San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Government Audit and Oversight Committee.  
July 25, 2013  
Agenda Item 4. “Hearing to address the importance of City College as an academic institution and resource for San Francisco’s diverse communities and local economy, and discuss the potential impact of the Accrediting Commission and what public officials, including the Mayor, are doing to protect the college and safeguard vital programs, assets, and overall accreditation.”

Sponsors: Avalos, Campos and Cohen.  
Video: http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=11&clip_id=18056 (CCSF agenda item starts about 1:30 hours into recording) 

Supervisors attending: Malia Cohen (Chair), John Avalos, David Campos, Eric Mar, Katy Tang  
Notes by ksaginor

**Avalos** – opening remarks to this agenda item. This is an emergency hearing that we’ve called to address potential closing of City College. We don’t have direct jurisdiction of City College but it is very important to the city in so many ways …. campuses around the city… purpose of this hearing is to educate myself and others about what city college provides for the City and to find out what is being done. There are questions about the role of accrediting commission – we will be hearing from both sides. There are concerns about downsizing, gutting of programs, privatization. There needs to be some kind of unity about how we can get on the same page to protect City College. Given that Board of Trustees has been dissolved, there appears to no be a role for the Board of Supervisors to play, in providing public space for concerns and to make recommendations to public officials, especially with the mayor’s office involved.

**Campos** – I support addressing the financial issues at CCSF, but I don’t think that having your financial house in order means losing the character of the institution. Some are saying that having the financial house in order means losing diversity of programs. We cannot save CCSF if we end up with a CCSF that doesn’t look like what CCSF has been – language programs, adult education, job training, workforce development, second chance program, veterans’ center, guardian scholars, programs for seniors, helping students transfer to four year colleges, opportunity for low income folks, community based campuses. We plan to have a series of hearings, the next one will be at the Mission Campus.

**Mar** – It is important to pull together to support not just any CCSF, but the CCSF we have. Also, we need to understand what the impact would be of losing CCSF. We need to work together to improve CCSF.

**First speaker Gohar Momjian, ALO.** – My job is to work on behalf of Chancellor to meet standards. We are open, accredited, and enrolling students. Accreditation is a voluntary process …. [I did not take notes on her description of the process, already familiar to most of us. See http://www.accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Feb-2011-special-edition.pdf ]. Standards are set by a peer process, these are general statements, the commission does not dictate how they are to be met. [In response to question from Avalos about state or federal oversight.] The standards of the commission need to be aligned with federal and state regulations. The Commissioners are faculty, administrators, and others. College CEOs elect the commissioners. Standards need to be met at all times. On July 3, ACCJC announced decision to terminate accreditation for CCSF in 2014, but said it was not a final decision. We are pursuing a review and appeal process that will take a long time – could take up to a year. We are focused on meeting the standards as quickly as possible while pursuing the review and appeal. The special Trustee is working closely with CCSF Chancellor and with the State Chancellor to meet the standards. [In response to question from Campos about who decides whether or not the standards are met] The Commission makes the final determination, basing its decision on the history of the institution, visiting team report, our self-evaluation report, and testimony provided by the Interim Chancellor Scott-Skillman, Special Trustee Agrella, and myself [at the meeting in June].

**Campos** - What standards does the commission follow in making that determination.
Momjian – The original accreditation standards, very clear if you read them if you’ve met them or not. Last year we reviewed mission, but didn’t put in process to review again this year.

Campos - If the elected Board of Trustees decided to follow the advice of the team that’s been working this year, and do what they say we need to do to not loose accreditation – and they did that. But it turns out that it wasn’t enough. Then what do you do? Where is the accountability in that case?

Momjian – I don’t understand the question.

Campos – That is the problem. There is a disconnect. Who is the ACCJC accountable to?

Momjian – The U.S. Department of Education. And again, it’s not a private organization, they represent the institutions.

Campos – I’ve heard they get funding from foundations. Is that relevant to knowing whether they are objective?

Momjian – My job is to focus on meeting the standards. When Brice Harris came, he gave analogy that in the middle of a game with the clock ticking, you can’t stop to argue about the rules, with City College as the collateral. Do that later. We need to work together so the commission will reconsider its decision.

Campos – Problem with analogy is if the referee has already decided which team should win.

Momjian distributed FAQ about accreditation to supervisors.

Hydra Mendoza, Mayor’s Education Advisor. – We’ve been working behind the scenes to provide support, including personnel in finance and human resources. We recently met with departments that will be severely affected if City Colleges does not survive – Office of Economic and Work Force Development, City Build, TechSF, [couldn’t catch all she named]. Making available real estate department to understand what City College owns, Department of Public Works, we’ve been talking to MTA about advertising on buses. Mayor’s Education Leadership Council… Letters will be sent to SFUSD students to encourage them to go to CCSF…[some of what she named is about keeping CCSF open, some about what happens if CCSF closes.] Mayor is focused on looking at the self evaluation and on helping get the recommendations accomplished.

Question – Is there a vision that the mayor has about what CCSF should be? beyond just meeting accreditation standards?

Mendoza – Work force development and transfer are major focus. … We don’t want to tell the college this is what you need to do.

Avalos – I talked with student leaders about achievement gap, students who feel that CCSF is not doing enough – an area of legitimate change that is needed, probably it’s addressed in the ACCJC report.

Mendoza – That’s not what the Mayor’s office is focused on, that’s for CCSF and SFUSD to pay close attention to. We do support programs and have invested money in programs that have shown success, such as Bridge to Success. And we are looking at aligning SFUSD with CCSF, so that kids graduated from SFUSD as proficient are proficient and successful at City College.

Avalos – I met with students who feel that City College is not doing enough to make sure students can move through in two years.

Mendoza – If classes are not available to help kids get through in a timely fashion, that’s something the college will have to look at. Student services piece, is another part of recommendations that needs to be addressed in plan.

Avalos – What does the Mayor see as real threats to accreditation? People have been talking about possible sale of assets, downsizing, cutting programs, eliminating enrichment programs for adult education.

Mendoza – Those are decisions that the college has to make based on data. On concern is that within a year CCSF could get closed and our kids will be out on the curb. We have to have standards for our kids and we are providing meets those standards. It is not the academics of CCSF that is in question. The Accreditation Commission isn’t questioning what happens in the classroom. There are questions about whether kids are getting proper support and about efficiencies in finance. Some felt that more money is the answer, we are not
confident that the way in which monies will be used will be efficient. Program piece will be about what is the best for students. Standards do not say you must cut, but you must be self-sustainable. Can’t have ESL class with only three students if we could use the money to hire a calculus teacher, when calculus classes are packed.

**Campos** – I’m all for financial accountability. What is CCSF is not doing financially? Haven’t had a clear answer.

**Mendoza** – It’s primarily around operations component. Again, we’re thrilled that academic piece is intact. The FCMAT report will be very clear – look at FCMAT report – most current will be coming out soon. When you have more than 50 employees that have access to payroll information ... there are some structural pieces that can cause real pain for the college – potential for fraud, but there hasn’t been fraud. For years the college has not addressed those things. We want tighter structures. The places where there is potential for CCSF to fall on its knees need to be addressed. And it needs to be acknowledged that huge progress made this year.

**Campos** – We have know about these structural problems for some time. The State Chancellor had people working on these things for a year, and CCSF hasn’t done enough, even ‘though they’ve been following their guidance, but after a year, these are not addressed. And now the State Chancellor is putting the same people in place to fix the problems not fixed over the past year. Why is this a good idea?

**Mendoza** – The problem is pace at which things happen. Now the Special Trustee can make decisions swiftly, without debate.

**Campos** – What did the special trustee want to do before, that didn’t happen? That has not yet been answered… [Back and forth between Campos and Mendoza – with no specific conclusions.]

**Campos** – I do think that it’s a good thing that you are involved.

**Mendoza** - The best thing we can do is to show kids and students that we are committed to keeping it open. When we secure accreditation for the coming years, the financial impact of lost enrollment from this year will have deep effects going forward.

**Campos** – What can people in labor and in the community do to support the efforts of the mayor?

**Mendoza** - Enroll. Stay positive about making this go forward.

**Cecilia Tran** from Tom Ammiano’s office – City College is not just for kids, but for everyone, including seniors and immigrants. Ammiano held a community forum last week to provide space to bring people together. He is working with state legislators from both sides of the aisle for possible audit of ACCJC. He will be presenting in August to Joint legislative audit council. We’re not going to let CCSF close, because CCSF is San Francisco.

**John Rizzo**, President of the CCSF Board of Trustees – I want to start by correcting some misstatements made. ACCJC is independent from WASC. ACCJC is a private, non-profit agency. Changes already made at CCSF include all deans having to re-apply for their jobs, and many managers lost jobs. SLOs are the collection and examination of data about student learning. It’s a year long process, there is no way by the definition of it to finish it faster, but it will be finished very soon. We invited FCMAT the first time before we got the Show Cause decision. We have a balanced budget, actually with $2 million surplus. But the announcement of revoking accreditation has caused a drop in enrollment of 13.9%.

**Anita Greer** – CCSF has a history of doing well in accreditation. A year ago, we narrowed our mission statement. It was very painful to, but we did that. And we paid attention to collaboration of Board of Trustee, working collectively, collaboratively, and effectively. Received training, we did that. So it’s disappointing to know that ACCJC thinks we didn’t do those things, or didn’t do enough.

**Chris Jackson** – 25% of California community colleges are on some sort of sanction. We did prioritize our mission statement. We wanted GED students to also get access, that’s part of our values. And with the parcel tax, we were on track to return revenues to pre-recession levels. We’re all fighting to keep CCSF open, we want to keep it open for every student, not only the transfer students. When we had financial problems, we decided not to fire teachers and cut classes first. Can’t have student equity, if you don’t have access. We’ve done a lot and want to continue to do more. We might have made some better decisions, but our decision was
made to prioritize access. Among the types of help we are getting from Mayor’s office, maybe we don’t need help from real estate office.

**Rafael Mandelman** – Losing our locally elected Board means there is no public space for these kinds of conversations. The fact that you have provided this space is important. I don’t want to pick on Gohar Momjian, she works very hard, but she presented you with a set of talking points from ACCJC, and these really aren’t true. Accreditation is voluntary? Without accreditation we have to close. It’s a peer process? Seems to be dominated by a very small set of former administrators. Accreditation standards are clear? Standards may be clear, but how their interpretation is subjective. It’s not working for San Francisco. This institution serves our community. That it could be shut down in one year is absolutely outrageous. Harm that has come from ACCJC's approach – students lost in decrease enrollment, tens of millions of dollars lost, it’s difficult to convince new chancellor and new administrators to come to CCSF. When they say they don’t want to argue about the rules in the middle of the game, this is not a game, and the harm is real and immediate and doesn’t wait until the end of the game. Thank you for doing everything you can.

[At this point, I had to leave the meeting to participate in press conference sponsored by Assemblyman Phil Ting to encourage enrollment. Next speaker was Alisa Messer, AFT2121. These notes are from her presentation materials and from the transcript of the subtitles.]

**Alisa Messer** – AFT 2121 represents the counselors, librarians and instructors of the college. City College is an extremely valuable publicly owned resource that is in imminent danger at the moment. We are widely supported by the electorate, and yet we were denied our accreditation as of next year. It's not final, but we are in grave danger. Denying our accreditation will effectively close the college. So, we're looking for everyone's help to help us save this essential public resource. We opened in 1935 as a response to the economic and societal impact of the great depression. From the first $2 million bond in 1938 to Proposition A, the citizens of San Francisco have consistently surprised city leaders with their deep support for the vision and mission of CCSF. Even in tough times, CCSF has consistently chosen to affirm San Francisco's values of inclusion, accessibility and diversity. As a student asked at the forum held last Thursday (sponsored by Supervisor Avalos and Assembly member Tom Ammiano), “Why would you want to take away the starting line?” It doesn't make any sense when we're trying to help so many students from so many different walks of life get to the finish line. CCSF can be better. We need better fiscal tracking and controls, better efficiencies. We think we can better assist under served students, the majority of whom are students of color, achieve their educational goals. We can integrate best practices into our operations and we can govern more effectively. One thing that no one, not even ACCJC focuses on is actually what matters most and that's the education that we provide to the students of San Francisco and the bay area. AFT 2121’s decision to file a complaint against ACCJC was a necessary and timely step. Many months of deep research into the ACCJC as well as what was happening at city college over the last year convinced us that it was essential that we raise our voices and document some of this information. Someone needed to speak the truth about the overreach of an accrediting commission that in San Francisco and elsewhere has acted in contradiction with its mission, harming the interests of students, faculty, staff, and the broader community and community colleges throughout California. It would have been irresponsible not to do that. Bringing this information forward hasn't stopped the faculty and everyone at CCSF from working at the same time to address those recommendations. We work very hard, and extra hard over this last year, working to meet the standards, working on SLOs even as we've been researching and asking critical questions of the ACCJC. And even as we've been doing our primary job, educating students. We can do all those things, choosing one doesn't mean not doing another, and we will continue to do that work. City College is San Francisco. There's no other place in San Francisco where people from all neighborhoods, backgrounds, and perspectives can learn side-by-side united by their mutual desire to improve their lives and the lives of everyone in their community.

*Public comment continued for an hour and a half*
