

ACCJC

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR
COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES

Outcomes | Innovation | Improvement

2030 Strategic Plan



ACCJC 2030

STRATEGIC PLAN

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) is committed to equitable student outcomes and supporting the institutional transformations required to serve the next century of learners.

Over the past two years, we have undertaken a rigorous process of self-reflection informed by feedback from faculty, staff, board members, funders, think tanks, and legislators from around the country. This culminated in the 2024 Accreditation Standards, a series of revised processes, new technology systems, and an enhanced training and educational programming series. We have reduced the cost of accreditation and the burden of duplicative reporting, strengthened our portfolio liaison model to better understand and collaborate with our institutions, and built dashboards to enhance our ongoing fiscal and student success monitoring.

In summer 2024, we received our continued recognition as an institutional accreditor by the Department of Education, a badge of honor earned every five years with the hard work of our dedicated staff and volunteers.

And yet, we know our work is not done.

In fall 2023, ACCJC began developing our 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, recognizing the need for our continued evolution in order to support member institutions and respond to the public's ongoing demand for transparency, quality, and equitable outcomes. The ACCJC Commission and staff obtained feedback from hundreds of partners through virtual surveys

and town halls, all of them reinforcing the critical importance of ACCJC's values: integrity, quality assurance, institutional improvement, peer review, student learning & achievement, and collegiality – and its commitment to the achievement of equitable student outcomes.

Feedback also highlighted the following themes, which became the basis for the 2030 Strategic Plan.

- Communication & Collaboration with Institutions
- Institutional Support and Accountability
- Advocacy

ACCJC 2030 – Strategic Plan recognizes the significant challenges our institutions face with anticipated demographic changes, funding cuts, and the uncertainty of a rapidly changing world. Accreditation must continue evolving to meet the needs of our new world and the students we serve. To that end, we are committed to five primary objectives outlined in the following strategic plan, shaped by the needs of our institutions and students.

Thank you to all the volunteers who make ACCJC's work possible. May we all continue to foster our collective and resolute commitment to our students.



Mac Powell
President



Introduction

ABOUT ACCJC

ACCJC is a federally recognized accrediting commission whose institutional accreditation is accepted as a reliable assurance of quality, allowing institutions of higher education access to federal financial aid. ACCJC is unique in its concentration on public and private two-year degree granting institutions, its geographic range, and its membership. Its current (2024) 137 public, non-profit, and for-profit member institutions span California, Hawai'i, New York, and the western Pacific and include the largest public higher education system in the US, serving 2 million students, and one of the nation's smallest colleges, with 28 students.

SCOPE

ACCJC's scope is defined in Article II, Section 2 of the *ACCJC Bylaws*. ACCJC accredits institutions in the United States, its territories, and affiliates, with a primary mission of granting associate degrees; institutions accredited by ACCJC may also award certificates and other credentials, including bachelor's degrees, if those credentials are within the institution's mission and authorized by their governmental authorities. ACCJC may also accredit non-domestic institutions, which have as a primary mission, the granting of associate degrees.

For more information about ACCJC please visit our website at www.accjc.org. The ACCJC Accreditation Standards and Accreditation Handbook are available for more specific information about ACCJC's accreditation processes.



Mission and Core Values

MISSION

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges supports its member institutions to advance educational quality and student learning and achievement. This collaboration fosters institutional excellence and continuous improvement through innovation, self-analysis, peer review, and application of standards.

EXPRESSING OUR CORE VALUES

Quality Assurance: Because our processes are based on thorough and recognized best practices, our determination that an institution is in fact providing a quality educational experience for its students is respected by multiple partners.

Student Learning and Achievement: Students are the grounding point for every Standard and aspect of the review process, the end goal of each evaluation, and the driving passion of the faculty and staff at our member institutions.

Integrity: Every interaction with our members is guided by our commitment to the principles of transparency and consistency. This creates mutual and clear understandings and ensures fair and value-adding results for institutions.

Peer Review: One of America's best contributions to education is the peer review process. Through its proven powers, the peer review process allows members of the academic community to serve their colleagues by providing rich feedback that identifies commendations and areas for improvement.

Collegiality: The work of accreditation is mediated through the relationships that are formed among all the participants, characterized by mutual respect, collaboration, and engagement around common interests.

Institutional Improvement: ACCJC Standards create an institutional culture reflective of higher education's best practices to guide and strengthen an ongoing culture of continuous quality improvement.

By 2030, ACCJC aspires to manifest its core values through ongoing support and accreditation of member institutions. This ongoing collaborative relationship demonstrates to ACCJC member institutions and the public

- the value, integrity, collegiality, and transparency of ACCJC practices and actions;
- ACCJC's commitment to achieving equitable student outcomes;
- the process of continuous quality improvement;
- the critical need for peer review; and
- the value of ACCJC advocacy for institutional transformation and the significance of accreditation.

Environmental Scan/Trends

ACCJC member institutions face significant challenges with anticipated demographic changes, funding difficulties, political interference, declining public trust, and global uncertainty. As we all strategize how to best serve our students for the next five years and beyond, we must consider these challenges, seek out new opportunities to make positive impacts, and strive to be more innovative, efficient, effective, and responsive leaders and community partners. *ACCJC 2030 – Strategic Plan* guides ACCJC in its work to support and advocate for member institutions as they carry out this work.

A C C J C M E M B E R I N S T I T U T I O N S T U D E N T S

The U.S. is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, with Hispanic/Latino groups showing the largest increase in total share of population between 1997 and 2017 ([ACE Report](#)). In California, 70% of community college students are people of diverse ethnic backgrounds ([CA State of the System 2022 Draft Report](#)). ACCJC membership also includes institutions in Hawai'i, New York, and the western Pacific, together serving some of the most diverse student populations in the country. Nationwide, over one third of two-year college students are more likely to be first- or second-generation immigrants and more likely to be non-native English-speaking than those students at four-year institutions ([AACC Data Points](#)). Hispanic/Latino students now make up 28% of community college students. While Hispanic and Asian representation among two year college students has increased in the last decade, White and Black representation has declined ([College Board analysis](#)). When considering student demographics, the American Association of Community Colleges highlights some other key figures: 13% of students are single parents, 8% are non-U.S. citizens, 4% are veterans, 23% are students with disabilities, and 9% are students with prior bachelor's degrees ([AACC Fast Facts](#)). Additionally, community college students are overwhelmingly working students. 43% of full-time students work full time and 30% work part time; nearly two thirds of part-time students work full time and almost a quarter work part time ([AACC Fast Facts](#)). ACCJC member institutions truly represent the populations they serve.

ACCJC member institutions not only include public community colleges, but also private non-profit, private for profit, and federally owned/military two-year institutions, representing a diverse set of students and institutional missions. For example, the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) is one ACCJC's most unique members, providing culturally based foreign language education, training, evaluation, and degrees for the U.S. Department of Defense globally. Post military service, many DLIFLC graduates go on to work for the State Department, Homeland Security, or other governmental and non-governmental agencies in service to our country. Just as unique, Deep Springs College is a private, non-profit, two-year institution governed by its students with a mission to prepare young people for a life of service to humanity. The students' two-year program is completed tuition-free while operating the rustic campus, its gardens, and ranch before most students transfer to highly selective four-year institutions. This broad understanding of two-year institutions provides new perspectives to member institutions undergoing the peer review process.

In considering all student populations, one cannot overlook students involved in the justice system. As part of larger diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, ACCJC member institutions lead the way in providing quality educational opportunities to incarcerated students. This is a critical component of realizing social justice, reducing recidivism, and building stronger communities. The Rising Scholars Network and grant program provide opportunities for justice-involved students ([CA CCCO Vision 2030](#)), particularly those in highly racialized prison populations. Development of resources, training, course content, and innovations in teaching and learning are critical in this work, and ACCJC continues to support member institutions in this educational advocacy.

Demographic data is not all that is changing; enrollment data is also in flux. Between fall 2010 and fall 2021, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions decreased by 15 percent, with the most significant decline taking place during the pandemic (1.1 million students) ([NCES Condition of Education 2023 Report](#)). However, there has been a more recent shift, and many ACCJC member institutions are optimistic about this trend. In the California Community College System, enrollment was up 2.4% in the fall 2022 semester from fall 2021, with growth at some colleges greater than 10% ([CCCCO Fall 2022 Update](#)). In 2023, the University of Hawai'i (UH) Community Colleges reported a 2.7% increase in enrollment from fall 2022 to fall 2023, the first expansion in community college enrollment in 13 years. Additionally, the UH system saw increases in first-time freshmen from Hawai'i public schools, Filipino students, Micronesian students, and a slight increase in all underrepresented students ([UHCC Enrollment News 2023](#)). According to ACCJC 2023 Annual Report data, private and proprietary institutions have seen a slight increase in enrollment since 2019. Unfortunately, not all colleges are experiencing this growth. In a December 2023 report to ACCJC, member institutions in the western Pacific reported declining enrollment. ACCJC is committed to providing all institutions with the resources and support needed to address or maintain data trends.

Just as student populations are demographically diverse, so are the goals and educational objectives of learners. Most students at two-year institutions focus on earning degrees or certificates, transferring to a four-year institution, or gaining career skills. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, more students earned a certificate in 2022-23 than in any of the last ten years (NSC Degree Earner Report 2024). While only 16 percent of students who start in community colleges ultimately earn bachelor's degrees within six years ([ED Home Room Blog, Nov 2023](#)), many of those who earn bachelor's degrees attended a two-year institution at some point in their educational career. In California, 29% of University of California graduates and 51% of California State University graduates started at a community college ([CCCCOE Fast Facts](#)). In the 2021-2022 school year, over 100,000 ACCJC member institution students, across institution types, transferred to a four-year institution (ACCJC 2023 Annual Report Data). One may look no further than this data to understand the vital importance of two-year institutions.

The American Association of Community Colleges reports that 65% of students at two-year institutions reported a transfer or degree goal. Of those, 55% also sought to develop skills for their career ([AACCC Data Points](#)). Community colleges and other two-year institutions offer immense value and opportunity for students looking to begin a new career, change careers, or expand current career skills. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment in associate and postsecondary non-degree-level occupations is projected to grow 11% in the 10-year period ending in 2026, faster than the 7% average projected for all occupations ([CCCCO Key Facts](#)). For the years 2022-2032, the top five fastest growing occupations, and the majority of occupations projected to have the most new jobs, require some form of post-secondary education ([bls.gov Employment Projections](#)). ACCJC member institutions are integral to the development and attainment of gainful employment in this evolving workforce landscape.

FUNDING CHALLENGES

As stated previously, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions decreased by 15 percent between 2010 and 2021, with the most significant decline taking place during the pandemic (1.1 million students). For most ACCJC member institutions, tuition and state-based funding make up over 50% of their revenue. In the United States as a whole, community college revenue by source is 31.7% state, 24.1% federal, 24.1% tuition, 20.6% local, 3.8% other ([AACC Analysis College Revenue 2021-2022](#)). Much of state-based funding is contingent on enrollment. Factoring in tight state budgets and hard cuts to education, many ACCJC member institutions face fiscal challenges.

UH institutions depend on State General Funds for approximately 48% of their operating budgets. Tuition revenue accounts for another 34%, with anticipated restrictions approaching 10% ([UH Operating Budget 23-34](#)). Current state funding for California public community colleges is guided by the Student Centered Funding Formula and includes three variables: a base allocation, primarily based on enrollment; a supplemental allocation based on the number of students receiving a College Promise Grant, Pell Grant, or covered by nonresident tuition exceptions; and a student success allocation ([CCCCO Website](#)). For many institutions, the end of pandemic-related special federal funding creates another set of financial difficulties. These challenges all call for creative enrollment solutions, an unwavering and campus-wide focus on student success outcomes, strategic student supports, and new partnerships ([CCCCO Report – Equity and Student-Centered Strategies](#)).

Between academic years 2010–11 and 2021–22, average annual undergraduate tuition and required fees for full-time students across all degree-granting postsecondary institutions increased by 17 percent (from \$12,200 to \$14,300, in constant 2021–22 dollars) ([NCES Condition of Education 2023 Report](#)). With pandemic-related hardships, current economic and political uncertainty, and FAFSA and student loan related confusion and hardships, students struggle to afford college, often opting to forgo higher education and enter straight into the workforce.

Now more than ever, ACCJC member institutions and the students they serve need creative solutions, efficiency, community partnerships, and advocacy at all levels.



POLITICAL AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

The challenges to the U.S. system of higher education are immense: *political polarization, contentious elections, challenges to our democracy, political attacks on higher education and its worth, nation-wide legislative initiatives related to academic freedom, and a public that has suddenly questioned the value of higher education.* In response to some of these issues, accreditors and federal regulators increasingly focus on proving and improving the value of higher education through data, equitable student success, workforce education, and improved measurable student outcomes. ACCJC is dedicated to providing resources to our institutions, including access to best practices and integration of this important work into our ongoing processes of continuous quality improvement.

Serving over ten million student nationwide ([AACC Fast Facts](#)) community colleges and other two-year institutions have a unique opportunity to leverage public support. Americans support funding community colleges more than other institutions of higher education: 82% support their tax dollars funding community colleges, compared to 69% for public, four-year universities ([AACC Data Points](#)). The U.S. system of higher education is at a turning point, and two-year institutions can lead the way in providing equitable student success.

Accreditation is one of the most powerful levers available to influence change and create value in higher education. Accreditation focuses on what people care about most in education — quality, equity, access, and student success. It focuses on outcomes that matter: degree completion, readiness for work and community roles, and economic mobility for every student. The accreditation process also provides a formalized mechanism to reinforce to the campus community the necessity of making data-informed decisions to improve student outcomes, and that those student outcomes will be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and class, making the focus on institutional equity gaps inescapable.



A R A P I D L Y C H A N G I N G W O R L D

New technologies and changing workforce needs, the unprecedented development and exposure to artificial intelligence, and a climate crisis affecting the world at increasing rates are just some of the external factors impacting ACCJC member institutions and their students.

The value of two-year institutions is significant. For every dollar students spend on their community college education, they gain \$5 in higher earnings in the future (California CC EMSI EIR 2021). As of March 2022, the employment rate of 25- to 34-year-olds was higher for those with higher levels of educational attainment ([NCES Condition of Education 2023 Report](#)). In California, the activities of the colleges and their students support one out of every 16 jobs (California CC EMSI EIR 2021). State governments are increasingly looking for partnerships with institutions of higher education for research and development, training in new technologies, creation of new pathways to certificates and degrees supporting new industries and career paths, and to address issues of income inequality, economic competitiveness, and sustainability. For example, the High Road Training Partnership is a worker-centered framework that calls on community colleges to partner with industry. The Partnership stimulates investment in preparing workers for socio-economic mobility in health care, climate, STEM and technology, education, and early education.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the way we educate, the way students learn, and the way we work. Students and educators must take an ethical and transparent approach to using AI in the classroom to support learning, not to replace it. AI will foster new technology, new industries, and increased efficiency. Institutions must be on the cutting edge of program development to train the next generation of workers and partner with industries in ways never seen before. A report by the McKinsey Global Institute on *Generative AI and the future of work in America* estimates “by 2030, 30% of hours currently worked across the U.S. economy could be automated,” due in large part to AI, and 12 million occupational transitions, requiring additional skills, may be needed ([McKinsey Global 2023](#)).



Scientists say halving climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 is crucial to stop a rise in temperatures of more than 1.5 Celsius. Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, recently reported that the next two years will be essential to the survival of our planet ([Abnett & Jessop, Reuters 2024](#)). While the effects of climate change are felt worldwide, the majority of ACCJC member institutions are in locations severely impacted by the climate crisis. California is increasingly impacted by extreme weather, fire, drought, pollution, and struggling agriculture. The Pacific Island region is one of the first areas of the globe to be severely impacted by intense weather, sea level rise, water scarcity concerns, and the effects of warming oceans.

Higher education institutions lead the way in research and development, increasing access to STEM programs (particularly at the region’s community and two-year colleges) to prepare the next generation of students to combat the climate crisis. Indigenous knowledge is being recognized as a critical component of ocean conservation and sustainable living ([U.S. National Science Foundation](#)). Community colleges and two-year institutions closely connected to the communities they serve are being called upon to support those efforts. Curricula, student services, crisis preparedness, and long-term planning must all be adapted. Students and communities need new sources of physical, mental, emotional, financial, and educational support as they confront and endure these challenges together. ACCJC member institutions face many challenges, but they are presented with even more opportunities. It is the mission and design of ACCJC to stand beside these institutions as they confront difficulties, devise solutions, and celebrate successes.



Strategic Plan: ACCJC 2030

The Commission endorses the following priorities and objectives to support member institutions in advancing educational quality and student learning and achievement through innovation, self-analysis, peer review, and the application of ACCJC's 2024 Accreditation Standards.

2030 Strategic Planning Priorities

Priority 1: Advance educational quality and the achievement of equitable student outcomes through engagement with member institutions, partners, and the public.

Priority 2: Communicate and collaborate to advance the mission of ACCJC and promote the value of peer-based accreditation.

2030 Strategic Planning Objectives to Support These Priorities

Objective 1: Support institutional efforts to achieve equitable student success through peer review, member engagement, educational opportunities, and high-quality nationally recognized resources.

Objective 2: Deploy and refine the 2024 Standards and processes to support institutional transformation and the achievement of equitable student outcomes.

Objective 3: Communicate the value of accreditation's role in institutional transformation and achievement of equitable outcomes to member institutions, the public, and partners.

Objective 4: Increase transparency and communication of institutional outcomes to key partners by implementing robust technology systems.

Objective 5: Utilize data to drive Commission decision-making and institutional transformation in support of equitable outcomes.

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