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L.A. City and Trade-Technical colleges placed on probation

An accrediting body faults them for inadequate planning and evaluation of the effectiveness of student programs.

By Gale Holland

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Two Los Angeles community colleges have been placed on probation by a regional accrediting commission, which faulted L.A. City and Trade-Technical colleges for inadequate planning and evaluation of the effectiveness of student programs.

The sanction is the second of four increasingly serious actions that can be brought by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, which has jurisdiction over institutions in California, Hawaii and elsewhere. Failure to correct the problems could result in the colleges losing their accreditation, although that rarely happens, educators said.

Officials at Trade-Tech, south of downtown, and L.A. City College in Los Feliz, said the problems the commission identified did not reflect on the quality of instruction at their institutions.

"They really are sort of technical issues," said Gary Colombo, vice chancellor for institutional effectiveness at the Los Angeles Community College District, which operates nine campuses, including Trade-Tech and L.A. City College.

"Would we think a hospital review of a patient death was just a technicality?" responded Barbara Beno, president of the accrediting commission. "Two-year colleges have a lot of students entering, but by the time they get to graduation, the numbers are way down . . . We want to get institutions to focus on student success, and I don't consider it to be a technical issue."

The commission in recent years has raised its standards, resulting in more scrutiny of how well two-year colleges educate students and whether students complete certificate and degree programs or go on to four-year institutions, several educators said. At its June meeting, the group issued warnings to nine institutions, including East Los Angeles and Pasadena City colleges, and extended earlier warnings for four others. Los Angeles Southwest College, placed on probation in June 2008, had that sanction lifted at the meeting.

"In this era of a huge push to get people through [college], it's no longer good enough to say we don't know who's there for what, and what happens to them," said Nancy Shulock, executive director of the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy at Cal State Sacramento.

The commission said L.A. City College needed to better utilize research and program review to improve student learning and support services. Trade-Tech was told to forge stronger links between its program review and its planning functions and allocation of resources, and to restructure how the campus is governed.

Marcy Drummond, acting president at Trade-Tech, said Thursday the college was already working on the problems and expected to be off probation by next year.

"We have a game plan, and we've been implementing the game plan," she said. "The accrediting commission has really upped their standards, and I agree with the standards. We strive for excellence, and these are excellent standards."

L.A. City College administrators could not be reached for comment. Colombo said he anticipated L.A. City College's sanction to be removed by next June.

When a college loses its accreditation, its course credits are not recognized by other institutions in the state and it cannot award financial aid. Compton Community College is one of the few two-year colleges in the state to have had its accreditation pulled. The college was taken over by the state in 2004 and has become a satellite of El Camino College in Torrance.

gale.holland@latimes.com

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