



The Process of **Self Study**

CHAPTER TWO: PROCESS OF THE SELF-STUDY

Introduction

MidAmerica Nazarene University thoroughly embraced the self-study process with every office on campus providing information, evaluations and examples of evidence for inclusion in the report. In addition, 45 faculty, staff and community members served on the various work teams that accomplished this project.

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The self-study design and plan was based upon instructions contained in the *HLC Handbook of Accreditation* and materials received in workshops and presentations sponsored by the Commission. The process was structured around the five criteria for accreditation, core components of these criteria, and the examples of evidence that support the criteria. HLC's cross-cutting themes (future-oriented, learning focused, connected, and distinctive) are not discussed in separate chapters, however, MNU does recognize their importance to the self-study. Instead, the themes are cross-referenced against the content of the report and may be easily identified in the margins of the report.

Chapter Two will describe the following elements of the self-study process: the theme, mission and goals, committees used, important events, the writing of the report, resources available, communication with stakeholders, and the level of consultation with the Commission.

Elements of the Self-study Process

Self-Study Theme

President Robinson coined the phrase: "*Embracing the Vision, Pursuing the Call*" to unite the self-study to the vision, mission and goals of the University. The theme draws attention to the distinctive nature of MidAmerica Nazarene University as an institution of Christian higher education and supports the core belief that its primary purpose for existence is derived from a higher call.

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Self-Study Mission and Goals

The mission and goals for the MNU self-study were intended to provide a direction for conducting the evaluation as well as a scaffold for organizing the work of the committees and greater campus community.

Mission

The purpose of the MidAmerica Nazarene University institutional self-study is to promote excellence through providing regular, systematic analysis of all the university's departments and the programs and services which they offer. According to Dr. Ed Robinson, MNU President, "We are conducting the study for ourselves, in order to be and become the kind of learning community we seek." The process was designed to provide a basis for assessing current issues and needs and making recommendations for future directions. In support of this primary purpose, MidAmerica will use this self-study to prepare for continuing accreditation from The Higher Learning Commission and to provide valuable inputs for its strategic planning and budgeting processes.

Goals

Significant goals were arrived at to help shape the design and the process of the self-study and to create successful strategies for implementation. These goals were approved by the steering committee which is comprised of faculty, staff and administration, and were communicated throughout the University. The self-study goals are as follows:

1. To evaluate our faithfulness to our stated Christian mission and vision.
2. To re-avow MidAmerica's commitment to its stakeholders including the church, students, parents, community, faculty, staff and administration.
3. To evaluate our effectiveness in both academics and the academic support processes endemic to Christian higher education, and to demonstrate how MidAmerica Nazarene University satisfies the Commission's criteria for accreditation in a way that meets the Commission's needs.
4. Self-study is not simply about "passing the test." Its purpose is to seek consistent improvement under both the scrutiny of our internal eyes and the careful review of outside evaluators.
5. To discover ways in which and by which we can make our strong University even better and to integrate findings from the self-study process into the strategic planning and budgeting processes of MidAmerica Nazarene University.
6. To produce a self-study report that will form the basis upon which MidAmerica Nazarene University can apply for reaffirmation of accreditation.


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Committee Formation and Deployment

MidAmerica Nazarene University used multiple committees and numerous participants representing a broad cross-section of the campus community. The University formally kicked off its decadal self-study process with The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association in April of 2006. In July, 2006, President Robinson appointed a steering committee comprised of three (3)


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Minutes related to the self-study process are available in the virtual resource room.

self-study co-chairs and five (5) criteria team chairs to organize and conduct the study. The co-chairs were an Associate Academic Dean; the Director for Institutional Research and the Public Relations Director. Criterion chairs consisted of the Assistant Director of Recruitment, the Director of the Annual Fund, two division chairs and a faculty member.

The Vice President for Academic Affairs, on August 23rd, 2006, met with the steering committee to further establish timelines for the self-study process and to select committee members to comprise each of the five (5) criterion teams. The steering committee attempted to create criterion committees which would represent a broad cross-section of the overall institution. For this reason, members were selected from both academic and non-academic units; and from a diversity of ages, genders, tenures and ranks.

Two major changes came in the Spring of 2008 with the resignations of the Public Relations Director and the Director of the Annual Fund. To replace these vacancies, the Registrar stepped in as co-chair and the Director of Admissions for Graduate and Adult Studies became a criterion chair. In addition, two members of the Criterion Four committee have left the institution and had to be replaced.

The following table details the various responsibilities of each committee:

Table 2-1: Self-study Committees, Members and Tasks

Committee	Membership	Responsibility
Co-Chairs	Associate Academic Dean, Director of Institutional Res., Registrar.	Edits final draft of the report; organizes and manages the self-study process and supports the Criterion committees; collects information, provides analysis and writes chapters of the report beyond the five HLC criteria; responsible for graphic design, layout and publication of the final draft; plans and coordinates the site visit; establishes and organizes the physical and electronic resource rooms.

Steering committee	V.P. for Academic Affairs, Self-study co-chairs, Criterion committee chairs.	Approves the self-study design, calendar and timetable. Determines guidelines and processes for collecting information, organizing and writing the report; Serves as a point of central communication to coordinate the work of the Criterion committees and university offices; actively involved in planning and coordinating the site visit.
Criterion Committees	Criterion committee chair, 5 committee members.	Requests information/data from all offices on campus. Evaluates data; assesses best practices and which examples of evidence to use in the chapter; determining contents for chapter; writes draft of the chapter and submits drafts for review; edits drafts.
Each office on campus	Faculty, Staff, Administrators.	Responds to requests for information by providing narrative, data and analysis regarding the operations of their specific unit.

Self-study Implementation

The initial task in conducting the self-study was to educate the campus community regarding the purpose and process of the self-study. A detailed self-study plan, process and timeline; created by the Steering committee; provided direction and organization and was shared with the campus and all contributors. The timeline contained the major events of the study including meetings, task and writing deadlines, and deliverables. The steering committee and co-chairs reviewed the plan frequently. Progress reports regarding the plan were presented at Team MidAmerica meetings, Town Hall meetings, Dean's Cabinet meetings and Faculty Assembly.

On September 1st, 2006, the self-study chairs held a meeting to craft the self-study design. It was reaffirmed that the design best suited to the culture of MidAmerica Nazarene University would be one centered on the Criteria for Accreditation. The self-study chairs sent out a request asking each office on campus to provide information and evidence associated with the five criteria for accreditation. This was a very familiar task for many offices on campus because MNU's program review process already requires comparable work and therefore the structure was already in place.

Over the next five months, each unit on campus met together and answered accreditation related

questions in narrative form. Every office also provided substantiation for each of their narrative answers. As part of continuous improvement, the University already had systematic data collection and reporting in areas such as assessment, program review, the MNU Data Book, the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) and the annual reports of division chairs and directors. Many of these sources were relied upon by office units as the foundation for their responses.

In February 2007, the self-study chairs asked each criterion team committee to begin studying the information provided from each office on campus and reviewing their evidence. The committees then had the difficult task of analyzing, identifying and describing best practice or the most universal substantiation that MNU is fulfilling (or not fulfilling) each core component of their assigned criterion. When the committees were unable to find compelling evidence that MNU meets a particular requirement they were encouraged to go back to one or more offices and ask for additional verification, and/or to note in their report that this is an area where improvement needs to take place.

Early in the process, resources were provided by the University so that leaders of the self-study could attend annual HLC meetings and gather information from papers, presentations and poster sessions on how to conduct the self-study and write the report. From 2004 to 2006, the vice president for academic affair and associate academic deans attended the annual meeting. In April 2007, the steering committee (12 persons) also attended. The 2007 HLC annual meeting also served as a working retreat which enabled the steering committee to work together to review the initial information collection and evaluation effort. During the Chicago trip, the co-chairs facilitated discussions with the steering committee regarding the five criteria, the need for evaluative writing in the report, and the need to consider and incorporate the cross-cutting themes in the report. Finally, the steering committee spent time in the conference resource room, reviewed the self-study reports of other institutions and discussed best practices for analyzing information and writing the first draft.

Writing the Report

By July 2007 each criterion team submitted a first draft report to the steering committee and co-chairs. This first draft report was organized using the general criterion statement and core components as report headings. The writing included as much analysis as necessary to demonstrate that MidAmerica Nazarene University meets each criterion for continued accreditation.

Upon receipt of the initial drafts, the co-chairs met and reviewed each chapter for content, accuracy, depth of analysis, use of language, and organization. Extensive feedback in the form of suggested amendments and requests for additional work were sent back to each criterion committee for possible inclusion in the second draft of the report.

In February 2008, a second draft of the report was submitted by each criterion committee and then reviewed and edited by the co-chairs. This draft was used in a stakeholder advisory board meeting conducted on Friday, March 28th, 2008. A group of 16 community stakeholders representing the community, the Church, employers, parents, alumni, administration, faculty and staff agreed to read the second draft of the report, formulate suggestions and attend a breakfast meeting to participate in a discussion. Many of the stakeholder's ideas and suggestions for improving the self-study were incorporated. Final revisions and editing followed.

Resources Allocated to the Self-study

Self-study is a priority at MidAmerica Nazarene University. Outside the financial resources and human resources which are included in the Vice President for Academic Affairs's budget, the University also maintains a "North Central" budget. This budget is used to fund conferences, postage, printing, supplies, travel, food, professional services, books, periodicals and membership dues related to regional accreditation. For example, funds were made available for the co-chairs and steering committee to attend the annual HLC meetings and to cover the cost of the stakeholder advisory group breakfast and for professional production of the report. Technology resources, including the shared drive, Blackboard™ learning management system and the MNU webpage established a structure for organizing and sharing information. The University designated a prime location in the new Bell Cultural Events Center as a venue for the team's visit and the location of the resource room. The University allocated financial, technological, physical and human resources to ensure a comprehensive and well-documented process.

Methods of Communication with the University Constituencies

Team MidAmerica and Town Hall meetings have been the primary venues for communicating with the campus community regarding the self-study process. For a two year period, regular time slots were provided during these meetings to discuss the report and site visit. It should be noted that Academic Council, Graduate Council, Faculty Assembly, Dean's Cabinet, President's cabinet and the Monday Reports have served as secondary forums for the dissemination of information. In addition, as mentioned above, a stakeholder advisory group was formed to better communicate with the University's constituencies and to encourage their participation in the process. Finally, regular reports were made to the Board of Trustees in the three year period of preparation leading up to the site visit.

Conclusion

MidAmerica Nazarene University conducted a thorough self-study process using multiple committees, numerous participants representing a broad cross-section of the campus community and a significant investment of time and consideration. The ultimate purpose of the study was to

determine the institution's fidelity to its Christian purpose within the context of the field of higher education. To see how well the University had embraced its vision and pursued its call. In so doing, MidAmerica also planned to review the effectiveness of its programs and operations in a way which strengthens its relationship with the Commission, meets the needs of the visiting team and satisfies the criteria for accreditation. The University discovered the completeness of the self-study process to be an excellent instrument of introspection which encouraged communication and planning for the future. MNU now has a comprehensive evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses which can form the basis for future improvements.



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