

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 759

HE 033 974

TITLE Designs for Excellence: Handbook for Institutional Self-Study. Seventh Edition.

INSTITUTION Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Philadelphia, PA.

PUB DATE 2000-00-00

NOTE 51p.

AVAILABLE FROM Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Tel: 215-662-5606; Fax: 215-662-5501; Web site: <http://www.msache.org>.

PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Academic Standards; Distance Education; Evaluation Methods; Higher Education; *Institutional Evaluation; Nontraditional Education; Peer Evaluation; Planning; *Self Evaluation (Groups)

ABSTRACT

This self-study handbook focuses on: (1) "Self-Study and Peer Review" (including the role of "Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education," the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's statement of standards for accreditation); (2) "Models and Approaches to Self-Study" (the comprehensive model, the comprehensive with special emphasis model, the selected topics model, and the alternative self-study model); (3) "Planning and Organizing for Self-Study" (the self-study environment, early planning for self-study, the steering committee, planning questions, and contacts with Commission staff); (4) "Linking the Design and Self-Study to Commission Standards and External Requirements" (the starting point; students; faculty; administration and staff; governing board; the educational program; library and learning resources; financial resources, facilities, equipment, and other resources; catalogs, publications, and promotional materials; and other external requirements); (5) "Preparing and Submitting the Design" (elements of a self-study design and submitting the design); and (6) "Off-Campus Sites, Distance Learning, and Other Alternative Offerings" (branch campuses, additional locations, other instructional sites, distance education programs, study abroad, and non-degree programs). (SM)

DESIGNS for Excellence

Handbook for Institutional Self-Study

Seventh Edition

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY

O. R. T. Ratturray

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Published by the

Middle States Commission on Higher Education
3624 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Telephone: (215) 662-5606

Fax: (215) 662-5501

//www.msache.org

[Bound copies of this document are available for purchase through the Publications Order Form on the Commission's web site at www.msache.org.]

[This version in PDF format recreates fairly closely the printed and bound version available from the Commission, except for minor typesetting and page-length differences.]

[Permission is granted to representatives of member and candidate institutions to make additional copies of this document, available in PDF format on the web, for the purpose of the self-study and peer review process. All other requests for permission to make copies should be addressed in writing to the Commission.]

© 2000, Copyright by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education

All rights reserved.

First published in 1971 as *Handbook on Institutional Self-Study*.

Second edition 1984, *Handbook for Institutional Self-Study*. Third edition 1989.

Fourth edition 1990, *Designs for Excellence: Handbook for Institutional Self-Study*.

Fifth edition 1991. Sixth edition 1998. Seventh edition 2000.

The seventh edition supersedes all previous editions.

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	v
1 Self Study and Peer Review	1
Self Study	2
Peer Review.	3
Role of <i>Characteristics of Excellence</i>	4
2 Models and Approaches to Self-Study	5
The Comprehensive Model	6
The Comprehensive with Special Emphasis Model	7
The Selected Topics Model.	8
The Alternative Self-Study Model	9
3 Planning and Organizing for Self-Study	
The Self-Study Environment	13
Early Planning for Self-Study	14
The Steering Committee	15
Planning Questions	17
Contacts with Commission Staff	20
4 Linking the Design and Self-Study to Commission Standards and External Requirements	23
The Starting Point: Mission, Goals, and Objectives	24
Students	25
Faculty	26
Administration and Staff	26
Governing Board	27
The Educational Program [Including post- <i>Characteristics</i> Policies on Outcomes Assessment and Distance Learning].	28
Library and Learning Resources	29
Financial Resources.	30
Facilities, Equipment, and Other Resources	31
Catalogs, Publications, and Promotional Materials	32
Other External Requirements:	
Federal Requirements and Accreditation	32
State Requirements.	33
Other Accrediting Organizations	34
5 Preparing and Submitting the Design	
Elements of a Self-Study Design	35
Submitting the Design	41

	Page
6 Off-Campus Sites, Distance Learning, and Other Alternative Offerings	
Branch Campuses	44
Additional Locations	45
Other Instructional Sites	45
Distance Learning Programs	45
Study Abroad	46
Non-Degree Programs (For-credit and Non-credit)	47

List of Figures

1 The Self-Study and Peer Review Processes	1
2 The Self-Study Process	2
3 The Peer Review Process	3
4 The Comprehensive Report [In the Context of the Institution’s Programs and Services]	7
5 The Comprehensive Report [In the Context of the Standards in <i>Characteristics of Excellence</i>]	7
6 Contents of a Comprehensive-with-Emphasis Self-Study Report	8
7 Contents of a Selected Topics Self-Study Report	8
8 Points of Contact between Institutions and Commission Staff	20
9 Agenda for Preliminary Staff Visit	20
10 A Self-Study Timetable	38

Acknowledgements

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education is grateful for the assistance of many individuals who assisted in preparing and reviewing this sixth edition of *Designs for Excellence: Handbook for Institutional Self-Study*. It is a project that has involved both the Commission staff and external volunteer reviewers.

Staff first began identifying and suggesting revisions in 1994, under the leadership of then-Executive Director Howard L. Simmons. The process culminated in 1998, when Executive Director Jean Avnet Morse asked the following individuals, who had recently participated in the self-study process at their institutions, to review staff work on the revisions:

John W. McDermott, Vice President for Planning and Research,
Moravian College;

Mary Lee Seibert, Acting Provost, Ithaca College; and

Joan Z. Spade, Associate Professor, Lehigh University.

The revised text also was presented to and discussed by the Commission on Higher Education at its June 1998 meeting.

The text clarifies and expands upon the original concepts in the 1991 edition, the 1994 revisions in *Characteristics of Excellence*, and new government regulations that affect accreditation. It also includes changes in emphasis that the Commission has encouraged institutions to consider, such as provisions for alternate forms of self-study, collaborative self-study, outcomes assessment, distance learning, and information resources.

The seventh edition includes a new Chapter 6, featuring a more comprehensive review of off-campus offerings.

1

Self-Study and Peer Review

Regional accreditation has evolved as a means of sustaining the quality and integrity of educational institutions. It also recognizes that higher education is accountable to its several constituencies, including the academy at large, the primary consumers of the educational services it provides, and the general public. Membership in the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools includes a commitment to continuous self-improvement through self-study and review by peers. Colleges and universities become members of the Association upon accreditation by the Commission on Higher Education.

The Commission requires every candidate and member institution preparing for accreditation to undertake an intensive self-study, followed by peer review (Figure 1). With the advice of Commission staff, the institution first submits a document known as a design for self-study, in which a steering committee,

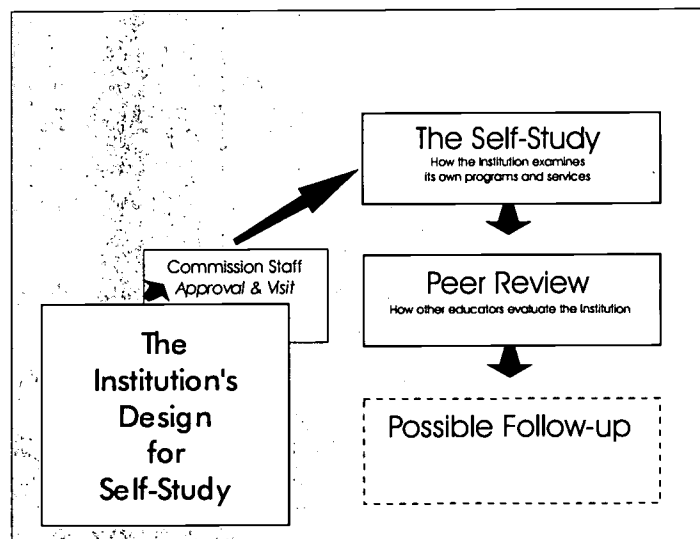


Figure 1
The Self-Study
and
Peer Review Processes

appointed by the institution for the purposes of self-study, outlines how the self-study will be accomplished. The design includes the rationale, scope, expected outcomes, participants, and timetable for the self-study process. Once Commission staff has approved the design, the self-study begins.

Self-Study

During self-study, the institution evaluates its educational programs and services and determines how well they achieve the institution’s goals, fulfill its mission and meet the Commission’s standards. Under the leadership of a steering committee appointed by the institution, working groups examine existing data and evaluative reports, frequently gather new data, and prepare draft evaluative reports on their assigned topics (Figure 2). The steering committee edits the reports of the various working groups, produces a draft for discussion, and disseminates the final self-study report.

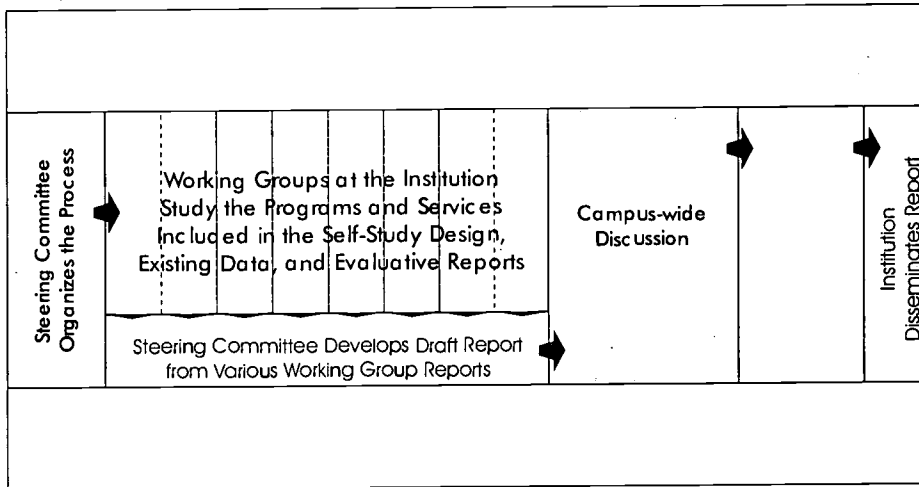


Figure 2
The Self-Study Process

A cross-section of the campus community is expected to participate in the self-study process at each stage—in the steering committee, the working groups, and the campus-wide discussions. The Commission staff assigned to that institution is available throughout to offer advice and support.

The self-study that each college or university conducts is the most important and valuable aspect of the accrediting process, and the benefits it brings to an institution are proportional to the incisiveness of its inquiry. The self-study process enables the campus community to examine the institution’s strengths and its weaknesses, to develop solutions to problems, and to identify opportunities for growth and development. The aim must be to understand, evaluate and improve, not simply to describe or defend.

The primary benefit of self-study should be the continuous growth and development of the institution. Therefore, the self-study process will be most helpful if the institution adapts and implements it as a continuous process that supports the institution’s regular planning cycle. Because it is a major activity in the life of an institution, institutions should ensure that it is a useful activity, planned and executed carefully, and not simply a formal exercise.

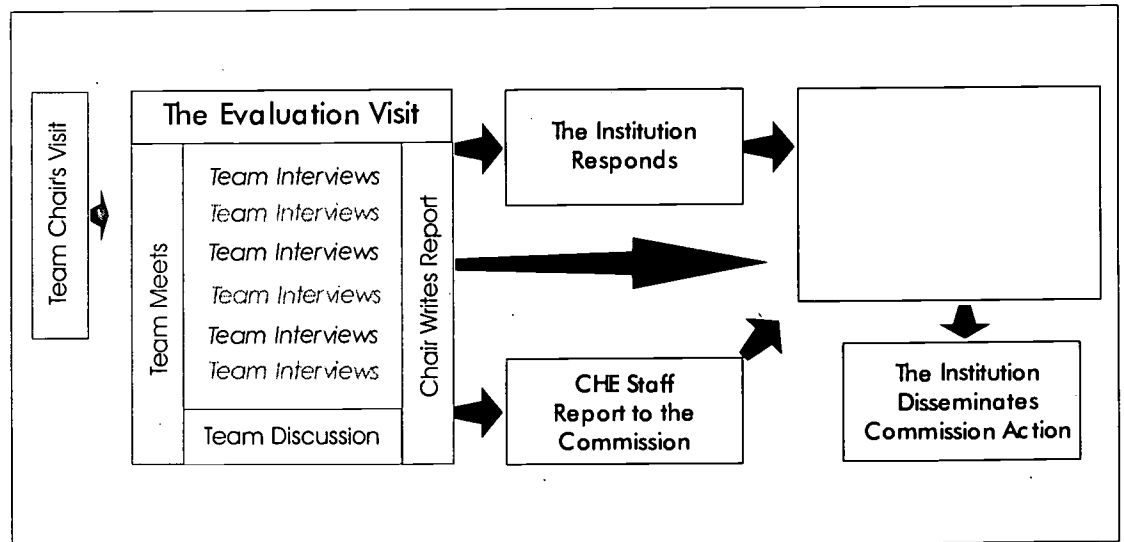
Peer Review

Peer review, which begins after the self-study is complete, is the process by which educators from similar organizations examine an institution under review. It is a comprehensive evaluation by peers who examine the institution's self-study and conduct a team visit, followed by a separate review by different peers and public representatives on the Commission. It occurs approximately five years after an institution is initially accredited and every 10 years thereafter.

In addition, five years after each decennial visit, the institution prepares a periodic review report (PRR), which is reviewed by peer evaluators. Commission staff members also monitor each institution between reviews to determine if special circumstances require more frequent evaluations. The PRR is a retrospective, current, and prospective analysis of an institution since its last evaluation. It includes a description of how the institution responded to any recommendations that the institution made five years previously in its own self-study report, by the visiting team that evaluated the institution, and by the Commission. For more information about the PRR, see the Commission's *Handbook for Periodic Review Reports*. This handbook, *Designs for Excellence*, addresses only the 10-year review.

The decennial peer review, which includes a team visit and Commission action, is initiated when Commission staff nominate a team chair and identify several evaluators from institutions similar to the institution under review. Once the institution approves the roster of its evaluators, the team reads the self-study report and background materials and visits the institution to gather additional information and perspectives from faculty, staff, students, administrators, trustees, and community members (Figure 3). The team visit validates the institution's findings in its self-study and sharpens its impact by making recommendations. The team will recommend whether the Commission on Higher Education should accredit or reaccredit the institution, it may recommend follow-up activities so that the institution can meet the Commission's standards, and it may offer non-binding suggestions for improvements.

Figure 3
The Peer Review Process



The team's written report is reviewed by the institution for factual accuracy and then considered by the Commission, through its Committee on Evaluation Reports. (Candidate institutions are reviewed by the Committee on Follow-up Activities/Candidate Institutions. For more information, see the Commission's handbook *Candidacy for Accreditation*.) Members of the Committee on Evaluation Reports include commissioners, evaluation team chairs, and the Commission's staff liaison assigned to the institution under review.

The Committee studies all materials relevant to the institution, including the institution's self-study document, the report of the visiting team, the institution's formal response to that report, and the team's recommendation regarding accreditation. After a full discussion, the Committee forwards a recommendation to the full Commission for formal action.

After discussing the particulars of the case, the Commission considers each recommendation and decides whether to accept it or to take a different action. The Commission's accreditation decision may include several types of actions, ranging from a reaffirmation of accreditation without conditions to one requiring an institution to "show cause" why its accreditation should not be removed. This judgment is conveyed to the institution in the form of an action letter, addressed to the institution's chief executive officer but intended for circulation to all of the institution's constituencies.

Role of Characteristics of Excellence

One of the essential points of reference for self-study and peer review is *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*, the Commission's primary statement of standards for accreditation. The standards reflect indicators of quality that are appropriate for institutions of higher education and are the basis for judging institutional effectiveness. They identify an institution's mission, goals, and objectives as guideposts for all aspects of the accreditation protocol. The following excerpt from *Characteristics* explains the significance of accreditation in the Middle States region:

Middle States accreditation is an expression of confidence in an institution's mission and goals, its performance, and its resources. Based upon the results of an institutional self-study and an evaluation by a team of peers and colleagues assigned by the Commission, accreditation attests the judgment of the Commission on Higher Education that an institution has met the following criteria:

- that it is guided by well-defined and appropriate goals;
- that it has established conditions and procedures under which its goals can be realized;
- that it is accomplishing its goals substantially;
- that it is so organized, staffed, and supported that it can be expected to continue to accomplish its goals; and
- that it meets the standards of the Middle States Association's Commission on Higher Education.

The Commission on Higher Education emphasizes the need for constructive interaction by many members of the academic community during the self-study process, although the methods for achieving representative participation will vary from institution to institution. The Commission also welcomes innovative approaches to self-study that enhance an institution's strategic plan and enable the Commission to affirm that the institution continues to meet the Commission's standards for accreditation.

2

Models and Approaches to Self-Study

There are four major models for self-study. They are the comprehensive, comprehensive with emphasis (also called comprehensive with special focus), selected topics, and alternative models. Within these broad models, there are many possible approaches to self-study and evaluation, because the mission, purpose, internal conditions, needs, and external influences at each educational institution are different.

An institution should not set aside its needs and priorities in order to undergo peer review for accreditation. In fact, each institution is encouraged to select the model and approach that best suit its needs and priorities. The specific model and approach that are chosen are less important than the long-term usefulness of the self-study.

The different models for self-study may be conceptualized as points on a continuum in which any particular approach falls somewhere between a fully comprehensive self-study approach and one which is narrowly focused. A significant number of institutions elect the comprehensive model for self-study, and many institutions benefit from the self-reflection and analysis that are required by this model. However, if an institution recently conducted a thorough self-evaluation, such as during an institution-wide planning process, or if the institution has a regular program of institutional research that can provide comprehensive data, the institution might want to consider an alternate model for self-study.

The approach to self-study that an institution selects should be sufficiently broad to meet the institution's needs, as well as sufficiently thorough to provide the basic information that will enable the Commission to fulfill its responsibility of determining if the institution has fulfilled its stated mission and goals. The Commission also expects that all of the standards identified and discussed in *Characteristics of Excellence* will be addressed in the institution's self-study, regardless of the model or approach that is selected.

In some instances, the Commission directs the scope of an institution's self-study, in response to either the review of a periodic review report or a follow-up report. A committee of the Commission may recommend that an institution give further emphasis to a particular area in its next self-study, and the Commission's staff liaison will assist the institution in determining how best to address the required issues.

Institutions are encouraged to develop a carefully designed narrative report, keyed to current circumstances and supported by necessary factual data that are presented in a concise and readable form. The majority of the self-study report should be concerned with introspection, analysis, and the presentation of findings, not with description alone. In order to facilitate the visit of an evaluation team, the self-study report should include a broad overview of the institution, not a one-dimensional perspective.

The self-study approach should enable the institution to utilize any research or evaluation that it recently has completed internally or received from external agencies, rather than duplicate those efforts. One way to avoid unnecessary duplication is to maintain an annotated inventory of all data, evaluations, or other such reports. If such an inventory does not exist at the beginning of the self-study process, it is wise to create one and distribute it early. The inventory subsequently can be updated, publicized regularly throughout the institution, and made available on a computer network or centrally located in printed format.

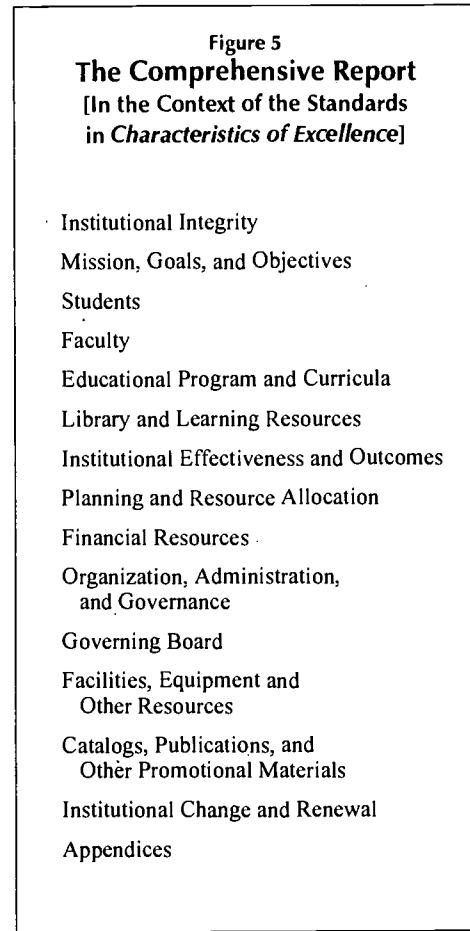
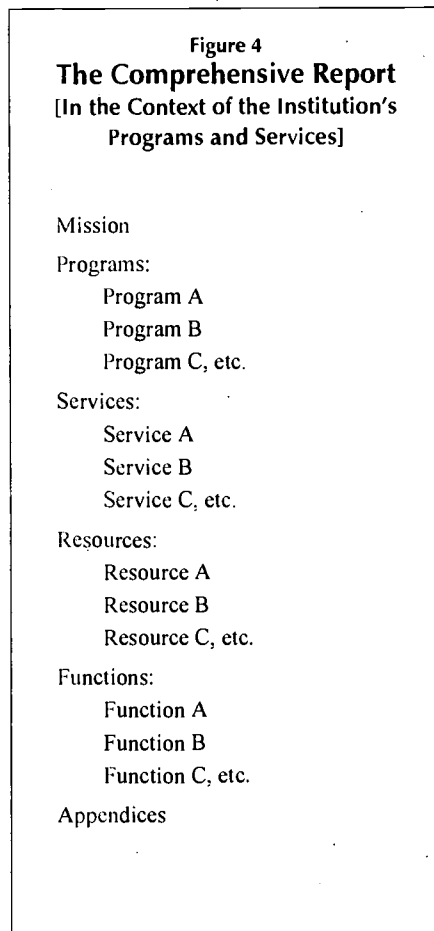
At the end of the self-study process, the steering committee should reach a consensus on the recommendations which flow from the self-study analysis. These recommendations should be reviewed carefully with an eye towards unifying and synthesizing them whenever possible. For example, if most of the academic work groups recommend increasing efforts to review general education requirements, that recommendation should be presented as "institutional," rather than be reiterated in every instance.

One of the goals of selecting a particular model and approach should be to foster further institutional self-study and planning. Institutional growth and improvement on a continuous basis after the self-study and evaluation team visit are as important as the short-range improvements and accountability typically expected from the process. Therefore it is important that the narrative in each self-study report include, in addition to description and analysis, a link to the institution's existing plans for the future as well as an explanation of how the self-study findings will be considered in the institution's planning process in order to ensure the long-term usefulness of the self-study.

The Comprehensive Model

The comprehensive model for self-study enables a college or university to appraise every aspect of its programs and services, governing and supporting structures, resources, and educational outcomes in relation to the institution's mission and goals.

Of the many approaches to organizing a self-study under this model, a typical comprehensive self-study begins with a careful reassessment of the institution's mission, goals, and objectives. This review lays the groundwork for gathering data and conducting analyses, as well as setting priorities and making recommendations for change and improvement.



Once the mission, goals, and objectives have been reviewed, the self-study process should focus on each of the programs, services, resources, and functions in terms of the criteria set forth in *Characteristics* (Figure 4). Another approach could be to discuss the institution in the context of the standards as they are presented in *Characteristics* (Figure 5).

Those participating in a self-study using the basic comprehensive model should understand that the inquiry in each area will be conducted in depth, but the institution ultimately may decide not to give equal weight to each area in the final self-study document.

The Comprehensive with Special Emphasis Model

Comprehensive with special emphasis (or special focus) self-study, a variant of the basic comprehensive self-study model, is particularly useful for institutions wishing to give special attention to selected areas or issues that affect the institution. One example of this model is provided in Figure 6. It involves an assessment of mission and goals; an overview of the programs, services, resources, and functions of the institution; and an in-depth examination of issues or areas which the institution judges to be of primary concern or significance.

The areas of emphasis usually are chosen in one of several ways. For example, the topic may be one of the categories from *Characteristics*, or it may be an issue which is common to several categories and of special interest to the entire campus, such as general education, computers and other technologies, or outcomes assessment.

An institution should choose areas of emphasis in consultation with the Commission staff liaison assigned to that institution. However, the balance between the areas of emphasis and the comprehensive component of the self-study will vary from institution to institution.

In selecting the areas to be studied, it is important to remember that areas which allow the working groups and the visiting team to understand and analyze a cross-section of the institution often are more valuable than those which are limited to a particular unit or program. For example, it is more valuable to examine the impact of computers on the entire teaching and learning process, rather than to review only the computer science program.

The steering committee should decide whether the areas of emphasis will be assigned their own chapters or whether the issues will permeate the entire self-study report. Nevertheless, it is the nature of a comprehensive self-study with special emphasis that recommendations in the report give special attention to the chosen areas of emphasis.

The Selected Topics Model

A selected topics model involves more concentrated attention to certain selected areas, units, or aspects of the institution. Compared to the comprehensive with emphasis model, the selected topics model is more narrowly focused. The selected topic(s) should encompass the entire institution, to the extent possible, although giving less in-depth coverage to the comprehensive categories outside the selected topics (Figure 7). The topics also should be sufficiently general to allow for an appropriate selection of the evaluators who will visit the institution. Early discussion with the Commission staff liaison is essential to ensure that the topics selected are appropriate for the self-study.

A selected topics approach includes a substantial opening chapter that provides a summary evaluation of the institution—a “mini-comprehensive” section—which provides the context for the topics to be reviewed. This section serves as an introduction to the institution and should be sufficiently thorough in

Figure 6
Contents of a Comprehensive with Emphasis Self-Study Report
[One Approach]

- Mission
- Programs:
 - Program A
 - Program B
 - Program C, etc.
- Services:
 - Service A
 - Service B
 - Service C, etc.
- Resources:
 - Resource A
 - Resource B
 - Resource C, etc.
- Functions:
 - Function A
 - Function B
 - Function C, etc.
- Area of Emphasis
 - A standard from *Characteristics* or
 - An issue common to Programs, Services, Resources, and Functions that interests the entire campus
- Appendices

Figure 7
Contents of a Selected Topics Self-Study Report

- Summary Institutional Context:
 - Mission
 - Programs
 - Services
 - Resources
 - Functions
- Selected Topics:
 - Rationale for Topics and Relevance to Self-Study
 - Discussion A
 - Discussion B
 - Discussion C, etc.
- Appendices

its analysis to demonstrate that the institution meets the basic standards for accreditation that are outlined in *Characteristics*.

In selecting its topics, an institution may benefit, in some instances, by choosing to concentrate its efforts on a study which parallels another major study or assessment project that is in progress. Such studies might be multi-phased or time-sequenced in ways that do not fall within the conventional 18-month self-study period. An example of this approach might be a full curricular review, parallel to an outcomes assessment project that has begun but is not yet complete.

Institutional growth and improvement on a continuous basis after the self-study and evaluation team visit are as important as the short-range improvements and accountability typically expected from the process.

The institution's current strategic planning process also can be chosen as one of the selected topics in this approach to self-study in order to avoid repeating processes that are meeting the goals of self-study. By this choice, institutions can elect to review their planning and refine or enhance it in light of current institutional challenges, such as retention, fiscal restraints, or faculty diversification. In this instance, the institutional plan should be attached as a companion document to the institution's self-study.

The Alternative Self-Study Model

Institutions may propose to have their accreditation reaffirmed through the alternative model to traditional self-study.

Except for institutions that are undergoing self-study for initial accreditation or those that are seeking to have their accreditation reaffirmed for the first time, any institution may request approval from Commission staff to use an alternative approach to self-study. Institutions planning to utilize this model will be expected to meet the following criteria:

- The institution is not under review by the Commission for any substantive change;
- The institution has a planning process which links planning and budgeting;
- The institution can confirm, on the basis of three recent consecutive annual fiscal audits, that its finances are in order and that it is meeting its financial obligations;
- The institution can document—through on-going assessment, program review, and internal audit—its institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes;
- The institution can document—through professional accreditation reports and external reviews—that it engages in ongoing self-study.

The approach utilized for the alternative model need not necessarily be a self-evaluation that is conducted primarily for the purpose of reaccreditation by the Commission. In fact, some acceptable alternatives actually may bear little resemblance to what is generally classified as self-study. These are situations that demand flexibility and adaptation in designing an individualized approach to self-study, and the success of this model depends upon the institution's ability to be innovative.

For example, the approach to the alternative self-study model that an institution selects may be related to a mission which is too complex to fit into the conventional categories of self-study. The approach also may rest upon a series of self-studies or institutional audits carried out over several consecutive years, or it may be based upon information gathered as a result of systematic planning and assessment.

Research universities often are best served by devising a self-study approach which addresses a specific theme that is institutional in nature but focused on a current issue.

One such theme might be research in which the university evaluates the impact that a particular issue has upon graduate programs, undergraduate programs, resource allocation, or academic support services.

The university also may take this opportunity to review its undergraduate curricula to confirm that research and graduate studies have not diluted its commitment to undergraduate students.

Another approach to the alternative model may be related to the specialized nature of the institution—such as colleges of art or music; schools of medicine, nursing, optometry or podiatry; seminaries; or other institutions that include specialized programs. Such an institution may well decide to coordinate its review by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education with that of one or more specialized accrediting organizations. These institutions are invited to consider a collaborative self-study process, by which the Commission and specialized accreditors may agree that the institution can develop a single self-study process and self-study report, one which both organizations can utilize to evaluate the institution with a single team visit that is composed of representatives from both organizations.

When a regional and a specialized accrediting organization agree to conduct a collaborative evaluation visit, the design for a collaborative self-study would address the specific concerns of all parties, and a number of issues should be agreed upon in advance by all parties. Some of the issues to be considered include:

[T]he Commission and specialized accreditors may agree that the institution can develop a single self-study process and self-study report, one which both can utilize to evaluate the institution by means of a single team visit.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- the structure of the self-study process and the scope of involvement by institutional stakeholders in that process;
- the evaluation responsibilities of both the entire collaborative team and the members representing each accrediting agency;
- the protocol to be followed in conducting the exit interview; and
- the structure, organization, length, and style of the evaluation report that will be prepared by the visiting team. [Program evaluations could be incorporated within or appended to the body of the report.]

For this collaboration to be successful, however, all parties must demonstrate some flexibility, and each accrediting organization would take separate actions on the institution's accredited status. The decision to enter into a collaborative self-study should be based on the overall benefits to the institution. For further information about this process, consult the Commission's publication *Collaborative Evaluations by Regional and Specialized Accrediting Agencies: Guidelines and Procedures* (1997).

To ask the Commission to consider one of these unique approaches to self-study, the institution should demonstrate that it meets the Commission's criteria for selecting the alternative model for self-study, as described earlier in this section. In addition to a detailed description of the proposed process, the request should identify: (1) how the approach will benefit the institution and strengthen its educational programs and services; and (2) how the self-study process and the report to be produced will enable the Commission to fulfill its responsibilities to the broader academic community and to the public at large.

The type of documentation to be submitted will vary according to the circumstances of each institution, but the institution need not develop new documentation that duplicates existing materials.

For complex institutions or those engaged in concurrent self-review and planning activities, a self-study and evaluation process extended over a longer than usual time frame may be appropriate. In special cases, even the evaluation visit need not occur on a single occasion, if smaller visits in sequence will serve the institution and the Commission well. Similarly, both the focus and timing of evaluation for institutions experiencing significant crises may be adjusted in response to an institution's circumstances.

The Commission's staff liaison will be prepared to discuss these and other options during the preliminary staff visit to the institution.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

3

Planning and Organizing for Self-Study

The self-study process is most effective when the campus environment is one in which the self-study process can be nurtured and when there is effective leadership by a committed steering committee, early planning, and regular contact with Commission staff.

The Self-Study Environment

The prerequisite for the effective design and implementation of an institutional self-study process is a self-study environment which includes appropriate resources, a campus climate of cooperation, and effective institutional research and planning functions. The Commission recognizes that an institution's unique characteristics may determine how these requisite conditions will be met.

Resources. Implementing the self-study design requires fiscal and physical resources, including adequate space in which to conduct the self-study functions, information resources, and the technology needed to support data gathering and report preparation.

Climate. Good morale among the faculty, staff, and students is important to the success of the self-study. Although problems exist to some degree in many institutions, or at least are perceived to exist by some campus groups, the self-study should not be held hostage to major campus conflicts and disruptions. In exceptional cases, it may be necessary to postpone the commencement or continuation of self-study; in such instances, the chief executive officer or the accreditation liaison officer should contact the Commission staff liaison for guidance or to request an extension of time to begin the self-study.

Research and Planning. Good institutional research and an ongoing planning function are the foundation for any self-study. Without adequate and appropriate databases, the self-study process cannot function effectively and there can be no solid basis for either descriptive or analytical results.

Not all institutions starting self-study processes have well organized and staffed institutional research offices, but most institutions have the capability of carrying out an institutional research function, even if it is distributed across several units of the institution. In an ideal scenario, an institution also will have a formal institution-wide assessment plan that guides the collection and analysis of data.

As a starting point, the institution could make excellent use of the Annual Institutional Profile (AIP) filed with the Commission each year. A comparison of AIPs for several years could provide information about the basic characteristics and trends affecting the institution. The institution's most recent Periodic Review Report, as well as the previous self-study and evaluation team report, should become an integral part of the materials to be reviewed by the steering committee. In addition, institutions generally have a variety of annual reports, program review data, facilities reports, effectiveness studies, inventories, and similar data that can be used as a basis for self-study, in addition to reports on enrollments, finances, and other topics that may be required by external agencies.

The Commission does not prescribe a particular institutional planning process. It does, however, suggest strongly that planning be conducted within the context of the institution's goals, priorities, resources, and commitments. This means, at a minimum, that the institution has:

- carried out a thorough examination of its mission;
- reviewed its internal and external environments to form preliminary estimates of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats;
- developed and implemented a formal system for setting priorities and for developing budgets, strategies, activities, and timetables; and
- devised an evaluation procedure for systematically reviewing self-study planning, the self-study process, and self-study findings and recommendations.

Early Planning for Self-Study

Self-study done well is an educative but time-intensive process. A full academic year is the normal minimum working time needed, but preparation should begin at least three semesters before the anticipated date of the evaluation visit. If an institution has special needs or concerns, more time may be needed to emphasize particular issues.

Early planning usually is conducted by a representative group of persons who are familiar with the mission and the essential functions of the institution. This group, often appointed by the chief executive officer, may well become the self-study steering committee. At the very outset, this group should meet with the institution's senior administrators to discuss the relevant issues, especially the approach or model that might be utilized for self-study.

This stage of the process is not too early for the governing board, faculty, institutional research, and planning staff to become involved. The chief executive officer may choose to provide a concept paper to the board on the institutional issues that may be highlighted in the self-study. The chief academic officer may wish to use this early period to prepare the faculty for participation in the process by reviewing academic records, such as program reviews and any external evaluations that may have been conducted. Institutional research and planning personnel also should be consulted on the scope of available data and options for self-study strategies. If research functions are not being carried out through either

a central or a distributed model, data coordinators should be appointed. Their role, beginning immediately, should be to compile data and indices to those data for purposes of the self-study.

The Steering Committee

Careful attention must be given to identifying and appointing competent, well-respected, and committed individuals who will form a steering committee and who will provide leadership by fulfilling specific responsibilities during the entire self-study process.

Membership

The committee is led by a chair, who usually is appointed by the institution's chief executive officer. In some circumstances, it is useful to appoint co-chairs to lead the self-study effort, such as at large and complex universities or at multi-campus institutions.

**If a new steering committee
is formed, it is essential
that it work closely with
relevant existing committees
on campus to avoid
duplication and conflict**

The members of the steering committee may be appointed or elected, but they should represent the total campus community and should include adequate faculty representation. Institutions should consider carefully the abilities, credibility, and skills of the chair and any co-chairs, as well as the individual committee members. Steering committee members and chairs must have a sense of commitment to the process and to the eventual goal of institutional

improvement. They also must be given the authority to carry out their duties.

Although some institutions elect to use an existing committee, most institutions choose to create a new steering committee because of the value of having fresh insights and judgments from a new group. If a new steering committee is formed, it is essential that it work closely with relevant existing committees on campus to avoid duplication and conflict, and to ensure that the new committee's work is continued and implemented by the institution's continuing standing committees after the self-study is completed.

Responsibilities

The steering committee is responsible for providing leadership to the entire self-study process. This includes determining the key issues for self-study, preparing the design, developing the charges to subcommittees and coordinating their work on the various issues to be studied, ensuring that the timetable is implemented as planned, arranging for one or more campus hearings to review drafts of the self-study, and overseeing the completion of the final self-study report.

Key Issues. One of the first tasks of the steering committee is to identify key issues and questions to be addressed during the self-study. This process begins with a review of the institution's mission and goals, and a survey of the campus community will add validity and credibility to the decisions the steering committee makes about issues and questions.

Working Groups. The areas of self-study as defined by the steering committee become the basis for establishing working groups or subcommittees, each of which will be responsible for the detailed review of one or more related areas. The steering committee should develop the charges for each of these working groups, develop and distribute guidelines for preparing reports, and provide training to all working group members. The working groups should include a broad range of constituencies on the campus, although the number and size of these subcommittees, the methods for distributing assignments, and the nature of the tasks assigned will vary by institution.

Database. Compiling and analyzing existing data is an essential element of institutional research and planning. The steering committee should consider recent evaluations, progress reports, annual student and institutional outcomes assessment, reports routinely gathered in campus offices and academic units, and other reports prepared for purposes other than self-study. These resources should be inventoried, made available to appropriate committees, and utilized in the self-study. Further direction with regard to data collection is offered in Chapter 5.

Communication. A primary concern of the steering committee is communication—among and between the steering committee, the working groups, and the various campus constituencies.

The first key may be the result of the structure of the relationships between the groups. For example, the chairs of each working group could become an informal committee that works with the steering committee. In any event, the steering committee should meet regularly with the chairs of the working groups in order to monitor progress and make any necessary recommendations.

The steering committee also should ensure that the working groups interact effectively with campus groups during the process, and the committee should arrange one or more forums so that the campus communities can discuss academic and other self-study issues. In addition, the committee should report regularly to the president and trustees about the progress of the self-study process and also communicate that information to the entire campus.

Reports. The committee should analyze interim reports from the various work groups to determine whether assumptions are clear, whether data contain sufficient context, and whether statistics are interpreted and their significance discussed. Editorial guidelines for these drafts are discussed in Chapter 5.

Finally, it is the steering committee's responsibility to assemble and edit the drafts submitted by each of the subcommittees and to prepare the self-study report. Further guidelines appear in Chapters 4 and 5.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Planning Questions

As part of early preparation, the steering committee (or the initial *pro tempore* self-study leadership) should consider the following questions, which also relate to the prerequisites for self-study that are discussed earlier in this chapter. Many are also relevant to the Commission's standards, as described in *Characteristics of Excellence*:

Has there been a recent review of the mission?

One of the explicit standards for accreditation is that an institution has "...clearly stated mission and goals appropriate to the institution's resources and the needs of its constituents" (*Characteristics*, p. 4). The institution's mission should reveal its philosophical stance and societal obligations, provide guidelines for the maintenance of institutional integrity, and serve as a guide for educational planning. It also will operate as a frame of reference for decisions about such matters as student admission and retention, equity, the curriculum, the faculty, and the allocation of resources. Recent changes to the institution's mission and goals should be reflected in the self-study. If there has not been a recent review, this may be the time to begin one. On the other hand, the self-study process might reveal the need to modify slightly or to change significantly the institution's mission.

Is there an effective information system to support the self-study process?

The data needed for self-study should be readily available internally—a product of the institution's regular outcomes research (*Characteristics*, pp. 16–17). If they are not, compiling and analyzing them should be an essential part of the planning for self-study. If there is no office of institutional research (or data coordinators in a distributed model), the self-study committee itself should identify and gather all relevant documents and materials which might serve as a source of information. Consideration should be given to recent evaluations, annual student outcomes assessments, or other reports prepared for purposes other than Middle States evaluation. All such reports, as well as those routinely gathered in offices and academic units on campus, should be inventoried and utilized in the self-study effort.

Does the institution have a formal planning process?

The standards for accreditation require that institutions have "ongoing...self-study and planning aimed at increasing the institution's effectiveness..." (*Characteristics*, p. 4). Information gathered through ongoing formal planning is very useful in the self-study process. In effect, formal planning should prepare the institution strategically for the task at hand and, likewise, recommendations growing out of the self-study process should be incorporated into the continuing planning process.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

❑ *Is there a process for systematically reviewing and improving academic programs, courses, and learning outcomes?*

Characteristics of Excellence provides for institutions to use a variety of evaluative strategies to assure that academic programs remain dynamic and responsive to changing needs (*Characteristics*, p.12). Cycles of academic reviews assist in assuring that courses and programs remain consistent with institutional and departmental goals while encouraging innovation. Data from these reviews should be used in the self-study process. In addition, the Commission's policy statement, "Outcomes Assessment" (10/96) requires institutions to "provide evidence that the assessment of outcomes, particularly learning outcomes, is an ongoing institutional activity."

❑ *Is there another major institutional study in progress or recently completed? Are there ways to avoid unnecessary duplication in the self-study process?*

An institution should not duplicate unnecessarily any evaluative activity that was recently completed or fail to use any that is currently in progress. For example, the institution may have engaged in a recent, major self-evaluation or a planning process, either for the institution's own internal use

or for external constituents, such as for state and federal regulatory agencies or for other accrediting organizations. Or the institution may be considering requesting a collaborative self-study and evaluation visit by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and other specialized accreditors or state administrative agencies.

Information gathered from such evaluations should be reviewed carefully to determine how it might be utilized in the Middle States self-study process. Significant existing data and analysis may affect both the scope of the

self-study undertaken by the institution and the nature of the documentation needed to support the self-study and the evaluation visit. The Commission will give serious consideration to existing reports and may accept them so that the institution can focus its attention and its fiscal and human resources on new areas. Institutions are asked to discuss with the Commission staff liaison any such approaches which might eliminate duplicative efforts.

The Commission will give serious consideration to existing reports and may accept them so that the institution can concentrate its attention and its fiscal and human resources on new areas.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Have there been recent major events which have caused or might cause significant changes in the institution's circumstances?*

Because preparation for an evaluation visit should be an intensification of an institution's existing self-study and planning process, the self-study report will be most useful if it emphasizes current needs, problems, and opportunities. Institutions, therefore, should review carefully any recent changes which may have altered their mission or their delivery of services and should consider the impact of any significant changes that are planned for the future.

- Is the campus environment conducive to self-study?*

Institutions should make every effort to ensure the interest, cooperation, and active participation of all their constituents. This is perhaps the most crucial aspect of the preparation stage, and the initial visit to the campus by a Commission staff member can serve as a means of stimulating interest in self-study. However, any major unresolved campus conflict may lead the institution to request a delay in commencing self-study.

- Have appropriate plans been made to involve the institution's constituencies and larger community?*

Self-study provides a special opportunity for each institution to reach out to all of its constituents. A broad cross-section of an institution's constituencies might include, for example, faculty, students, trustees, administrators, alumni, parents, employers, neighbors, and for publicly-funded institutions, legislative representatives.

Such participation is essential because each institution's decision-making process can be enriched if it incorporates a wide range of diverse

perspectives, ideas, and judgments. In addition, the institution's internal stakeholders and external community will better understand the institution, will be more likely to have a sense of "ownership" and become constructively involved in the self-study process, and will be more prepared to implement any resulting plans.

Methods of achieving wide representative participation in self-study will vary from institution to institution. In addition to having representation from each campus constituency participate in the work of the steering committee and the working groups that carry out the self-study, many institutions rely on focus groups, surveys, and targeted review/discussion of self-study drafts to reach wider audiences within each constituency.

A broad cross-section of an institution's constituencies might include, for example, faculty, students, trustees, administrators, alumni, parents, employers, neighbors, and for publicly-funded institutions, legislative representatives.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Some institutions have published their committee and subcommittee drafts on campus-wide electronic discussion groups or intranet to stimulate comment from the campus community, as well as to inform their various constituents about the progress of the self-study, the findings and recommendations, and ultimately, the Commission's action.

❑ *Has a multi-campus institution or system addressed the relationship between its units and the central office?*

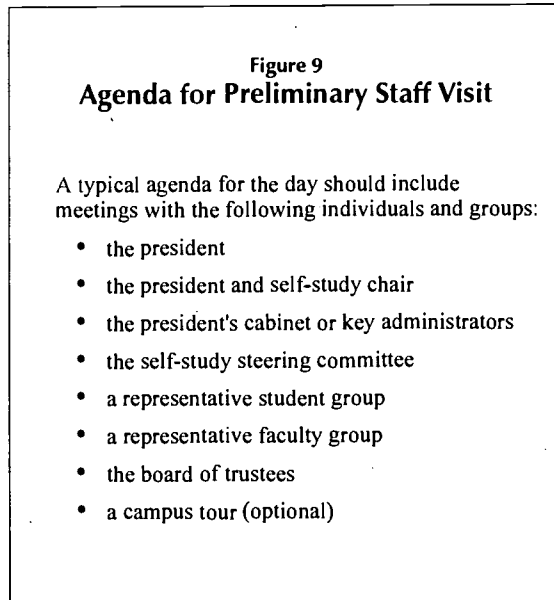
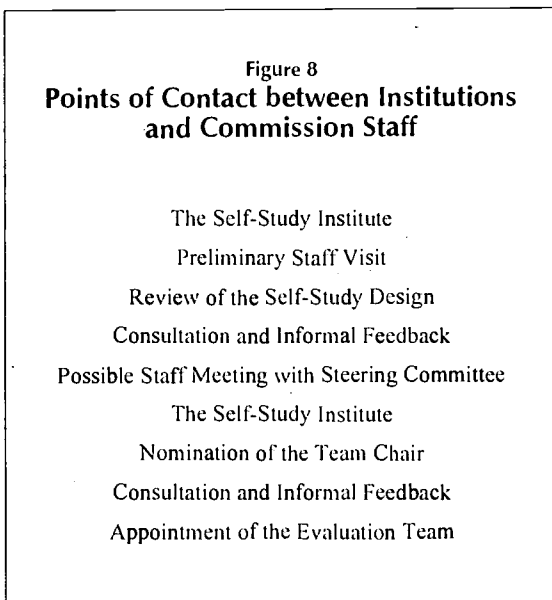
Institutions having two or more separate units organized around a central or system office should clarify the context within which each unit plans and operates its programs and services to achieve its objectives.

The Commission urges each institution to devise appropriate means of organizing its activities so that they result in meaningful self-assessment and ensure wide participation by various constituents. A well-planned and clearly focused self-study should result in a common effort to assess and to improve the institution.

Contacts with Commission Staff

The Commission staff liaison, the primary link between the Commission and the institution, will be available to answer all questions, concerns, or requests for assistance relating to the self-study. The staff has direct contact with the institution's representatives at several points before the evaluation team visit, including informal feedback to the institution on the design of the self-study (Figure 8).

Approximately 18 to 24 months prior to a regularly scheduled evaluation, the Commission staff liaison contacts the institution to arrange for an on-campus visit. During the visit, the Commission staff member meets with the chief executive officer, other staff officers, trustees, the self-study steering committee, a substantial number of faculty who are representative of the entire faculty, and student representatives (Figure 9).



The visiting staff member is not an evaluator. The preliminary staff visit reinforces the partnership between the institution and the Commission and permits the staff to become better acquainted with the institution and to establish and maintain a professional relationship during the self-study process. It is an opportunity for staff to learn more about the current status of the institution, to assist the institution in finding the most appropriate means of addressing relevant issues, to provide expertise on the procedures and the institution's preparations for self-study and peer review, and to discuss self-study with various groups that will have crucial roles throughout the process.

In addition to these early staff contacts, the Commission sponsors an annual Self-Study Institute to prepare institutions for self-study. It features sessions led by peers who have completed the process and by Commission staff. Representatives of institutions that are preparing to design a self-study are expected to participate. The following year, when the institution is in the process of implementing its design, its representatives again attend the Institute and participate in more advanced sessions with other institutions at a similar point in the process.

Staff also are available for consultation on the detailed information provided in a number of Commission publications, including the following:

- *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*
- *Framework for Outcomes Assessment*
- *Off-Campus Offerings: Handbook for Evaluators and Institutions*
- *Handbook for Graduate Education*
- *Guidelines for Distance Learning Programs*
- *Handbook for Evaluation Teams*
- *Handbook for Chairing and Hosting an Evaluation Team*

The next contact between the institution and Commission staff occurs when staff identify an appropriate team chair and team members, and the institution approves the roster. Most of the final preparations for a team visit occur directly between the institution, the team chair, and the evaluators, although Commission staff send relevant documents to team members and coordinate the billing for or reimbursement of expenses for the visit.

**[T]he Commission sponsors
an annual
Self-Study Institute,
to prepare institutions for
self-study. It features sessions
led by peers who have
completed the process
and by Commission staff.**

4

Linking the Design and Self-Study to Commission Standards and External Requirements

The self-study process for an institution of higher education in the Middle States region should explore issues that are linked to the criteria identified in the primary standards for the Commission on Higher Education, *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Standards for Accreditation*. Developed by consensus among member institutions in the region, *Characteristics* is the anchor for all activities conducted by institutions and by the Commission.

Characteristics covers such topics as an institution's mission, goals, and objectives; its human resources; its programmatic, fiscal, and physical infrastructure; and the manner in which these various parts function together. All institutions must address each of the standards in *Characteristics*. However, because each institution is governed by its own mission, goals, and objectives, all of the criteria do not apply in equal proportion to all institutions. Therefore, the design for self-study should indicate that the process will address those sections of *Characteristics* that are relevant to the model or approach that is selected for self-study.

While the questions listed below are not the only questions that might be asked, they are intended as a starting point and as a guide to the steering committee as it manages the breadth and depth of the self-study discourse and as it directs the report-writing process. In addition, the design should describe how and by whom these types of questions will be addressed.

The Starting Point: Mission, Goals, and Objectives

A mission statement expresses the nature and scope of the impact that the institution expects to have on the students it serves, in the context of the character, purpose, and uniqueness of the institution.

The institutional goals and objectives define how the institution expects to fulfill its mission. Goals are essentially statements of outcomes, and objectives are the methods by which those outcomes will be attained. Each program or service of the institution also has its own goals and objectives, and these programmatic goals must be linked directly to one or more institutional goals. Achieving each of the program goals leads to the achievement of the institutional goals, and achieving the institutional goals fulfills the mission. Progress is measurable from the bottom to the top of this pyramid.

Characteristics, therefore, insists on consistency between the mission and the goals and objectives at both the institutional and programmatic levels. As the institution responds to changes in its environment, the need for programmatic changes may require changes at the institutional level and even in the mission itself. An example of such change is the incorporation by many institutions of distance learning as a mode of instruction. The institution should state explicitly the rationale for entering into distance learning and should modify its academic programs and support services as needed to reflect this new delivery system. The self-study should reflect the extent to which this new instructional mode is achieving the institution's goals and objectives and enhancing student learning.

In reviewing the institution's mission, goals, and objectives, the self-study process should address at least the following questions in order to place the institution in the correct historical context; to define the clarity and unity of its current mission, goals, and objectives; and to assess their adequacy for the future.

Historical Overview

- ✓ Have the institution's mission, goals, and objectives changed over time? If so, when did those changes occur, why did they occur, and what was the nature and impact of those changes?

Clarity and Unity

- ✓ Is the current configuration of goals and objectives clearly defined? In other words, are they expressed in simple terms that are broad in scope, identifiable with the institution, and described honestly? Do they state the results sought and the means to be used? Are they reasonably attainable, and are they understandable by and utilized within the institution?
- ✓ Is there a fundamental unity of the institutional and programmatic goals and objectives? If not, which institutional and programmatic goals and objectives are inconsistent and why?
- ✓ Would achievement of the goals lead to fulfillment of the mission? If not, should goals be brought into line with the mission or *vice versa*? What are the political or other barriers, within or external to the institution, that would make it difficult (but not impossible) to achieve greater unity among the mission, goals, and objectives? What opportunities might be available to overcome those barriers?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- ✓ Do various campus constituencies and sources of external influence (such as government, other sponsors, and the geographically immediate community) interpret consistently and support the institution's mission, goals, and objectives? If not, how can these differences best be reconciled or changed?

Adequacy for the Future

- ✓ Are there current or impending changes that might affect the adequacy of the institution's mission, goals, and objectives to serve contemporary or future needs? How could the importance of these changes be evaluated and priorities established? How urgent are they for the institution's survival and growth?

Students

The human resources at an institution of higher education include the students, faculty, administration, staff, and the governing board. A self-study design must provide opportunities for each of these campus constituencies to inquire into the key concerns outlined in *Characteristics*.

As *Characteristics* observes, “[s]tudents are the primary beneficiaries of an institution's educational mission.” Therefore, an institution should obtain and utilize information from student profiles in order to design programs and services that respond to the diverse academic and social needs of its students.

Special attention should be given to programs for marketing, admissions, retention, financial aid, and intramural and extramural activities, as well as to services for financial aid, counseling, and student records. The institution must communicate clearly to students its policies and objectives. It also should be concerned with the overall campus environment.

Questions to be Addressed:

- ✓ Does the range of services offered meet the diverse needs of the student body? If not, which elements are missing?
- ✓ Do the programs and services that are offered correspond with the institution's mission, goals, and objectives? If not, which elements are not congruent? Does the lack of congruence adversely affect the institution's preparedness to serve the needs of its students?
- ✓ Are admissions policies appropriate to the purposes of the institution and consistent with other criteria in *Characteristics*, such as those for educational programs and curricula and for faculty? Are there adequate resources to manage and to evaluate the process? Are the policies clearly stated and adequately disseminated?
- ✓ By what means does the institution gather information about student characteristics, such as demographics, beliefs, attitudes, values, interests, skills, cultural awareness, and other aspects of psychological and social development? Does such data collection describe student characteristics before, during, and after enrollment? Is this process systematic or *ad hoc*?

- ✓ How effectively does knowledge about student characteristics influence and inform the teaching and learning process, the campus climate, the programs offered, and the services provided?

Faculty

Faculty, whose principal responsibility is to teach, are central to the process of developing and delivering an institution's programs and services. In some institutions, faculty responsibilities also may include academic research and/or academic advising.

Characteristics stresses that an institution should be concerned about the criteria and procedures applied to the selection, supervision, academic freedom, continuing professional development, and assessment of both full-time and part-time faculty. The institution's concern should be whether these activities are appropriate to the institution's mission and goals, whether the criteria and procedures are communicated clearly to the faculty, and whether these activities are conducted with regard for "justice, equity, and respect for diversity and human dignity."

Questions to be Addressed:

- ✓ Are faculty responsible for devising and developing the institution's programs in the following areas: academic, professional, research, and service?
- ✓ Does the institution and do faculty accept teaching as the primary responsibility of faculty? If not, to what extent do competing responsibilities affect the teaching and learning that is anticipated by the institution's mission and goals?
- ✓ Are faculty in all departments or divisions of the institution appropriately prepared, and do they remain current, in the following areas: academic qualifications, commitment to scholarship, sensitivity to the strengths and needs of students, continuing professional development, and service to the community?
- ✓ Does the institution have an effective system for monitoring changes in program requirements; the needs of faculty for adequate and equitable procedures for conditions of employment, the employment and tenure status, workload and compensation, and support services for faculty; and their participation in governance? Does it have an effective system for implementing changes in these areas?

Administration and Staff

The administration of an institution consists of a chief executive officer, other senior administrators, and staff. All must have appropriate qualifications, understand the goals and objectives of the institution, and function competently within clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Characteristics identifies the following as some of the important aspects of effective administration: communication and cooperative working relations within the administration and with other constituencies, such as faculty and

students; procedures for the systematic evaluation of administrative units; opportunities for the professional renewal of personnel.

Questions to be Addressed:

- ✓ Does the chief executive officer provide effective leadership for administrative operations, the faculty and other professional staff, and the governing board in fulfilling the institution's mission, goals, and objectives?
- ✓ Do the members of the administrative staff have the necessary skills, time, and assistance that will enable them to discharge their duties effectively?
- ✓ Are the lines of communication among administrators and with various constituencies of the institution open and sufficient?

Governing Board

A governing board reviews, at a policy level, the institution's plans, personnel, facilities, and operations to ensure that the institution fulfills its mission and goals and maintains integrity and quality. It has a legal responsibility as the steward of the institution's property and assets to ensure the continuity of the institution. Its members must be responsive to the institution's various constituencies and must be both loyal supporters, and potential defenders, of the institution.

Characteristics defines an effective board as one that understands and accepts these functions, that is sensitive to the need for its own renewal, and that includes members who are competent and willing to serve unselfishly, avoiding even the appearance of conflicts of interest or personal financial gain.

Questions to be Addressed:

- ✓ Do the bylaws of the governing board provide adequate direction for the membership, characteristics, duties, responsibilities, and privileges of board members? If not, which areas deserve closer attention?
- ✓ Do the individual members of the governing board understand, accept, and faithfully observe the appropriate functions of the board?
- ✓ By what process does the board obtain the information it needs to make informed decisions? What is the quality of the information the board receives, in terms of its breadth, depth, validity, and reliability?
- ✓ Has the board fulfilled its responsibilities for ensuring quality in the planning and administration of programs and services? (Examples of these responsibilities are described in *Characteristics*.)

The Educational Program

The educational program at an institution includes the curriculum; the use of learning resources such as the library and laboratories; support services such as counseling, intramural and extramural activities for students; and informal contacts among students and faculty.

Characteristics seeks to ensure that there is “a demonstrable relationship” between the institutional mission, goals, and objectives and the programmatic goals and objectives, as previously discussed in this chapter. The curricula are coherent groups of courses at “increasingly advanced” collegiate levels, leading to an academic degree and “regularly evaluated and modified as needs require.”

Other aspects of the content and procedures of the educational program described in *Characteristics* include:

- systematic outcomes assessment and program review;
- the encouragement of curricular experimentation, varied instructional methods, and the use of contemporary technology;
- an interdisciplinary and inter-institutional focus, whenever possible;
- a mission-related “balance between specialized areas and general education”;
- clear policies and procedures on the transfer of credit within the institution, between institutions, or in “recognition of extra-institutional...college-level learning”;
- an appropriate curriculum when graduate instruction and research are emphasized;
- the integration of community services with the educational program, consistent with the institution's mission, goals, and objectives; and
- programs for off-campus populations that “meet standards comparable to those of all other institutional offerings.”

Post-Characteristics Policies

Since the initial publication of *Characteristics*, the Commission has developed (and the membership has approved) several policies that rely on the principles stated in *Characteristics* to address developments that are having an increasing impact on higher education institutions. These new policies typically involve multiple sections of *Characteristics*, although their primary reference is to the section on the educational program. They include the following topics:

Outcomes Assessment

The Commission has indicated that it expects all institutions to demonstrate that they have or are developing guidelines and procedures for assessing overall institutional effectiveness, giving primary attention to the assessment of student learning outcomes. For example, an institution should provide evidence that its stated mission, goals, and objectives are congruent with the actual outcomes of its programs and services. The institution should demonstrate that it assembles and analyzes data in order to improve teaching and learning, to enhance the personal development of its students, to improve the institution, and to remain accountable to its stakeholders or constituencies. Specifically, it should identify the desired student learning outcomes, as well as current and planned assessment measures.

In addition, when addressing the Commission's standard on institutional effectiveness, a report on outcomes assessment should focus on how data from an institution's educational programs and services affect the institution's ongoing self-review, decision making, planning, and improvement.

Building upon *Characteristics*, the Commission has developed a policy statement, entitled "Outcomes Assessment" (1996); a handbook, *Framework for Outcomes Assessment* (1996); and *Outcomes Assessment Plans: Guidelines for Developing Outcomes Assessment Plans at Colleges and Universities* (1998).

Distance Learning

The Commission has released a policy statement, entitled "Distance Learning" (1997), and *Guidelines for Distance Learning Programs* (1997). These documents emphasize that distance learning programs are subject to the same level and scope of scrutiny employed in more traditional settings or for conventional campus-based programs.

Questions to be Addressed:

- ✓ Does the total range of curricula, activities, and services "foster the achievement of institutional goals"?
- ✓ For each curriculum, activity, or service, is there congruence between the programmatic goals and objectives; among the institutional mission, goals, and objectives; and between the actual needs of students and the community?
- ✓ Do the various components of the educational program meet the specific criteria outlined above for program procedures and content?
- ✓ Do existing graduate programs have the appropriate breadth, depth, and resources; and do they stimulate independent thinking on a graduate level?
- ✓ Has the introduction of any new mode of instruction, such as distance learning, had a significant effect on the educational program—as well as on any other program, service, or resource—in light of the Commission's standards for accreditation?
- ✓ Does the process for establishing and reviewing the educational program involve appropriate constituencies, and is the process effective?
- ✓ Do the institution's outcomes assessment activities lead to improvements in the educational program, teaching and learning, overall institutional effectiveness, and accountability?

Library and Learning Resources

The effectiveness of library, information, and other learning resources which support the programs and services offered by the institution is defined by the range of resources available to meet the needs of students, faculty, and staff, as well as by the manner in which they are delivered, their accessibility, and their utilization. The resources should be selected collaboratively by competent teaching faculty and information providers, and should be subject to a process of continuous evaluation.

Characteristics provides that each of these dimensions should be examined quantitatively and qualitatively, in light of the ultimate goals of helping students become “independent, self-directed” lifelong learners. The need for broad and convenient access, as well as the effective use of resources, are recurring themes in all discussions of library, information, and other learning resources. Therefore, *Characteristics* stresses that the concept of library and other learning resources should not be limited explicitly by narrow definitions of space (facilities such as libraries or campus versus off-campus locations) and media (print, non-print, or electronic), or limited implicitly by narrow definitions of time (hours of service or electronic access) or location (from the library, other campus facilities, or the homes of individual users).

Questions to be Addressed:

- ✓ Does the range of library, information, and other learning resources adequately support the programs and services being offered?
- ✓ Are the facilities, personnel, and technologies that are available appropriate for the use that is expected to be made of the resources?
- ✓ Are the resources accessible to all who need them in a timely manner?
- ✓ Are there information literacy programs designed to increase the information competence of students, faculty, and administrative staff to know when they have an information need and to evaluate and effectively utilize the information?
- ✓ To what extent are the resources actually utilized by students, faculty, and staff? Are there adequate data on the usage of all types of resources? Are the data and recommendations effectively linked to the institutional planning process?
- ✓ Is there an adequate process for evaluating the content, procedures, and technologies of library, information, and other learning resources which sustain current programs and services? Is there an adequate process for planning which resources may need to be enhanced to facilitate the continued growth of the institution?

For a further discussion of appropriate questions, consult the Commission’s publication *Guidelines for Librarian Evaluators* (1997).

Financial Resources

Each institution should use its budget to plan its income and expenditures, as well as to establish institutional priorities that are based on actual or potential financial resources and on the financial requirements of the programs and services that the institution wishes to offer.

Characteristics encourages institutional autonomy. Specifically, the allocation of resources by budget line item is the responsibility of the chief executive officer and the administrative staff, developed in consultation with the departments or units that deliver the programs and services. The budget is a guide to operating the institution, subject to review and amendment by the governing board, and line-item allocations should be free from control by organizations or individuals outside the institution who provide the resources. However, the process should be

governed by a standard structure for accounting, financial reporting, and auditing.

Questions to be Addressed:

- ✓ Is the budget clearly tied to the planning process?
- ✓ Does the budget reflect revenues that may be reasonably expected from available or attainable fiscal resources?
- ✓ Does the budget adequately support projected programs and services?
- ✓ Have there been significant changes in revenues or expenditures, and how are they being addressed?
- ✓ Is the locus of decision-making appropriately vested in the governing board, the chief executive officer, the administrative staff, and other relevant campus constituencies?
- ✓ Do the procedures for accounting, financial reporting, and auditing conform to standard practices?

Facilities, Equipment, and Other Resources

The building, equipment, materials, operating funds, contributions from the community, and the resources of other organizations that are used to support an institution's programs and services are determined by the needs of its students. These resources should enable the institution to accomplish its goals and objectives.

Characteristics provides that the governing board rely on wise planning and systematic review to ensure the quality of the facilities, equipment, and other resources, and for stability over time. It also notes that the systematic maintenance of appropriate facilities, equipment, and other resources, managed by "qualified personnel," should result from "a sense of community responsibility" and result in "economy and convenience in scheduling," "increased usefulness and effectiveness," a basis for attracting students and faculty, and enhanced prestige for the institution.

Questions to be Addressed:

- ✓ Is there a direct relationship among the needs of students enrolled in programs or utilizing services at the institution; the adequacy of appropriate planning and the management of resources within the institution; and the mission, goals, objectives, and available fiscal resources of the institution?
- ✓ Have the facilities, equipment, and other resources improved the operations of the institution and enhanced the manner in which the institution is perceived within and outside the institution?

Catalogs, Publications, and Promotional Materials

The official publications of an institution include the catalog and such auxiliary publications as books, films, tapes, advertisements, handbooks and manuals for personnel and procedures, and any statements describing the accredited status of the institution.

The catalog is the central publication with which all others must be made consistent in content and philosophy. Examples of appropriate content for a catalog are listed in *Characteristics* and in the policy statement, "Principles of Good Practice in Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status." The honesty and accuracy of all publications reflect on the institution's integrity, promoting "public trust and the confidence of the educational community."

Questions to be Addressed:

- ✓ Does the catalog contain all of the information necessary for students to make "informed decisions about their education"?
- ✓ Are all auxiliary publications consistent with the catalog?
- ✓ Are all publications accurate and prepared with honesty?
- ✓ Do all references to accreditation by the Commission include the Commission's name, address, and telephone number?

Other External Requirements

In addition to ensuring that the self-study addresses the standards, policies, and procedures of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the self-study should address appropriately the requirements imposed by federal and state regulatory agencies, as well as by other accrediting organizations. This coordination is especially important if the institution has requested a joint visit with a state agency or a collaborative review visit with one or more of the specialized institutional accreditors or specialized programmatic accreditors.

Federal Requirements and Accreditation

Amendments to the Higher Education Act frequently impose new requirements on accrediting agencies and on institutions that participate in Title IV student financial assistance programs. Some of these requirements are effected through federally mandated accreditation standards and regulations. In addition to those federal requirements which were already a part of the Commission's standards for accreditation, institutions should demonstrate that they meet the additional criteria described below, as well as any other criteria that may be mandated in the future. The design should include an opportunity for the self-study to address these criteria, either in a single section of the self-study or woven into several sections, as the institution deems appropriate.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Institutions should monitor the cohort default rate and ensure that it is within federal limits. If the institution has triggered a review or other action by the U.S. Department of Education, the self-study should include a description of the issues and the institution's plans to address them.

Any reference to Middle States accreditation must include the address and phone number of the Commission. The Commission also requires that at least the catalog, the institution's World Wide Web site, and its primary recruiting materials include this information. The self-study should include references to these listings.

Federal regulations require the Commission to consider the actions of state licensing bodies and other accrediting agencies when making accreditation decisions. Institutions holding accreditation from agencies other than the Middle States Commission on Higher Education should include an overview of the institution's or program's current status with each agency.

The federal government requires that the outcomes assessment plan include a review of the institution's success with respect to student achievement in relation to mission. Institutions should include in the self-study a review of course completion, graduation rates, state licensure exam pass rates, and other data as appropriate to the mission of the institution and the programs it offers.

If the institution charges program-specific tuition, the self-study should address whether the tuition and fees are appropriate for the subject matter taught and the objectives of the degree or credential being offered.

Institutions should consult with staff and monitor the Commission's publications to identify any laws or regulations that may affect what accrediting organizations may require of institutions after the publication of this edition of *Designs for Excellence*.

State Requirements

Because particular state requirements vary within the Middle States region, the Commission suggests strongly that the institution contact its state regulatory or coordinating body regarding current requirements. Free-standing institutions abroad that are recognized by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education must contact the state agency which granted their license and degree-granting authority to identify any special requirements that may apply to the institution. In some instances, institutions which are a part of state or local systems of higher education may face other requirements.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education shares with each of the state regulatory or coordinating agencies the schedule of evaluation visits planned for accredited institutions within that state. The state regulatory agencies may elect to send a representative to work with and serve as a resource to the team during the evaluation visit. Such cooperative efforts are intended to minimize unnecessary duplication and to ease the reporting and evaluative burden placed on the institution.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

□ *Other Accrediting Organizations*

As detailed earlier in *Designs*, the Commission on Higher Education works cooperatively with other accrediting organizations to develop collaborative reporting and evaluative activities when an institution determines that such arrangements would be useful, efficient, and effective.

The decision to seek a collaborative evaluation and team visit is the prerogative of the institution. It should be based upon careful consideration of the institution's specific situation and its objectives for the evaluation in question. The institution should consult with staff from both the Commission and the specialized accrediting organization in order to determine whether a collaborative evaluation would be appropriate, to assist in reviewing the structure of the evaluation process, and to avoid duplication of effort and conflicting requirements. Once a decision has been made, the chief executive officer must take the initiative to contact all accrediting organizations involved in the evaluation.

Institutions requesting and having been approved by the Commission for such collaborative reviews should ensure that the standards, policies, and procedures of the respective accrediting organizations are followed in the development of self-study plans as well as in the final self-study documents and supporting materials.

For further information, consult the Commission's publication *Collaborative Evaluations by Regional and Specialized Accrediting Agencies: Guidelines and Procedures* (1997).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

5

Preparing and Submitting the Design

A design for self-study is a blueprint for the self-study process and for the final document. It establishes the intellectual boundaries for the self-evaluation and the temporal limits for the entire process. It establishes the institution's expectations, and it informs the Commission of the institution's plans. A good design cannot guarantee an excellent self-study, but a poorly developed design can decrease the chances of producing a useful final document. Because the creation of the design is as significant as the preparation of the final self-study report, institutions should give thoughtful attention to this early step in the self-study process. The following suggestions describe the format and scope of the design document and the procedures for submitting it to the Commission.

Elements of a Self-Study Design

The length of the self-study design will depend upon several factors, such as the the self-study model and the complexity of the approach that is selected, as well as the level of detail in the charges to the various subcommittees. It is important to remember that the primary audience for the design is the institution itself, and the design should have sufficient detail to guide the self-study process, to facilitate the writing of the self-study report, and to inform the Commission. In most instances, however, the design need not exceed 50 pages, and it should include the following components:

Nature and Scope of Self-Study

The nature and scope of an institution's self-study will vary with each institution's needs and special circumstances. This section of the design should identify the model that the institution has chosen and offer a clear rationale for the approach to the model that will be utilized. The rationale should demonstrate that the selected approach to self-study will be useful, attuned to current and future institutional needs and priorities, and focused on the teaching and learning process.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Specific Goals and Objectives

The goals for the self-study process are statements of outcomes, which describe what the institution intends to accomplish by an in-depth analysis of its major programs, services, and resources, as they are defined in the 14 categories of *Characteristics*. The specific objectives describe the activities in which the institution will engage during self-study to accomplish its goals.

Organizational Structure of the Steering Committee and Subcommittees

The self-study design should include a clear description of the structure of the steering committee and the subcommittees or working groups, the names of their members, and each person's title in an administrative or academic area.

There are various ways in which the steering committee can work with each subcommittee or working group. For example, members of the steering committee may serve as chairs of the self-study groups to facilitate the communication of information about the progress of the self-study. On the other hand, the steering committee may decide to name a liaison from its membership to each study group, and this person would report directly to the committee. That liaison may or may not be a full member of the subcommittee.

Charges to Subcommittees

Each study group should be given a clear assignment and a schedule for submitting interim and final reports. The guidelines to the subcommittees should explain that each assignment requires a brief description of the specified area, a documented analysis of strengths and problems in that area, and recommendations for building on strengths and addressing problems. The subcommittees should understand that they are charged not with finding definitive solutions for every problem but, rather, with proposing possible courses of action which might lead to solutions.

Study groups can best accomplish their tasks by receiving charges that require analytical responses. The following are examples of descriptive versus analytical statements in a charge to a subcommittee:

Descriptive: What is the College's mission statement?
Analytical: Does the College's mission statement reflect current programs, services, and planning priorities?

Descriptive: What is the process for reviewing academic programs?

Analytical: How effective is the academic review process?
 What changes have been implemented as a result of these reviews?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Descriptive: How are counseling and advising provided to students?

Analytical: What evidence is there that student counseling and advising are effective?

Each subcommittee should receive a copy of the complete design, not only its own charge. This allows the group to understand its own task within a larger context and to relate its work to that of the other subcommittees.

Outcomes Assessment

The institution's self-study steering committee is the clearinghouse and coordinating body for the collection of all outcomes data, and it guides the subcommittees in assessing the data for their assigned areas. The criteria for documenting findings and making recommendations have been previously outlined in Chapter 4, which discusses the various sections of *Characteristics*.

The self-study design should explain how findings from the institution's ongoing outcomes assessment activities will be considered during the self-study process and woven into the fabric of the final self-study report. It should define the institution's expectations for data collection, analysis, and reporting, and it should anticipate the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, it should contain:

- clear and concise descriptions of the procedures that were or will be used to collect and analyze data; and
- annotated lists of any questionnaires, surveys, or other instruments.

Inventory of Support Documents

Certain data useful to the self-study process should be readily available throughout the institution. The process of compiling and analyzing these data should be regarded as an essential part of institutional research and planning. However, institutions with an office for research and planning may have accomplished this task prior to the preparation for the self-study process.

This section should include an annotated inventory of recent and current self-studies, reports, collections of data, assessment instruments, and other resources that can be utilized by the self-study subcommittees. It is often tempting to prepare an exhaustive list of institutional documents, but it is more useful to list only those documents which have been identified as relevant to the general or specific foci of the self-study.

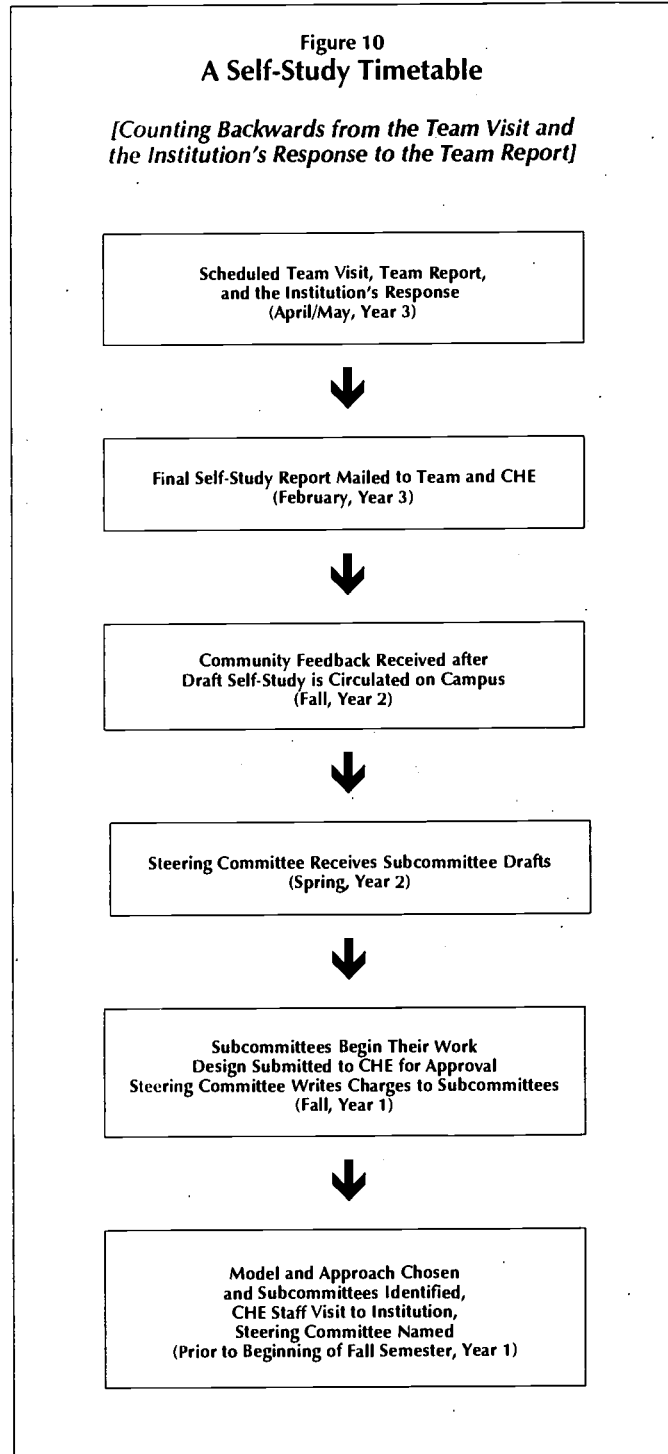
Timetable

To develop a timetable for the self-study process, institutions may utilize the following approach (illustrated in Figure 10), allowing sufficient time for vacations, holidays, special campus events, and inevitable "down time":

- Begin by selecting an approximate time period for the scheduled evaluation team visit. These visits occur either in the fall or spring, but before mid-October or mid-April to ensure timely review by the Committee on Evaluation Reports and subsequent action by the

Commission. The institution establishes the final dates for site visits, in collaboration with the team chair. After the team makes its report, the Institution is entitled to respond, and the response must be received before the Commission will review the team report.

- From the date selected for the evaluation visit, **count backwards six weeks** to allow for the distribution of the finished study and its review by members of the evaluation team and the Commission staff liaison.
- **Count backwards again**, allowing the number of weeks needed to produce a final version that has been reviewed by the campus community.
- **Still counting backwards**, assign time for the steering committee to develop one or more drafts of the self-study report, based upon the subcommittee reports. Allow sufficient time for the subcommittees to complete their reviews and to produce their subcommittee reports. Each subcommittee may require a different amount of time, according to the scope of its task. The steering committee also may receive subcommittee drafts on a staggered reporting schedule.
- Before the subcommittees begin their work, for example in the fall of the first planning year, the steering committee should be named, the Commission staff liaison will visit the institution to discuss the self-study process, the institution then selects its self-study model and its



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

approach to that model, the steering committee writes its charges to the subcommittees, and the final design is submitted to the Commission for approval.

The timetable also should ensure that four to six weeks before an evaluation, the institution will mail to all members of the team an executive summary, the self-study report, a catalog, a faculty handbook, a student handbook, and if applicable, a copy of the collective bargaining agreement. The team also should receive a list of materials that will be available to them and their locations on campus, although the most important resources should be assembled in the team's meeting room on campus. At the same time that self-study materials are mailed to team members, the institution should mail two complete sets to the Commission office.

□ *Editorial Style and Format*

The design for self-study should include guidelines that will facilitate the compilation of information and assure that the final report reflects a consistent style. This statement of editorial style and format should include criteria for writing draft documents from subcommittees, for preparing the steering committee's final self-study report, and for incorporating any reports that have been prepared internally or externally for another review process. The guidelines may be incorporated within the text of the self-study design or attached as a separate document.

Subcommittees should be urged to present findings, conclusions, and recommendations in a coherent, concise, and objective manner; to avoid jargon; and to utilize compatible technological applications for assembling and processing the document. Some part of the design, such as the institutional overview and the statement of objectives, probably can be used with some modification in the introductory chapter of the self-study.

The steering committee then must reduce the materials produced by the subcommittees to a length that busy people can be expected realistically to read and study. Therefore, 200 double-spaced or 100 single-spaced pages is the accepted maximum length for a self-study report. Length, however, is less important than substance; brevity with substance would be ideal.

The final self-study report should be a concise and readable, but substantial, document to be used by its principal readers, the campus community. This audience includes, for example, faculty members, students, trustees, administrators, alumni, parents, employers, neighbors, and for publicly-funded institutions, legislative representatives. The design should anticipate that these constituents will discuss the final draft of the self-study report, that there will be a process to gain general acceptance of the document, and that the faculty, administration, and governing board ultimately will take responsibility for the entire report. The report will serve as a point of departure for the work of Commission staff, the team chair, members of the evaluation team, and the Commission. It also should be available, at the discretion of the institution, for informational use by outside groups.

The writing or editing of the self-study report may be assigned to a professional writer/editor on the faculty, who need not be a member of the steering committee. However, report writing should be viewed as a multi-phased activity that covers the entire self-study process, beginning with the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

development of the self-study design. This person, therefore, should be chosen prior to the start of the process and should participate in developing the writing and editorial guidelines to be disseminated to self-study participants.

□ *The Format of the Self-Study Report*

The design document should offer a clear description of the organization and structure that will be used for the final self-study report. An annotated outline should describe clearly what will be included in the document and should include subheadings or sufficient details to assist the subcommittees in organizing and understanding their charges.

There is no one "best way" of organizing and writing a self-study report. What the Commission on Higher Education seeks is an institution's own sense of purpose and best assessment of its progress, its perspicacity, and its style: The quality of a self-study report will tell outsiders a great deal about an institution.

The self-study report should include an executive summary and a copy of the Annual Institutional Profile (or the Remote Annual Profile), which summarizes data about the institution and currently is on file with the Commission.

The executive summary should be no more than five pages in length, and it should highlight the major findings and recommendations of the study. It should identify the people who participated significantly in the process, as well as who wrote the report and who gave it final approval.

**In selecting team members,
the Commission relies heavily
upon the type of institution
the self-study approach
that the institution selects,
the Commission staff liaison's
background knowledge of
the institution and the self-study,
and the institution's suggestions
for the types of team members.**

□ *Profile of the Evaluation Team*

The self-study design should include the institution's recommendations on the *types* of evaluation team members that should be selected to visit the institution at the conclusion of the self-study process.

The Commission staff liaison will consider carefully the institution's suggested team profile, although the final decision about team membership remains with the Commission and its staff. In selecting team members, the Commission relies heavily upon the type of institution, the self-study model and approach that the institution selects, the Commission staff liaison's background knowledge of the institution and the self-study, and the institution's suggestions for the types of team members.

Visiting teams in the Middle States region usually include from eight to ten evaluators, but the nature of the institution and its self-study approach may be served best by a smaller team. On the other hand, the complexity of the institution or its self-study may require additional team members. For example, multi-unit institutions or systems may require separate evaluation teams for each unit or a single evaluation team of sufficient size to cover all units. In some instances, all units will be evaluated simultaneously; in others, units will be evaluated in sequence or in stages on a well-defined schedule.

The purpose of a team visit is to validate the institution's self-study. Therefore, the goal in selecting an evaluation team is to establish the best match between the institution's self-study process and the members of the team. In addition, as the team examines the institution as a whole, it is expected to give particular attention to any special focus in the self-study. This is especially important if the institution chooses a comprehensive-with-special-emphasis, a selected topics, or an alternative self-study model. Depending on the nature of the institution's self-study, such teams may reasonably exclude some areas of expertise found on a more traditional team utilized for a comprehensive self-study, such as finance, student services, libraries or information resources, or outcomes assessment. Commission staff will make every effort to provide the appropriate guidance to chairs and evaluators on these types of teams to ensure that they understand and respect the premises of the institution's self-study.

Teams are composed of peers from institutions that are located in states other than the state of the institution under review, except that in unusual circumstances, Commission staff may request the institution's permission to utilize an evaluator from the same state. Geography is less important than the evaluator's expertise, experience, and ability to handle the assignment in a manner that will be useful to the institution and to the Commission.

For further guidance, consult two Commission policy statements: "Selection of Evaluation Teams and Chairs" and "Accreditation and Evaluation of Multi-Unit Institutions."

Submitting the Design

As soon as the design has been completed, the steering committee should submit it to the Commission staff liaison assigned to the institution. The staff liaison will respond to the institution with any comments, suggestions, or questions arising from a review of the design. If the design is not complete or acceptable as submitted, the institution will be asked to submit additional information or a revised design.

Once the self-study design is accepted, it is maintained in the institution's self-study file. It becomes an essential guide for the Commission staff in selecting a team chair, which usually occurs a year or more prior to the planned evaluation visit, and for selecting the various members of the evaluation team. The design also serves as an important resource and reference for the staff liaison throughout the period of self-study.

The Commission's staff liaison directs each institution to share its design, along with other basic information about the institution, with the chair well in advance of the chair's preliminary visit. Together with any draft self-study materials that may be prepared, the design sets the context for discussions between the chair

and the institution's representatives. It also enables the chair to plan the deployment of evaluation team members.

Finally, every person directly involved in the process should receive a copy, and the design should be distributed widely on campus.

6

Off-Campus Sites, Distance Learning, and Other Alternative Offerings

The Commission on Higher Education recognizes that many institutions of higher education provide offerings at locations other than the main campus and through modalities other than in traditional on-campus, lecture-style classrooms. Although these offerings may range from non-credit courses or programs at remote locations to independent branch campuses, all activities should fit within the institution's mission and the institution should provide the same level of quality and service as the offerings on the institution's main campus.

Characteristics of Excellence make clear that each institution is responsible for all activities conducted in its name or under its sponsorship. Therefore, each institution that selects the Comprehensive, or Comprehensive with Emphasis Self-Study design must address all off-campus or alternative offerings, including, but not limited to, its branch campuses and additional locations, as well as its study abroad, distance learning, and non-degree (credit and non-credit) programs. Selected Topics self-study reports should relate the impact of the selected topic to off-campus or alternative offerings. Institutions conducting an Alternative Self-study Model should discuss with the staff liaison the best approach to addressing off-campus and alternative offerings within the self-study.

The Commission ensures the quality of these off-campus and alternative offerings by reviewing or visiting such programs as part of the institution's decennial review, or more frequently if the Commission determines that such reviews and visits are necessary. Institutions are also reminded of the Commission's policy, "Institutional Change," which requires prior approval by the Commission for any substantive change.

The discussion of offerings at branch campuses, additional locations, etc., should consider all relevant provisions of *Characteristics of Excellence* and should include both data and analysis of such topics as the following:

- consistency of programs with institutional mission
- location
- student profile
- faculty profile
- outcomes assessment of student learning and program effectiveness
- appropriateness and adequacy of library and other learning resources
- student services
- adequacy of resources
- participation of faculty and staff in institution-wide management
- names of on-site administrators

All off-campus and alternative offerings must be included within the scope of accreditation, and institutions may be required to obtain prior approval before implementing some of these activities. (See the policy statement, "*Institutional Change.*")

Branch Campuses

The Commission on Higher Education defines a *branch campus* as a location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. The location is independent if the location:

- offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential;
- has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and
- has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

A branch campus may or may not operate as a fully independent component of a larger institution. Students may apply directly to the branch, or they may be students from the primary campus who, for a variety of reasons, may be taking a course at a branch campus. However branches are perceived within the institution, the Commission considers a branch campus to be a significant part of an institution's identity and operations. Therefore, the Commission will conduct a visit to all existing branch campuses as part of the decennial review. To ensure that branch campuses are given appropriate consideration by the institution itself, the self-study should address the branch campuses and any plans for additional branches.

All new locations that meet this definition of "branch campus" must be approved by the Commission prior to implementation according to the Commission's policy statement *Institutional Change*.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Additional Locations

One way in which institutions are responsive to community needs and new markets is by offering programs of interest to a particular community. These programs may be offered at existing campuses, corporate sites, or leased sites.

An *additional location* is a location, other than a branch campus, that is:

- geographically apart from the main campus and
- at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program.

These sites require the same level of quality education and services that are available to students at the main campus or at branch campuses. Therefore, institutions must address existing and planned additional locations within the self-study. As part of the decennial review, CHE staff will assign an evaluator to conduct visits to at least one-third of the existing additional locations. The locations will be selected jointly by staff, the team chair and the institution, based on enrollment and the date of the last visit to that location. All areas addressed by the Commission's accreditation standards will be reviewed during the visit.

All new sites that meet the definition of "additional location" must be approved by the Commission prior to implementation according to the Commission's policy, *Institutional Change*.

Other Instructional Sites

An *other instructional site* is a site not meeting the *branch campus* or *additional location* definitions at which the institution offers one or more courses for credit. These sites include, but are not limited to, high schools, corporate sites, community centers, and churches.

The Commission expects members to address these activities and the resources committed to them in the self-study document.

Distance Learning Programs

New teaching modalities are being adopted as institutions reach out to new markets. Advancements and the availability of technology have made distance learning an attractive option for many institutions and students.

Although an institution may have offered one or more courses in the past, the Commission requires that the institution receive prior approval through the substantive change procedures before offering at least 50% of a degree program through distance learning. (See the Commission's policy statement *Institutional Change*).

Offering a substantial portion of a program through distance learning requires a commitment of resources and planning. Therefore, the Commission expects the self-study to include a discussion of any planned or current distance learning activities. A member of the on-site evaluation team will review these activities. In addition to the items listed under "Off-Campus, Distance Learning, and Alternative Offerings" above, special attention should be devoted to the factors outlined in *Guidelines for Distance Learning Programs*.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Study Abroad

Many institutions have increased their study abroad offerings in the past decade to fulfill the institution's mission and to address student interest. In addition to the areas listed above for off-campus and alternative offerings, the discussion in the self-study also should include both data and analysis of:

- the quality of the educational programs and curricula**
- the language(s) of instruction**
- typical or actual enrollment**
- orientation of students**
- housing arrangements for students**
- the administration and monitoring of all study abroad programs by the home campus**
- on-site administration of each course or program**
- on-site faculty and on-site student advisors for each course or program**

The institution's study abroad activities will be reviewed by the on-site evaluation team during the decennial visit, and visits to the study abroad site may be conducted prior to the full team visit to the institution. Commission staff will assess the scope of study abroad activity and discuss with the institution the significance of the program within the institution's mission. If study abroad is considered by the institution and/or CHE staff to be integral to the mission of the institution or to be a significant activity, staff will assign an evaluator to visit one or more of the courses and/or countries prior to the full team visit. The evaluator's report will be included with the self-study materials and reviewed as part of the regular peer evaluation process.

The purpose of the visit will be to assess the following:

- whether the teaching and housing facilities are appropriate and adequate**
- whether student services are adequate**
- whether the faculty are appropriately credentialed**
- the assessment of student learning and of the institution's program of study abroad**
- the on-site administration of the program**
- the orientation of students**

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Non-Degree Programs (For-credit and Non-credit)

Non-degree offerings include all courses which are distinct from courses offered as part of an institution's degree programs. These non-degree courses, which may be for-credit or non-credit, include those offered as part of a certificate program (pre- or post-baccalaureate) and those offered as stand-alone courses in response to community interest. The self-study should address these activities to an extent consistent with the emphasis on these activities within the institution's mission..

j:\desig00w (web)



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



NOTICE

Reproduction Basis



This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.



This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").

EFF-089 (3/2000)