

2017 Self-Study Institute: Guides

This packet of material contains 7 brief (1-3 page), helpful Guides for various aspects of the self-study process for use by the Steering Committee. Included in the packet is a note taking guide that will be used during the 2017 Self-Study Institute. These materials will become the basis for web-based modules that will be accompanied by samples, time lines, schedules, videos links to MSCHE policies and other resources, and optional templates.



Middle States Commission on Higher Education

**Components of the Self-Study Design
Notetaking Guide**

<p>I. Institutional Overview</p> <p>About the Institution (history, mission, goals, sector, student populations, etc.) Summary of key institutional strengths, opportunities for improvement, institutional developments</p>	<p>Notes:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>II. Institutional Priorities</p> <p>Broad stakeholder input Related to mission and goals Focused on institutional improvement Aligned with Standards</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>III. Intended Outcomes</p> <p>Demonstrate compliance with Standards and Requirements of Affiliation Other outcomes related to enhanced institutional effectiveness</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

<p>IV. Self-Study Approach</p> <p>Standards-Based or Priorities- Based Rationale for approach</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>V. Organizational Structure</p> <p>Selection and Membership of Steering Committee Selection and Membership of Working Groups Charges to the Working Groups</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>VI. Guidelines for Reporting</p> <p>Workgroup products Report template</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>VII. Organization of Final Report</p> <p>Outline of Chapters</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

VIII. Verification of Compliance Strategy to be used	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
IX. Evidence Inventory	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
X. Timeline for the Self-Study and Evaluation	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
XI. Communication Plan	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
XII. Profile of the Evaluation Team Characteristics of Chair and Team Peer Institutions Aspirant Institutions	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Conflicts Top enrolled programs	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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Additional Notes:



Developing an Effective Self-Study Design

The Self -Study Design serves as a guide for the Self-Study process and enables the Steering Committee and its Working Groups to conceptualize and organize relevant tasks. Members of the Steering Committee and Working Groups can refer to it to gauge progress and to ensure that the objectives contained in the Design are being met. The Design can also serve as a reminder of what tasks must be accomplished and when, how and when status should be communicated, and how the Self-Study Report should be organized. Institutions should give thoughtful attention to the development of the Design. While a good Design cannot guarantee an effective Self-Study process or an excellent Self-Study Report, a poorly developed Design will significantly reduce the possibility of producing a useful and meaningful final report.

The Self-Study Design communicates important information to three audiences prior to the Evaluation Team visit. First, the Design serves the purposes described above for the institution's Steering Committee, Working Groups, and campus community. Second, the MSCHE liaison and staff use the Design during the Self-Study Preparation Visit, and during the selection of the Evaluation Team Chair and the development of the Evaluation Team roster. Third, the institution sends a copy of the final Design to the Evaluation Team Chair once appointed so the Chair can understand the process and priorities the campus engaged in during self-study. The Design is not shared with the entire Evaluation Team.

Sections of the Self-Study Design

In as concise and clear a manner as possible, the Design should include the 12 sections described below. The Design should not exceed 30 pages in length (not including the Evidence Inventory).

1. *Institutional Overview.* The Design begins with a brief description of the institution, its mission, important recent developments, and steps taken to date to prepare for Self-Study. This section creates a context for the shared understanding of the institution. This section is helpful to new members of the campus community on Working Groups, the MSCHE liaison, and the Evaluation Team Chair.
2. *Institutional Priorities to be Addressed in Self-Study.* Provide a brief narrative about the 3 to 5 institutional priorities that will be evaluated through Self-Study, including:
 - Processes that were used to identify the priorities;
 - How the institution has ensured that the selected priorities align with the institution's mission; and,
 - How the institution has ensured that the selected priorities align with Commission Standards.

This information can be provided in narrative form only or both narrative and tables providing a "cross-walk" between elements of mission and the selected

priorities, and between Commission Standards and the priorities.

The MSCHE liaison reviews this section to determine if the institution has engaged in an inclusive process and has chosen priorities that appear to be well-aligned with the institution's mission and Commission Standards. The Evaluation Team Chair uses this section to shape the work of the Evaluation Team.

3. *Intended Outcomes of Self-Study.* The intended outcomes are based on a clear understanding of what the institution plans to achieve through the Self-Study. For example, outcomes could focus on ways to integrate the Self-Study process with other institutional planning and renewal processes, thereby ensuring that the Self-Study will be as useful and meaningful as possible. At a minimum, this section of the Design includes the following three outcomes:

- Demonstrate how the institution currently meets Middle States Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation
- Focus on continuous improvement in the attainment of the institution's mission and its institutional priorities
- Engage the institutional community in an inclusive and transparent self-appraisal process

Stating a limited number of outcomes, in explicit and observable terms, establishes a clear direction for the Self-Study and will allow the Steering Committee and Working Groups to assess progress. The Evaluation Team Chair can review them to understand the institution's expectations of the Self-Study.

4. *Self-Study Approach.* Identify which of the two approaches the institution will use to organize its Working Groups and Self-Study Report, Standards-based or priorities-based. Briefly explain the rationale for choosing the approach. See the Approaches to Self-Study Guide for further information.

5. *Organizational Structure of the Steering Committee and Working Groups.* Identify the members of (as of the date of submission), and the charge for, the Steering Committee and for each Working Group consistent with the self-study approach. Each Working Group is expected to engage in a process of active, open, and assessment-based inquiry and to identify institutional

strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement and innovation. Include:

- Names and titles of members of the Steering Committee with their positions of responsibility at the institution
- Names and titles of chair and members of each Working Group with their positions of responsibility
- For each Working Group, a description of which institutional priorities will be addressed (if it is a Standards-based design); or, a description of which Standards will be addressed by each Working Group (in the case of a priorities-based design)
- For each Working Group, specific lines of inquiry
- Relevant assessment information, institutional processes, documents, and procedures that will be gathered, reviewed, and used by the Working Group
- Anticipated collaborations among the Working Groups and with key campus offices

6. *Guidelines for Reporting.* To guide the efforts of the Working Groups, include:

- A list/description of all products to be completed, such as preliminary drafts and final reports
- Deadlines for the submission of Working Group reports
- A template for the preparation of Working Group reports

7. *Organization of the Final Self-Study Report.* The Design should include an annotated outline of the organization and structure of the final Self-Study Report.

8. *Verification of Compliance Strategy.* Each institution is required to complete a Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulation process with the Commission, elements of which are subject to change. Include a description of the strategy the institution will employ to successfully complete this process, including:

- What groups, offices or individuals will be responsible. In cases where a separate Working

Group has been organized to lead the institution through this process, the Design should contain names and titles of members

- How those responsible for the Verification of Compliance process will communicate with the Working Groups and Steering Community

A template for providing information relating to the Verification of Compliance process is available on the Commission website.

9. *Evidence Inventory.* The Evidence Inventory is a helpful organizational tool that allows an institution to arrange existing institutional documentation gathered for use during Self-Study by Standard, Criterion, and Requirement of Affiliation. Its purpose is to streamline the collection of documentation in ways that are efficient and valuable. This section contains the institution's strategies for populating and managing the Evidence Inventory. Institutions utilize various strategies to initially populate and then refine the Evidence Inventory. One strategy is to assign a member of the Steering Committee to liaise with key personnel on campus who can help with the documentation process. Another strategy is to organize a specific Working Group for this task. An initial Evidence Inventory, containing appropriate documentation, should be attached to the Design using the template on the Commission website.
10. *Self-Study Timetable.* To keep the Steering Committee and Working Groups on track, the Design includes a

timeline for every major step in the process, beginning with the early stages of on-campus planning activities and culminating with the Commission's action approximately 2 to 2 ½ years later. In this section, the institution requests either a Fall or Spring visit by the Evaluation Team. The MSCHE liaison reviews this section to confirm that the timeline is reasonable and that major milestones are achievable.

11. *Communications Plan.* The Communications Plan is used to regularly update institutional stakeholders about progress made during the Self-Study process. The Plan identifies audiences that will receive periodic updates from the Steering Committee, the methods to be used to communicate to these audiences, and when information will be conveyed. The Communications Plan may be integrated into the Timetable described above.
12. *Evaluation Team Profile.* Include a list of peer and aspirational peer institutions, preferably from the Middle States region, and indicate any institutions whose representatives might present a conflict of interest. Include indications of the specific expertise and background desired in an Evaluation Team Chair and evaluators. Also include a listing of the top programs by enrollment. Although the institution's expressed preferences will be given careful consideration, the final decision about team membership remains with the Commission and its staff.

	Standards-Based Approach	Priorities-Based Approach
Organization of Self-Study Report	Organized by Standard; usually, one chapter for each Standard. All standards must be addressed in the Self-Study Report.	Organized by Priority; usually, one chapter for each priority. All standards must be addressed in the Self-Study Report. For those standards not aligned with a priority, one chapter is devoted to evaluating remaining standards
Integration and evaluation	Priorities integrated within the Standards, where appropriate.	Standards integrated within the priorities, where appropriate
Working Groups	Organized by Standard	Organized by priority One working group responsible for those standards not integrated within a priority.
Evidence Inventory	Evidence Inventory is used as a tool to organize evidence by Standards and their Criteria.	Evidence Inventory is used as a tool to organize evidence by Standards and their Criteria. Must also include a column to show a crosswalk to Priorities and chapters within the narrative report.

Approaches to Self-Study

Choosing a Self-Study Approach

The Steering Committee co-chairs may choose one of two approaches to organizing the Self-Study Report. Regardless of approach, institutions are required to address all seven Standards within the Self-Study Report. In addition, all Self-Study Reports must address the results of the assessment of student learning outcomes and student achievement measures in light of the institution's mission and goals.

- Standards-Based Approach:* Usually, the Self-Study Report is organized into seven standards and institutional priorities are integrated within the Standards and evaluated through the lenses of the Standards. Working groups are assigned to one or more Standards and the Evidence Inventory is used as a tool to organize evidence according to Standard and Criteria. This approach is best suited for institutions seeking to focus on a comprehensive review of the institution.
- Priorities-Based Approach:* The Self-Study Report is organized by 3 to 5 institutional priorities informed by consultation with the institution's stakeholders. The Self-Study Report is organized by institutional priority, with one chapter for each. Those Standards that are not addressed through the lenses of the priorities must be addressed in a separate chapter. Working groups are assigned to one or more institutional priorities that are evaluated through the lenses priority of those Standards that relate to each priority. The Evidence Inventory is used as a tool to organize evidence by Standard and Criteria and must include a column to articulate a crosswalk to Standards and the Self -Study Report. This approach is best suited for institutions with a history of success in the peer review process. Institutional priorities included in this approach to self-study must receive prior approval from the institution's MSCHE liaison.

Institutional Priorities

- Result from broad institutional stakeholder input after considering assessment results
- Relate to an institution's mission, vision (where relevant), and the institution's strategic goals
- Focus on institutional improvement
- Clearly align with Commission's Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation

Selecting Institutional Priorities

The self-study process should be valuable to an institution, enabling it not only to demonstrate that it meets the Commission's expectations but also to gain insights that will serve the institution well for several years after the Self-Study Report and evaluation visit have been completed. During the self-study process, institutions engage in a careful analysis of institutional priorities in the interest of identifying mission-related opportunities for improvement, responding effectively to changes in higher education, and identifying innovative practices to serve students and society.

Institutional priorities should be forward-looking, worth the time taken to include in the self-study process, and related to mission. Through rigorous self-study review, inclusion of these institutional priorities in the self-study process should be

promising enough to add value to the institution over the long term, consistent with the Commission's mission to "ensure institutional accountability, self-appraisal, improvement, and innovation through peer review and the rigorous application of standards within the context of institutional mission."

After reflecting on institutional mission and goals and the results of relevant assessment activities, the Steering Committee co-chairs and institutional leaders will propose institutional priorities to be evaluated in the Self-Study Report. Consider:

- What aspects of our mission and goals are particularly salient at this point in our history?
- As we endeavor to achieve our mission, what does assessment information say

about opportunities for improvement or innovation?

Steering Committee co-chairs and institutional leaders answer the questions above and list proposed institutional priorities. Then, review the priorities by considering:

- To what extent does each proposed priority relate to our institution's mission and goals?
- To what extent does each proposed priority relate to the Commission's Standards?

This activity should result in identifying 3 to 5 institutional priorities for the purposes of self-study. The institution's priorities, and the process used to develop them, are included in the Self-Study Design, which is then reviewed and accepted by the MSCHE liaison so the institution can proceed with self-study.

Focusing Institutional Priorities

What do you do if your review of mission and goals or your brainstorming activities reveals numerous institutional priorities? Here are a few strategies you might employ to identify 3 to 5 priorities for the purposes of self-study.

Refining Strategy 1: Areas of Promise

This strategy can be used by those seeking to make the institution both more successful in achieving its mission and unique among other institutions through the self-study process. Consider:

- What aspects of the institution's mission and goals particularly stand out as specific areas of promise unique to the institution?
- What areas of promise have the potential to make the institution unique and particularly successful?

Refining Strategy 2: Areas of Best Practice

This strategy is best utilized when an institution would like to identify mission-related priorities the institution and its stakeholders would like to see improvement in as well as to learn more about best practices through the self-study process. Consider:



- What areas of best practice does the institution most need exposure to so it can further enhance its ability to achieve its mission?
- What areas of best practice are most critical for the institution to consider adopting for it to achieve its mission further?

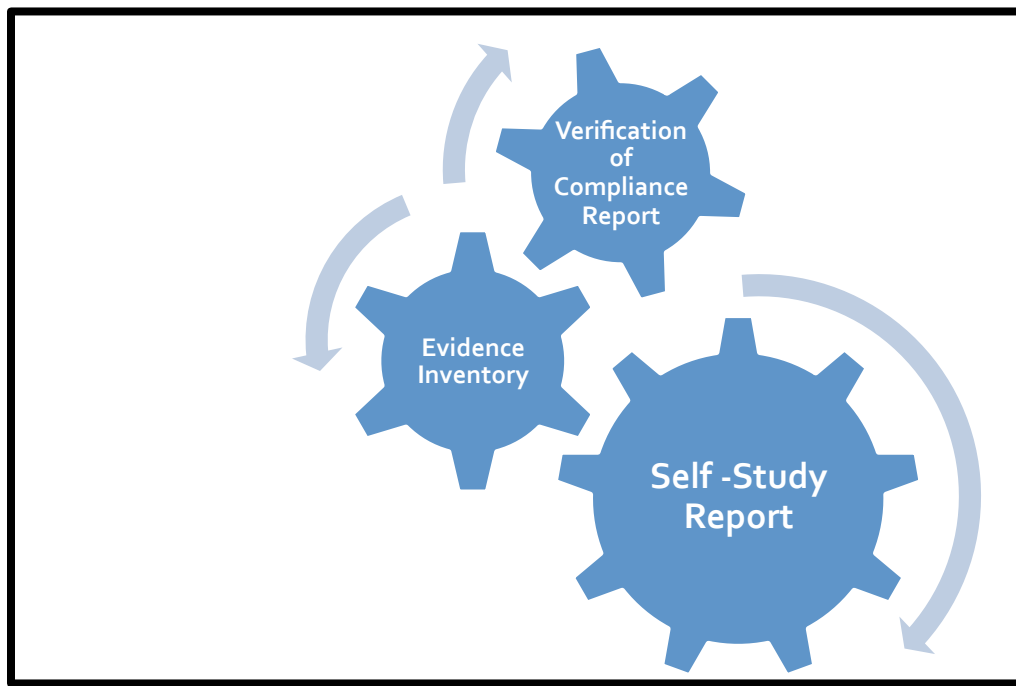
Refining Strategy 3: Areas of Need.

This strategy is best used by institutions that believe they need to address specific institutional issues or external mandates through the self-study process. Consider:

- What issues does the institution most need to analyze through the self-study process?
- Which of these are most critical for the institution to evaluate?

Remember to review the proposed list of institutional priorities according to the extent to which they align with the institution's mission and the Commission's Standards.

Alternatively, if the institution has recently undertaken mission and goals review as part of a strategic planning process, the institution's leadership and members of the Steering Committee should begin by considering the results of the recent review and then suggest the institutional priorities to be addressed in the Self-Study Report.



Components of the Self-Study Review

There are three key components in the self-study review process, all of which are inter-related and will be used by the Commission and its team members. Some ideas for successful oversight by the Steering Committee are as follows:

Verification of Compliance. The Steering Committee oversees the Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-relevant Federal Regulations process up to and including the time when the documentation is submitted to the Commission. The Steering Committee can delegate responsibilities associated with this process to an individual, office, or Working Group. It is important for the Steering Committee to begin applying the strategy it described in the Self-Study Design as soon as possible. Documentation pertaining to several elements of the Verification of Compliance process might be found in the Evidence Inventory, so it is a good idea for those responsible for developing both to be aware of what the other persons or groups are doing.

Self-Study Report. The Steering Committee is responsible for ensuring that the Self-Study achieves the intended outcomes identified in the Design, the charges to both that Committee and the Working Groups are fulfilled, and that the Self-Study Report addresses both the Commission's Standards and the priorities the institution has chosen for analysis. Regardless of the self-study approach chosen to organize self-study, the Steering Committee and Working Groups work together to refine each Working Group's documentation approach, to conduct assessment-based research focused on lines of inquiry, and to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. Some questions the Steering Committee might want to ask include the following:

- Is the charge from the Steering Committee understood by the Working Groups?
- Have members of the Working Groups learned about the

Commission Standards they will be addressing?

- Have the Working Groups aligned their work with the intended outcomes found in the Self-Study Design?
- Have Working Groups taken care to identify and address opportunities for collaboration with other Working Groups and with the Evidence Inventory and Verification of Compliance documentation?
- Have the Working Groups engaged in focused research into lines of inquiry that appropriately address the institution's chosen priorities and aligned Standards?
- Do the Working Groups understand the Guidelines for Reporting found in the Design?

In addition, the Steering Committee should work together with each Working Group to provide them with the resources they need to complete their work.

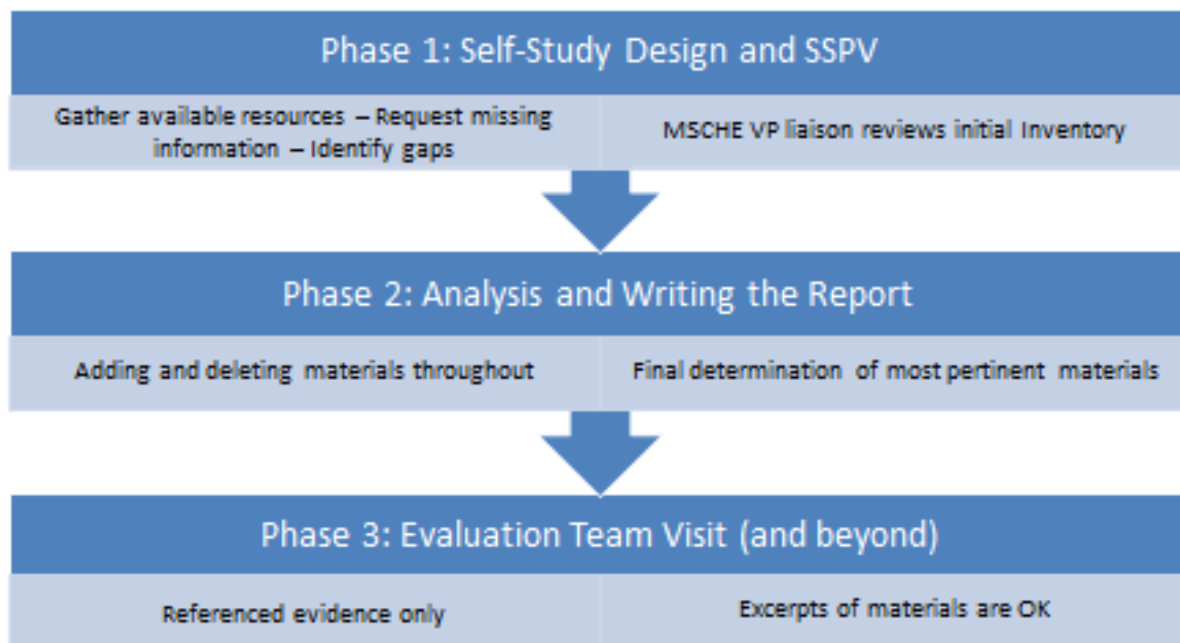
Evidence Inventory. The Steering Committee manages the collection and annotation of institutional data and documentation that will be part of the Evidence Inventory. The Steering Committee is responsible for ensuring that the Evidence Inventory does not devolve into a “document dump” of items that only tangentially related to Commission Standards or the institution’s chosen priorities. Steering Committees can assign a separate Working Group, specific members of the Steering Committee, or specific offices to be responsible for this refining process. At a minimum, the Steering Committee ensures that what is found in the Evidence Inventory is well-aligned with Commission Standards and their Criteria, succinct and elegant enough to enable

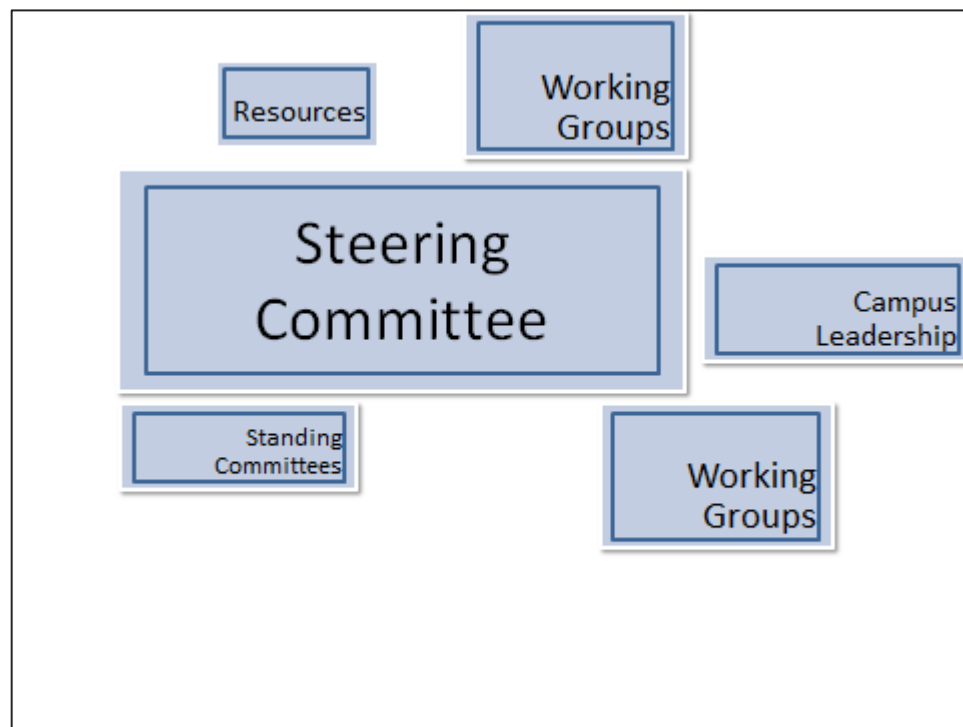
institutional stakeholders, Evaluation Team members, and Commissioners to be able to easily find the information that the institution represents as documentation that best attests to its compliance with Commission Standards and their Criteria. The Steering Committee should ensure that the Evidence Inventory is discussed in its meetings and should receive frequent reports about its refinement.

Before the evaluation team arrives, the Steering Committee reviews the Evidence Inventory by Standard and Criteria and addresses questions about comprehensiveness, ease-of-use and privacy such as:

- Does the narrative in the Self-Study Report relate to what is found in the Evidence Inventory?
- Is the documentation contained in the Evidence Inventory clearly related to the Standards and Criteria to which it has been assigned?
- Is the documentation succinct and easy to find; that is, can an Evaluation Team member directly access the information needed with as little effort as is necessary?
- Does the documentation align with right-to-privacy regulations and respect the privacy of individuals?

Evidence Inventory Uses





Organizing the Campus for Self-Study

The overarching purposes of self-study are to enable institutions to engage in an inclusive process of mission-oriented continuous quality improvement and to demonstrate that they meet the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation*. The self-study process allows institutions to engage in a thoughtful analysis of institutional priorities that it has selected in the interest of identifying mission-related opportunities for improvement, responding effectively to challenges, and identifying and adopting innovative practices to more readily adapt to changes in higher education, and to best serve students and society. An effective self-study process therefore requires careful preparation.

The self-study process should be valuable to an institution, enabling it not only to demonstrate that it meets the Commission's expectations but also to gain insights that will serve the institution well for several years after the Self-Study Report and evaluation visit have been completed. Time spent preparing is well worth the investment because it enables institutional stakeholders to participate in the process more fully and allows the institution's leadership to carefully consider who can serve most effectively on the Steering Committee. Some early preparation strategies include the following:

Appointing Self-Study Steering Committee Co-Chairs and Members Early in the process, the Commission invites the institution to send representatives to the Self-Study Institute. The Chief Executive Officer appoints Steering Committee chairpersons whose background and

expertise qualify them to lead the self-study process from beginning to end. The chairpersons work with the institution's leadership to identify a core group of individuals who will serve as members of the Steering Committee. Such individuals are familiar with the institution's mission and goals, represent various institutional constituencies, and will work with the Steering Committee's Working Groups to develop the Self-Study Report.

Since it is particularly important that there be adequate faculty involvement in the self-study process, appointment of a faculty co-chair may encourage such participation. Involvement of administrators also is important, and appointment of an administrator as a co-chair may be helpful. The use of co-chairs allows representation from several groups, can be helpful in assuring a balance of the skills and attributes necessary for successful leadership of the self-study effort, may be particularly useful at large, complex, or multi-campus institutions.

The Accreditation Liaison Officer may or may not be involved in the leadership of the self-study process. However, at a minimum, the ALO continues to serve as the primary contact with MSCHE staff and will be copied on all official communication. As such, the ALO should be cognizant of all activities related to the self-study process.

Members of the Steering Committee may be appointed or elected, should represent the institutional community, and should include adequate faculty representation. Consider carefully the abilities, credibility, availability, and skills of committee members. Steering Committee members must have a sense of commitment to the process and to the goals of the institution. They must have a broad institutional perspective that transcends that of their own area. They also must be given the time, resources, and authority to carry out their duties. In addition to faculty members and administrators, students, staff, and trustees should be involved in the self-study process as appropriate. If a professional editor will be used, include that person in the process from the start.

Most institutions choose to create a new Steering Committee to oversee the self-study process, although some institutions use an existing committee. If a new Steering Committee is formed, it should work closely with relevant existing committees to avoid duplication or conflict and to ensure that opportunities for improvement and innovation resulting from the Steering Committee's work are continued and implemented by standing committees after the period of self-study.

The Steering Committee is responsible for providing leadership to the entire self-study process. This includes:

- After consulting with institutional stakeholders, identifying the self-study approach and the 3-5 institutional priorities to be addressed;
- Developing the Self-Study Design;
- Establishing, charging, and overseeing the Working Groups and coordinating their work;
- Reviewing interim reports that will be used to write the final Self-Study Report;
- Ensuring that the Timeline is implemented as planned;
- Employing a Communications Plan to assure effective communication within the institution;
- Arranging for institution-wide review of and responses to a draft of the Self-Study Report;
- Overseeing the completion of the final Self-Study Report, including the refinement of the Evidence Inventory and completion of the Verification of Compliance template; and,
- Overseeing arrangements to host the Evaluation Team visit.

Brainstorming about Institutional Resources Managing a successful self-study process is a major project requiring a significant investment of time, energy, and institutional resources. A self-study process is usually most effective when an institution thinks early about the expertise and

perspectives that various members of its community can provide, whether such expertise is leveraged through formal membership on the Steering Committee or Working Groups, formal support due to the talents and skills specific individuals or offices might be able to provide, or through feedback they might be able to offer. Institutional leaders and the Steering Committee might consider brainstorming about offices or personnel on-campus that will play essential roles in the process as well as about the expertise and background of individuals who can be important sources of information. For example, in preparing for self-study some institutions rely on offices that regularly produce financial and institutional research information that could be useful to the Steering Committee. Other institutions rely on enrollment and registrar's offices to provide perspectives about appropriate measures of student achievement. It is usually a promising sign of success in the self-study process when institutions think early about how to collect and store documentation in ways that are direct, efficient, and cost-effective. Institutional leaders and the Steering Committee might identify individuals whose expertise relates to the organization of such documentation. The Commission has developed the Evidence Inventory to assist institutions in providing documentation.

Accessing Commission Resources The Steering Committee and Working Groups can access Commission resources to orient themselves to Commission expectations, policies and procedures, and the *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation* through webinars, instructional slides, publications, and templates.

Reflecting about Institutional Mission A key goal of self-study is for an institution to examine the extent to which it is successfully achieving its mission. Steering Committee co-chairs can engage campus leadership in a process of reflection about the institution's mission and goals, and relevant institutional assessment results, in order to propose institutional priorities to be addressed during the self-study process.

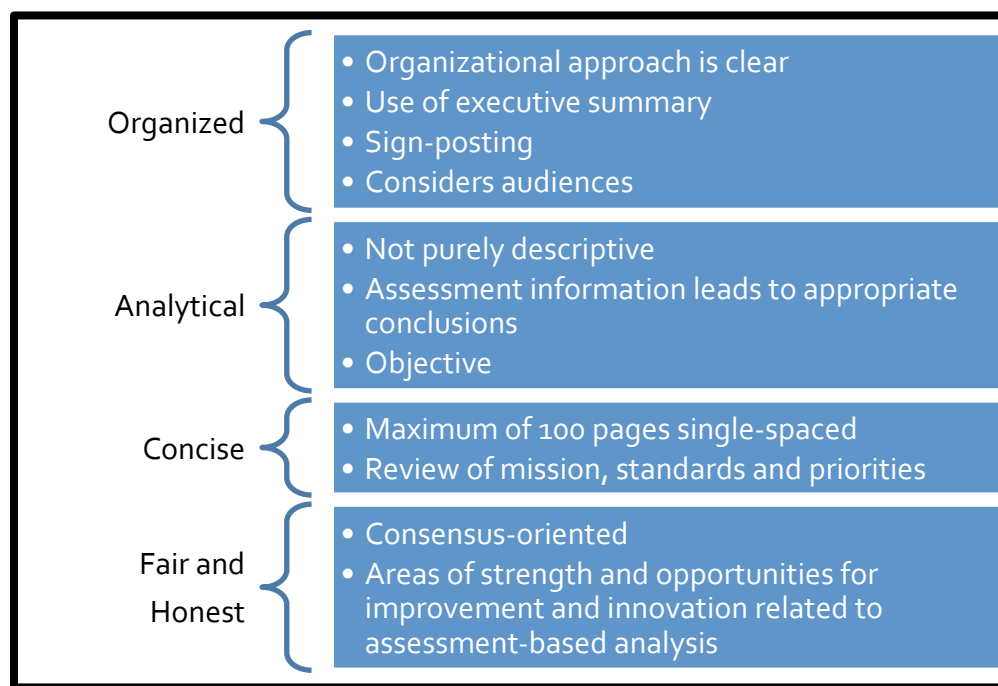
Attending the Self-Study Institute Steering Committee co-chairs learn about Commission expectations for self-study such as selecting institutional priorities, aligning them with Commission Standards, providing appropriate information in the Evidence Inventory, selecting an approach to self-study, writing the Self-Study Design, and engaging the institutional community. Attendance also enables the Steering Committee co-chairs to interact with other institutions at the same point in the process and expose them to practices that might also work at their own institutions.

Establishing Working Groups The Steering Committee decides on the organizational structure of the self-study, establishes Working Groups on Standards or priorities, coordinates their work on the various issues to be studied, and receives their reports.. Although the term “working group” is used here, institutions may use whatever terminology is clearest and most comfortable for them such as work group, study group, committee, subcommittee, or task force.

Working Groups are usually assigned based on the approach to self-study. For example, institutions that select the Standards-based approach usually have seven Working Groups, one for each Standard. Institutions that select the priorities-based approach might have Working

Groups for each priority plus one for each Standard not addressed by any of the priorities.

There are various ways in which the relationship between the Steering Committee and the Working Groups can be structured. For the Steering Committee to interact with each group, Steering Committee members may be designated to serve as chairs of the Working Groups, or Working Groups may be allowed to select their own chairs who report to the Steering Committee. What is most important is that the Working Groups (1) have designated leaders to keep them on task and on schedule, (2) have some mechanism for accountability and effective communication with the Steering Committee, and (3) Working Groups members represent a broad range of constituencies within the institution.



Writing the Self-Study Report

The Self-Study Report notes opportunities for improvement and innovation, and identifies future institutional initiatives that will be addressed well after the Evaluation Team has left and the Commission has made an accreditation decision. Therefore, the Self-Study Report sets the agenda for the institution itself for several years. As a “living” document, a clear Self-Study Report can serve as a plan and a reference source for all institution’s stakeholders.

It is therefore important for the Steering Committee to provide the leadership and oversight necessary to facilitate meaningful self-study and peer review. It is in the interest of every institution to receive a quality peer review that has been based on a cogent and rigorous self-analysis. A Steering Committee that works well with its Working Groups and institutional stakeholders will be able to reach its objectives and facilitate a process that adds value to the self-study process.

A goal of the self-study process is to produce a report that fairly and honestly represents the institution, avoids institutional politics and personal agendas, and warrants and receives broad support among campus constituencies. The process leading to that report is a series of written drafts, punctuated by periods of data collection, analysis, and review.

Under the leadership of the Steering Committee, each Working Group engages in an assessment-based analysis, the parameters of which are limited to the priorities, Standards, and lines of inquiry identified in the Self-Study

Design. As the analysis proceeds, these lines of inquiry may change while still aligning with institutional priorities and Standards that were originally identified.

Working Group reports are of central importance to the Self-Study process. The Self-Study Design contains a list of timelines and milestones, including the submission of these reports. The Steering Committee reviews Working Group reports to ensure that all assigned institutional priorities and Standards are addressed and whether the Working Groups have developed and presented sufficient information and evidence to support the writing of the Self-Study itself. If the Steering Committee finds insufficient topic coverage or inadequate demonstration of the institution’s ability to meet the expectations of Commission Standards, relevant Working Groups are asked to address these needs within specified time periods.

It may be useful to ask Working Groups to submit updates and interim drafts at various points before they submit their final reports. Interim reports can be helpful tools for providing and receiving feedback, identifying areas of commonality and duplication, and discovering assessment, documentation, and other resources that can be shared among several Working Groups.

Interim reports can highlight the connections Working Groups have made with others and collaborative efforts that have been employed. For example, a Working Group whose lines of inquiry focused on Standard V, “Educational Effectiveness Assessment” might note that

much of the work it is doing is already being accomplished by a Working Group assigned to Standard III, “Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience,” and brainstorm ways to streamline their efforts. Such connections and collaboration may help for developing more efficient approaches to populating the Evidence Inventory, collaborating on lines of inquiry that are similar, and alerting the Steering Committee of the need to organize the Self-Study Report in ways that are not unduly duplicative.

Discussion(s) about Final Working Group Reports by the Steering Committee. Once all Working Groups have submitted their reports, members of the Steering Committee carefully read through them to gather a general sense of issues that need to be discussed, such as:

- Are there any common themes, areas of strength, or opportunities for improvement and innovation among the Working Group reports that should be discussed by the Steering Committee and perhaps addressed in the final draft of the Self-Study?
- Does each Working Group report discuss the assigned Standards and priorities?
- Does each Working Group’s approach to the Evidence Inventory seem complete? Is there information that is overly duplicative, or are there significant gaps?
- Are there any “unanswered questions” that need to be addressed?

When answering these questions in advance of organizing and writing the final report, the Steering Committee’s purpose is to observe common issues across the Standards or institutional priorities as these could be important findings to note in the final report. A review of the opportunities for improvement and innovation in Working Group reports should suggest the institution’s future initiatives for the short and long term.

Writing the Self-Study Report. After the Working Group reports and other relevant information have been discussed, the Steering Committee begins to draft the Self-Study Report. The Steering Committee will create a concise, readable, and substantial draft document for review and comment by the campus community. Keep in mind the final report should be no longer than 200 double-spaced or 100 single-spaced pages.

A concise, coherent self-study report is more than a collection of Working Group reports. If the Steering Committee asks each Working Group write a chapter of the Self-Study Report, their reports will need to be consistent in style, format, and structure. The final report

should be edited for accuracy, consistency, and continuity and be written in one voice. Alternatively, the report writers can use the Working Group reports to provide the analysis of evidence that they use in writing the entire report.

An initial draft of the Self-Study Report follows the approach outlined in the Self-Study Design and is written in such a way that it reflects the assessment-based findings of the Working Groups. Some institutions do this by including an editor on the Steering Committee and others feel comfortable writing a consensus draft under the supervision of the Steering Committee Co-Chairs.

Involving the institutional community in the process is one of the prerequisites of meaningful self-study. The Steering Committee provides opportunities for the community to review and respond at key points throughout the process. Students, faculty, staff, trustees, and others can provide more informed and valuable suggestions if they are involved in reviewing the drafts of the Self-Study Report at various stages. Careful consideration of the ideas expressed by the community, and modification of the report where warranted, helps ensure that the final document reflects a common institutional perspective and that it will be widely accepted across the institution.

Next Steps. The Evaluation Team Chair receives the latest draft of the Self-Study Report prior to the Chair’s preliminary visit, at least four months before the team visit. The Chair reads the draft report with the Evaluation Team in mind, and may recommend modifications to make the report more useful to the Team.

After the Report has been revised considering the responses of the community and the Team Chair, it should be endorsed by the institution’s governing body.

Before completing the final Self-Study Report, the Steering Committee ensures that the final document is organized, analytical, concise, fair, and honest. The Self-Study Report is written so that the Report’s multiple audiences—institutional stakeholders, Evaluation Team members, and Commissioners—can understand the Report, can utilize a well-organized Evidence Inventory, and are able to follow conclusions and inferences made in the Report.

The final Self-Study Report should be ready for distribution no later than six weeks prior to the scheduled Evaluation Team visit. The Self-Study Report and Evidence Inventory, as well as other information requested by the Commission, are uploaded to the Commission’s portal.

The Self-Study Report as a Living Document

The self-study process represents a significant commitment of time and other institutional resources. It also presents a unique opportunity to reflect on the institution's progress and to inform institutional plans. The continuing usefulness of the Self-Study document depends on the clarity of its content, as well as on its availability to institutional stakeholders.

The institution may ensure continuing use of the Self-Study by taking steps such as:

- Continuing the existence of the steering committee;
- Creating timelines with assignments of responsibility for accomplishing the opportunities for improvement and innovation identified in the self-study, and the recommendations of the Evaluation Team and Commission, if any;

- Incorporating any recommendations into explicit charges to existing campus committees; and
- Using institutional research and assessment staff to support, assist, and track implementation efforts.

Tracking the implementation of self-study results should be incorporated into the institution's ongoing planning and assessment activities. Institutions are reminded that after the Commission makes its determination regarding reaffirmation, they may be expected to report on recommendations from the Commission in future years. Importantly, the institution should begin to address the future initiatives identified through the self-study process and described in the conclusion of the Self-Study Report. The institution's next self-study (in eight years) will be based on the results of those institutional initiatives that have been undertaken to address the institution's self-identified opportunities for improvement and innovation.



Self-Study Preparation Visit

Following the Self-Study Institute, the MSCHE liaison and the institution schedule a day for the Self-Study Preparation Visit. The Self-Study Design is submitted to the liaison at least 2 weeks prior to the Visit. The liaison meets with various institutional stakeholders to educate them about the self-study process and to gather information about the institution. The liaison also meets with the Steering Committee to offer feedback about the Design and to answer questions about the Self-Study process. The visit ends with a brief exit meeting to discuss general impressions and identify next steps.

After the liaison's Self-Study Preparation Visit, the institution submits a final draft of the Design. The liaison reviews it and, if it meets the Commission's expectations, communicates with the institution to accept the Design and, where appropriate, offer general feedback to assist the institution as it moves forward with the Self-Study process.

Sample Agenda and Topics for Discussion

Chief Executive Officer of institution (30 minutes)

- Discuss current status of institution and future plans
- Discuss goals of self-study
- Discuss characteristics of effective team/team chair
- Answer questions about the accreditation process

Steering Committee (90 minutes)

- Review and provide feedback on the Self-Study Design
- Discuss Commission expectations
- Answer questions about the accreditation process

Governing Board members (45-60 minutes)

- Discuss role of the governing board
- Answer questions about the accreditation process

Open Session for faculty, staff, and students (60 minutes)

- Explain the accreditation process
- Discuss the role of faculty, staff, and students
- Answer questions about the accreditation process

Exit Briefing with Steering Committee Co-chairs (30 minutes)

- Summarize the day's discussions and discuss next steps
- Determine date for submission of the final draft of Design