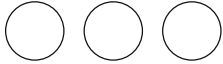


# Panel that rejected CCSF appeal over accreditation had ties to commission



**Nanette Asimov**

Updated: Nov. 3, 2014 1:46 p.m.



Four people on the independent panel that rejected City College of San Francisco's appeal of the 2013 decision to revoke its accreditation had ties to the commission that made that decision, a witness testified Friday under questioning from a San Francisco city attorney trying to prove bias against the school.

Krista Johns, a vice president of the accrediting commission being sued by the city, acknowledged that her boss, Barbara Beno, appointed the appeal panel that included three ex-commissioners and a college trustee who does training workshops with Beno.

Deputy City Attorney Yvonne Mere asked Johns if she agreed that the appeal “was required to be heard by an independent panel.”

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“Correct,” said Johns, who also acknowledged that the college’s challenge to those appointments was denied.

A biased appeals panel was one of several allegations the city’s attorneys tried to

prove Friday to show that the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges broke the state law prohibiting illegal and unfair business practices, and that it violated federal regulations in its attempt to revoke accreditation from City College. Revocation is on hold pending the outcome of the trial.

Mere said the commission knew its evaluations of City College in 2012 and 2013 violated federal regulations. Under questioning, Johns acknowledged that the commission changed its policies after being warned by the U.S. Department of Education last year that it was out of compliance with its conflict of interest policy and other problems.

The Education Department told the commission that letting Beno's husband, Peter Crabtree, help evaluate City College gave the appearance of a conflict of interest. It also said the commission had too few academics on its college evaluation teams.

Lawyers for the commission are trying to fend off the city's efforts to portray it as biased, and to show that there were ample reasons for voting to revoke accreditation. Without accreditation, the college would shut down. Just one of the 19 commissioners voted against revocation, and one abstained.

The lawyers called four commissioners to the stand who said they voted in 2012 to put the college on notice that it would lose accreditation if it didn't come into compliance with all standards within a year, and in 2013 they voted to revoke.

"Frankly, I was appalled at the fact that they had a financial situation that was not sustainable," testified Sharon Whitehurst-Payne, whose term on the commission ended in June. She also said the college "had not taken us seriously" about repairing its financial and governance problems, and that she "didn't see that much had changed" by 2013.

She said "93 percent of (college) income was going toward salaries and compensation ... I would have been looking for them to go back to the union and say, 'This is not

sustainable. ... If we have to take a pay cut, that's what we all have to do.”

In the audience, faculty looked shocked. During a break, [Alisa Messer](#), who was faculty union president at the time, said employees had taken a 9 percent pay cut and campaigned vigorously for Proposition A — a parcel tax bringing in \$15 million a year to City College — and Proposition 30, a statewide tax to end years of college cuts.

“My reaction can't be quoted in the paper,” Messer said.

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On the stand, Commissioner [Frank Gornick](#) said college officials themselves told the commission in 2013 that the college remained in “significant disarray,” and that there was “an intimidating environment” for those who wanted to comply with accrediting requirements.

Commission Chairman [Steven Kinsella](#) said he voted to revoke because the college owed more money than it had in the bank, which “technically means they're insolvent.”

Deputy City Attorney Ron Flynn reminded Kinsella that Prop. A would bring in millions of dollars a year, and the money would arrive within weeks of the commission's revocation vote. "Was that an improvement?" he asked.

"No," Kinsella said.

With testimony over, Judge Curtis Karnow said he will hear closing arguments on Dec. 9 and issue a tentative ruling sometime after that.

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Written By  
**Nanette Asimov**

Reach Nanette on

Nanette covers California's public universities - the University of California and California State University - as well as community colleges and private universities. She's written about sexual misconduct at UC and Stanford, the precarious state of accreditation at City College of San Francisco, and what happens when the UC Berkeley student government discovers a gay rights opponent in its midst. She has exposed a private art college where students rack up massive levels of debt (one student's topped \$400k), and covered audits peering into UC finances, education lawsuits and countless student protests.

But writing about higher education also means getting a look at the brainy creations of students and faculty: Robotic suits that help paralyzed people walk. Online collections of folk songs going back hundreds of years. And innovations touching on everything from virtual reality to baseball.

Nanette is also covering the COVID-19 pandemic and served as health editor during the first six months of the crisis, which quickly ended her brief tenure as interim investigations editor.

Previously, Nanette covered K-12 education. Her stories led to changes in charter school laws, prompted a ban on Scientology in California public schools, and exposed cheating and censorship in testing.

A past president of the Society of Professional Journalists' Northern California chapter, Nanette has a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University and a B.A. in sociology from Queens College. She speaks English and Spanish.

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