



**Commission on Colleges  
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools**

**REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE**

**Statement Regarding the Report**

*The Commission on Colleges will make its determination on the accreditation of an institution based on the findings contained in this committee report, the institution's response to issues contained in the report, other assessments relevant to the review, and application of the Commission's policies and procedures. Final interpretation of the Principles of Accreditation and final action on the accreditation status of the institution rest with the Commission on Colleges.*

**Name of the Institution:**           **Texarkana College**

**Date of the Review:**               **September 8-9, 2010**

**COC Staff Member:**               **Rudolph S. Jackson  
Vice President**

**Chair of the Committee** (*title, institution, addresses and contact numbers*):

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## Part I. Overview and Introduction to the Institution:

The Commission on College's charge to the Special Committee included: (1) **Core Requirement 2.2 (Governing Board)** -- determine whether the governing board is controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from it ; (2) **Comprehensive Standard 3.2.6 (Board/administration distinction)** -- determine whether there was a clear distinction, in writing and in practice, between the policy-making functions of the governing board and the responsibility of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy; (3) **Comprehensive Standard 3.2.7 (Organizational structure)** -- determine whether Texarkana College has a clearly defined and published organizational structure that delineates responsibility for the administration of policies; and (4) **Comprehensive Standard 3.2.8 (Qualified administrative/academic officers)** -- determine whether the institution has qualified administrative and academic officers with the experience, competence, and capacity to lead the institution.

The Special Committee also was charged with reviewing other matters of compliance with *The Principles of Accreditation* that might come to the attention of the Committee during the course of preparing for and/or during the visit. The Special Committee was also charged with writing a report to the Commission on Colleges setting forth the results of its fact-finding work and collective opinion of the institution's status of compliance with the requirements of designated sections of *The Principles of Accreditation*.

Texarkana College was initially established in 1927 and is a comprehensive community college currently enrolling more than 5,000 students in the fall semester of 2010. The institution is governed by a nine member Board of Trustees, each of whom is elected at-large. Until 2006, no member of the Texarkana College Board of Trustees had achieved that office in a contested election, according to college officials. Additionally, most trustees customarily served for numerous consecutive terms of office, occasionally exceeding thirty years of total service.

Since 2006, a majority of long-serving members of the Texarkana College Board of Trustees resigned from their positions, often citing age, length of service, and/or other commitments as primary factors for resignations. Some long-serving trustees also reported a practice of an incumbent resigning a few months before their terms were ended in order to allow the appointment of someone to a vacated seat prior to an election for that position on the Board of Trustees.

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMITTEE REVIEW PROCESS

The Special Committee's review process began several weeks prior to the visit with an examination of materials forwarded to each committee member by the Commission on Colleges. Those materials included:

- (1) the institution's April 9, 2010 response to each of the four selected areas listed in

a March 23, 2010 letter from Dr. Rudolph S. Jackson, Vice President of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; (2) written complaints filed with the Commission on Colleges by seven individuals formerly associated with Texarkana College; and (3) selected newspaper articles from the *Texarkana Gazette*.

The Special Committee formulated questions based on its review of this packet of materials and requested that the institution respond to as many of those questions as possible prior to the visit to facilitate the Committee's on-site review. The Committee requested a copy of the institution's new organizational structure and chain-of-command protocol, implemented in June of 2010, copies of official employment applications and official transcripts for all college positions bearing the titles of director, dean, vice-president, and president, and copies of minutes of all meetings of the Texarkana College Board of Trustees for the last four years.

On September 8, 2010, the Committee conducted numerous interviews at the College and at the Committee's hotel with selected individual trustees with the Texarkana College Board of Trustees, the collective body of the Texarkana Board of Trustees, community representatives, Texarkana College personnel including faculty and staff members, former presidents of the Texarkana College Board of Trustees, Texarkana College student representatives, and all individuals who filed complaints against Texarkana College with the Commission on Colleges.

In consultation with the Commission on Colleges' staff representative for Texarkana College, the Special Committee held executive sessions and conducted a brief summary exit report with Texarkana College officials and four members of the Board of Trustees at the Committee's hotel.

The Special Committee expresses its gratitude to the institution for all of the accommodations extended to the Committee both prior to and during the visit, and extends its appreciation to all parties who participated in interviews with the Committee.

## **Part II. Assessment of Compliance**

### **Assessment of Compliance with Section 2: Core Requirements**

2.2 ----The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from it. ---

Comment:

The Board of Trustees of Texarkana College is the institution's governing board and is the legal body responsible for the institution. Because the board has that responsibility, the entire institution looks to the board for leadership and guidance through broad policies, statements, and decisions made by the board.

There has been considerable change in the composition of the Texarkana College Board of Trustees since 2006. Unlike the all-male, all-white board that existed prior to 2006, three of the nine members of the current board are female, and two of the nine members are African-American. The current members bring strong experience from a wide background, greater diversity in reflecting the community served by Texarkana College, a renewed sense of revitalizing the mission of Texarkana College, and a dedication to building upon the legacy of service established by previous Boards of Trustees of the institution.

This shift in the composition of the Board of Trustees in a relatively short period of time, longstanding friendships and/or alliances between former college personnel and some former trustees and community members, and the zeal and enthusiasm with which some newer members of the Board of Trustees undertook their responsibilities all seem to have been factors in recent years, creating a situation where the same event can be viewed differently, depending on the lens one chooses to look through.

After sifting through differing perspectives, the Special Committee found no evidence that the Board of Trustees is controlled by a minority of its members or organizations and interests separate from it. An examination of four years' worth of meeting minutes, coupled with interviews with board members, reveals that the board is a strong group of individuals who freely express their perspectives, occasionally agree to disagree, and more typically find agreement in joining together to support improvement of the institution and its services to the region it serves.

The Special Committee found the Board of Trustees to be a well-balanced group of Texarkana College advocates who are dedicated to advancing the service of the institution to its various constituencies. The Committee also found that the board has had few opportunities to participate in specially designed programs focusing on appropriate roles of a governing board for an institution accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

### **Assessment of Compliance with Section 3: Comprehensive Standards**

- 3.2.6** There is a clear and appropriate distinction, in writing and practice, between the policy-making functions of the governing board and the responsibility of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy.  
**(Board/administration distinction)**

Comment:

In August of 2008, the Texarkana College Board of Trustees voted not to extend the contract of the college's president and allowed him to serve out the remaining term of his contract while a national search for a new president was conducted.

A broad-based search committee included community and college representatives, and the search committee's recommendation for a new president for Texarkana College was affirmed by the institution's Board of Trustees in 2009.

Interviews with faculty leaders yielded characterizations of the former administration of Texarkana College as “*more authoritarian*” with descriptions of the current administration as being more “*progressive and open.*” Faculty leaders cited recent investments in technology, development of professional master plans for Texarkana College, a commitment to greater diversity among institutional faculty and staff, and a shared governance philosophy among new and welcome strengths of the current administration.

Interviews with student leaders indicated that students have very positive feelings about Texarkana College and that those feelings have increased during the last several years.

Given that a relatively recent major investment in significantly upgrading the institution’s technology was an issue for some complainants to the Commission on Colleges, the Committee found that students and faculty leaders cited this upgrading of technology as a particular institutional strength brought about by the current administration and Board of Trustees.

The 2009 change in presidential leadership was less well-received by other longstanding college administrators, even to the point that the former administrative assistant to the president was reassigned to other duties shortly before the new president reported for service, leaving him at a decided disadvantage upon assuming the responsibilities of the office about fifteen months prior to this visit---in fact leaving him without immediate assistance from anyone with a depth of institutional knowledge upon his initial arrival at Texarkana College.

The president of the Board of Trustees readily indicated that such extraordinary circumstances resulted in him asking several people, including the president of the Faculty Association and one or more trustees and others, if any had time to help answer phones and otherwise assist the new president in those early days, and that such assistance may have carried over to helping launch other new institutional initiatives.

The Special Committee was thus convinced there were some instances of Board members exceeding the customary policy-making functions of Boards of Trustees and delving into responsibilities that should have been borne by the administration, faculty, and staff in working with a new president. Conditions faced by the new president as he assumed his new responsibilities at Texarkana College, however, merit mentioning and give important context to actions taken by the Board of Trustees to help facilitate the transition in leadership of the institution.

New institutional leadership at Texarkana College brings knowledge of and experience with current best practices of other institutions and renewed enthusiasm for advancement of the institution in serving its area. Interviews with business and community interests yielded favorable feedback about past services of the institution to its community that continues to increase in both breadth and depth following the change in institutional leadership.

The Special Committee noted many positive results of the new institutional leadership of major importance to maintaining an institution’s accreditation with the Commission on Colleges including significant upgrading of the institution’s technology, employing IT professionals to maintain this technology, adding institutional support capabilities in the human resources area,

developing campus and facilities master plans for the institution, putting renewed emphasis into the institution's Quality Enhancement Plan (which had reportedly languished for several years prior to the change in institutional leadership), more systematic attention to assessing student learning outcomes, instituting more formalized faculty and administration performance evaluation systems, and linking Institutional Effectiveness goals and objectives to the budget process.

In an effort to facilitate Texarkana College's reengagement in implementing the Quality Enhancement Plan, COC staff spent considerable time during the visit to assist Texarkana College staff in reviewing and updating the requirements for this phase of reaffirmation of accreditation. The discussion was timely in that the institution will be asked to provide an impact report related to the QEP as it submits the Fifth-Year Interim Report.

Interviews with college personnel, trustees, and community representatives also confirmed that while rumors and innuendoes within the college and in the community may have served to occasionally distract some faculty and staff from their primary focus on serving students and fulfilling the institution's mission, the institution continues to serve students and its community well.

While recognizing many positive initiatives occurring within Texarkana College over the last fifteen months, faculty leaders also indicated that more open communications between the administration and faculty and staff would build on the early successes of the new administration and would serve to reduce unfounded rumors going forward.

With an administrative team now in place to support the institution's mission and many new initiatives at Texarkana College, members of the Board of Trustees also have the opportunity to re-focus on their governance roles, confident that Texarkana College administrators and faculty are fully capable of administering and implementing those policies through effective daily operations of the institution.

**Recommendation 1: The Special Committee recommends that the Texarkana College Board of Trustees participate in training that focuses on appropriate roles and responsibilities of governing boards as delineated in *The Principles of Accreditation*, with particular emphasis on maintaining a clear and appropriate distinction, in both writing and in practice, between the policy-making functions of the governing board and the responsibility of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy.**

Interviews with trustees, faculty, administrators, students and community representatives also revealed an underlying desire to reach a point in the near term where the college can continue to capitalize on its accomplishments and new initiatives by increasing communication between administration, faculty and staff, and students.

**Suggestion 1: The Special Committee suggests that the president of Texarkana College increase communications within the institution and demonstrate his philosophy of shared governance between and among key administrative, faculty, staff, and student representatives by: (a) possibly forming and leading a group of those constituencies in periodic meetings on important topics of interest to the institution; (b) routinely**

