# Accreditation struggle at City College of San Francisco – Guest blog by Rick Baum

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***In this guest blog, Rick Baum, who teaches Political Science at City College of San Francisco and is a member of AFT 2121, reports on the struggle over accreditation and the continued attempts to destroy the institution.***

Union members need accurate reporting about issues facing them, especially in stories in union literature. Unfortunately, that does not always happen, as is the case in an American Federation of Teachers (AFT) report on City College of San Francisco (CCSF) gaining its full accreditation after having been under assault for more than four years.

The CCSF community learned on January 13, 2017 that the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) had declared the college to be fully accredited. This decision came four and a half years after CCSF, a college with over 80,000 students at the time, had been harshly sanctioned, and three and a half years after being threatened with closure by the ACCJC.

Winning accreditation was a big victory for those struggling against the ACCJC whose conduct, in the AFT story on this good news, was accurately described by the AFT President Randi Weingarten as "outrageous and unfair."

CCSF should never have been threatened with closure. In its report issued when it first sanctioned CCSF, the ACCJC "concluded" that CCSF's "instructional programs in credit and non-credit…provide high-quality instruction" and "confirmed that City College of San Francisco provides comprehensive and accessible student services," precisely what colleges are supposed to do.[1] Yet the ACCJC decided that CCSF is a college that should be closed even though its conclusion indicated that CCSF exceeded the U.S. Department of Education's goal for accreditation which is an education that provides "acceptable levels of quality."[2]

The granting of full accreditation comes after CCSF has been severely downsized as a result of the actions of parties in addition to the ACCJC, including the State Chancellor's office and its Board of Governors (BOG.) Shortly after the ACCJC's 2013 closure announcement, the BOG, urged by the State Chancellor, changed rules to enable a state takeover of CCSF and the displacement of its democratically elected Board of Trustees. This furthered the imposition of outside administrators who were devoted to downsizing and transforming the college to supposedly meet the demands of the ACCJC. Mainly as a result of their combined actions, the college lost more than 25% of its student population, a comparable percent of full-time faculty and many part-time faculty and staff.[3]

To add insult to injury, during the accreditation crisis, CCSF's remaining faculty members were also harmed. The CCSF faculty union, AFT 2121, agreed to contracts that provided a level of pay with purchasing power at least 10% below what it was in 2007.[4]

The good news about CCSF's accreditation victory is that the administration will no longer be able to use the closure threat as an excuse for shoving austerity and cuts down the college community's throats.

**The Future of the College Still Looks Grim**

In the AFT article on CCSF's accreditation being affirmed, AFT President Weingarten claims: **"**Faculty can get back to teaching and students to learning, without the specter of institutional decimation and devastation hanging over their heads." (emphasis added)

Unfortunately, "decimation and devastation" has not ended. The college's well-being and what it offers the community is still under attack. The administration continues to make cuts in classes on top of many already made and is planning to reduce the number of classes offered by 5% a year for the next four years.[5] These cuts will result in many faculty and staff losing their jobs, and students having fewer choices and opportunities.

Additionally, faculty union leaders are cooperating with the continuation of downsizing efforts. In late 2016, AFT 2121 union leaders reached "a negotiated agreement" with the administration under which senior full-time faculty are being offered a "golden handshake," that is a bribe, to encourage as many as 100 (around 16% of full-time faculty) to retire.[6] Under this agreement, CCSF's administration promises to replace only half of these retirees during the next 5 years.[7]

About a month before the good news on accreditation, the CCSF school community learned that it will likely be further harmed by the State Chancellor's office. It is demanding almost $39 million to be repaid by the college, some of which is disputed by the faculty union.[8] However, any money given up will probably result in and provide an excuse for further cuts.

Meanwhile, San Francisco's Mayor Ed Lee, who supported the state takeover of the college, is sabotaging the full implementation of a voter-approved free tuition program slated to start in the fall of 2017 that could help restore student enrollment.[9] He is refusing to timely spend all of the money allocated and necessary for this program.

Despite the above, President Weingarten concludes "After five [actually four and a half] years weathering needless sanctions and punitive attacks from their rogue accreditor, the brave students and faculty at City College of San Francisco can finally breathe freely again…"

Weingarten is jumping the gun. The administration at CCSF and others intend to continue the downsizing and transformation nightmare at CCSF. At a time when accurate reporting is more necessary than ever, AFT's reportage masks and mystifies much of what is actually going on at CCSF resulting in AFT members not being properly informed.

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1. See pages 37 and 18 ACCJC 2012 Evaluation Report at: http://www.ccsf.edu/ACC/Accreditation%20Evaluation%20Report%202012.pdf

2. See The U.S. Department of Education goal of accreditation under the title: Accreditation in the United States: *"The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality."*

Link http://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html

3. CCSF's administration acted to downsize the college and discourage students from enrolling. For

example, an email sent out to students by the interim chancellor on

July 4, 2013, right after the accreditor's closure announcement, opened as follows:

"Dear Students:

We have received the decision from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. The Commission has decided to terminate City College of San Francisco's accreditation effective July 31, 2014, approximately one year from now."

No mention was made that the ACCJC stated that CCSF might remain open after July 31, 2014.

4. Union literature indicated that pay would have to be 25% higher as of August 2015 to be where it was in terms of its purchasing power in August 2007. The latest contract, that expires in 2017/18, results in faculty pay increasing by around 14%, (not taking into account subsequent givebacks and further erosion from inflation.)

5. On October 7, 2015, faculty received an email from the CCSF's Employees Relations Office describing the cuts to be made:

> "In order to align our funding with the actual number of students after the period of stability funding, we will have to reduce our course offerings 5% a year over the next five years. We have been building up a reserve of funds to avoid a more sudden and devastating reduction in course offerings."

6. For faculty about to retire, taking the golden handshake makes much sense. Many doing so is bound to undermine the integrity of the college, its institutional memory and its programs. Note: An AFT 2121 email blast sent out January 13, 2017 states that "a negotiated agreement was reached…over the retirement incentive."

7. See http://www.aft2121.org/2017/01/serp-update/ next to the last question is:

Q. **Will CCSF replace faculty who leave under the SERP [name given to golden handshake]?**

A. The only guarantee they have given us is that they will replace at least 50% of SERP positions with full-time hires within five years.

8. The supposed reason behind the state demanding some of this money back occurred during part of the time of the state takeover of the college.

9. See my article: San Francisco's Free Tuition Program Has Big Flaws