to issue a warning to the district's two colleges, Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College (IVC), following accreditation visits in October 2010.

During this warning period both Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College continue to be accredited institutions and this will not immediately affect students, classes or scheduling.

Accreditation is the voluntary process for the evaluation of colleges and universities used by the higher education community. It is a quality assurance process through which institutions collectively set standards for good practice, conduct peer-based evaluations of institutions on a regular basis, confer accredited status on institutions, and make the results of accreditation review of institutions known to the public. All colleges must complete an accreditation self-study every six years that is submitted to the commission, which follows up with an accreditation team site visit to the college to determine whether accreditation will be maintained.

Warnings from the ACCJC are not uncommon and are provided when an institution has pursued a course deviating from requirements to an extent that gives concern to the Commission. Most institutions find a warning from the Commission to be an uncomfortable but useful stimulus to resolve deficiencies, institute improved practices and increase quality.

Gary Poertner, the new Chancellor of the South Orange County Community College District, commented, "We are proud of the 11 commendations our two colleges received in the reports. However, we have some important work ahead of us to correct the deficiencies. We take the Commission's recommendations and warning very seriously."

In the letter dated January 31, 2011, the Commission made the following recommendations for areas requiring improvement:

- SOCCCD – Develop strategic plans that are inclusive of the planning at the colleges and that are directly tied to district resource allocation for all entities; develop a communications process among the district entities on key issues of concern; communicate results of the Board of Trustees’s self evaluation process; develop a clearly defined policy for a code of ethics which includes dealing with violations of the Board’s code of ethics; provide clear delineation of functional responsibilities; and assess and communicate decision making processes and effectiveness of services to the colleges.
- Saddleback College – Work with SOCCCD on its recommendations.
- Irvine Valley College – In addition to working with SOCCCD on its recommendations, the Commission also emphasized that: “Although the college and its constituent groups have achieved a collegial working relationship with the current president to address issues with a new optimism, the college does not have this same type of relationship with the district leadership and the Board of Trustees. “

Chancellor Poertner will work with the two college Presidents and district services to establish a joint task force that will address each of these issues carefully and thoroughly. The findings and subsequent warnings were issued based on information obtained during accrediting commission team visits in October 2010. It is important to note that since that time, several significant leadership transitions have taken place, including a new Chancellor, several new Trustees and the establishment of a new board leadership.

“We are committed to resolving the Commission’s recommendations so our colleges can become accredited without sanctions,” Poertner stressed. “It is imperative that the colleges and district work together to collectively correct any deficiencies and strive for continual self-improvement on behalf of our students. This is both a challenge and an opportunity.”

Both colleges must prepare a progress report to the Commission by October 15, 2011. Additional information about the colleges’ accreditations can be found on the college websites at www.saddleback.edu/accreditation and www.ivc.edu/accreditation.

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