

College of the Sequoias, once at risk of closure, regains full accreditation

By Lewis Griswold

College of the Sequoias in Visalia has regained accreditation after the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges ordered that it change its culture or risk closure. College officials celebrated Monday, Feb. 9, 2015, with a bottle of sparkling apple cider. THEFRESNOBEE

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To the cheers of faculty and staff assembled at the main lecture hall, College of the Sequoias' President Stan Carrizosa said Monday that the institution had received official word that "the commission acted to remove warning and reaffirm full accreditation."

For students, the moves verifies that the college meets high standards, he said.



For COS staff and faculty, it means that new procedures put in place to measure performance are now permanent.

"We built systems to change the college's culture," Carrizosa said. "There's no looking back."

The saga began in February 2013 when the commission put the college on formal "show cause" status — the most severe of three levels of warning — and said it had to improve in several areas or risk closure.

At the time, Carrizosa had been on the job for less than nine months.

The commission said a "culture of respect, civility and trust" must exist between faculty and administrators.

Other problem areas involved the need for a formal planning process in which "informed decisions" lead to continuous improvements, and better counseling options for evening and online students, as well as those at the Hanford campus.

The commission also said the college needed better research tools for administrators, updated evaluation processes for employees and a better way to evaluate internal decision making and budget planning.

To meet the challenge, the college established committees of administrators, faculty, staff and students, and adopted the slogan "COS 2.0" as shorthand for the overall mission.

Monday, cookies with "COS 2.0" were given away at a celebration.

Ten-year professor Juan Arzola, who teaches political science and ethnic studies, said the mood on campus is "ecstatic" in the wake of the announcement.

"It was a humbling experience," he said. "There's been a significant change of culture. There's a mindset — 'This is

what's expected.' It's been a paradigmatic shift."

Noticeable improvements have been made in how students' success is measured, resources are allocated and even what courses are offered, he said.

The changes are felt at all levels of the college, Carrizosa said.

"There's more accountability, increased efficiency and we eliminated redundancy" he said. "We're achieving more transfers and degree completions and certificate completions."

In a bit of theater to show that the college had succeeded in lifting a cloud, Thea Trimble, president of the Academic Senate, moved an arrow on a large graphic from "warning" to "reaffirmation and accreditation."

"We will never be here again having to move that arrow," she said, "It will stay at the top."

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