



Self Study Manual

ACCJC Standards Adopted June 2002

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Draft: July 2003

*A Publication of the Accrediting Commission
for Community and Junior Colleges
of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges*

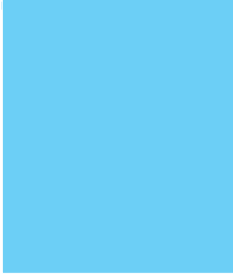


Table of Contents

Development of the Comprehensive Self Study Report	3
Participation in the Self Study	3
The Commission Standards	5
Calendar for Preparation of the Self Study	5
Resources for the Self Study	6
The Accreditation Liaison Officer as a Resource	7
Format and Content for the Comprehensive Self Study Report	7
Tips for Preparation of the Self Study Report	10
Submission of the Self Study Report	11
Appendix A: Sample Certification	12
Appendix B: Sample Cover Sheet	13
Appendix C: Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation	14
Appendix D: Policies Referenced in the Standards	17

Development of the Comprehensive Self Study Report

Each institution affiliated with the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges accepts the obligation to undergo periodic evaluation through self study and professional peer review. The heart of this obligation is the conducting of a rigorous self study during which an institution appraises itself in terms of the Commission Standards in accord with its stated purposes. A Comprehensive Self Study is required every six years following initial accreditation. The Commission's expectation on periodic review, found in the *Accreditation Reference Handbook, Revised Summer 2002*, governs conditions under which an institution is periodically evaluated.

The *Self Study Manual*, intended for use with the *Guide to Evaluating Institutions Using the ACCJC 2002 Standards*, provides a reference for the conduct of the comprehensive self study. The *Guide to Evaluating Institutions Using the ACCJC 2002 Standards* is a document meant to provoke some thoughtful consideration about whether the institution meets the Accreditation Standards at a deeper level than mere compliance. The *Guide* contains the Standards followed by questions to use in institutional evaluation. These questions provide an interpretation of the standards and how they might be applied to an institution.

Self study is part of a three-part process of accrediting an institution. This process includes a self appraisal, an on-site visit by a team of peers, and a review and a decision on the accredited status of the college by the Commission. The self appraisal results in a Report that is an analysis of the on-going and systematic activities and achievements of an institution. The aim of self appraisal is to assess how well an institution meets accreditation standards and to stimulate improvement of educational quality and institutional performance. The ultimate goal of accreditation is to help an institution improve attainment of its own mission—improving student learning and student achievement.

Self appraisal requires a conscious and self-reflective analysis of strengths and weaknesses and an examination of every aspect of institutional function against Commission Standards. Continuous dialogue among members of the college community—a dialogue that is consistently central to institutional processes and which serves to provide the college community with the means for arriving at a comprehensive institutional perspective—can be especially valuable as the institution engages in self study preparatory to writing a report. Broad involvement in the both the institutional self appraisal and preparation of the Self Study Report enhances the credibility and usefulness of the self study report.

Participation in the Self Study

Included in the self study document submitted to the Commission is a certification page (Appendix A) bearing the signatures of institutional leaders and attesting to broad participation in self appraisal and preparation of the Self Study Report. The certification page reflects the belief that the Self Study Report accurately portrays the nature and substance of the institution. Since the inclusion of all constituencies of the college insures that the self study does not reflect the exclusive view of any one group, the visiting evaluation team will seek to confirm that all campus elements have participated in the work of the self study.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Campus

Preparation for the self study begins with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the College whose personal involvement and visible support are crucial to the success of the self study. The CEO should ensure that the need for a self study is brought to the attention of the College Community and that an organization for the conduct of the self study is created. ACCJC Standard 4.B.2 requires that the CEO “provide effective leadership . . . in assessing institutional effectiveness.”

Students

Although obtaining broad and representative participation from students is often difficult, student leaders are typically enthusiastic participants on the steering committee. Every effort should be made to enlist student participation.

Faculty

All faculty have a major role to play in the self study process. The faculty perspective on the integrity, quality, and effectiveness of the institution is an integral part of the self study document. Adjunct faculty should be included in the process to the extent possible.

Staff

Support staff must be included in the self study. Employees in all quarters of the institution are knowledgeable about the college and can offer a perspective on how the college is functioning in terms of its stated purposes and Commission Standards. Recognizing the contributions of this constituency is important, as is including them as active participants in the process.

Administrators

Administrators must share in the work of the self study, collaborating with faculty, staff, and students in the search for evidence that the institution meets Commission Standards. The perspective of administrators is an important part of a self study.

Trustees

Governing Board participation can take a variety of forms. Progress reports on the self study are a way to secure Board participation. Note that at the conclusion of the self study, the Board must certify both participation in the process and the Self Study Report.

Others

The institution may elect to include others in the self study. Members of foundation boards, program advisory committee members, or other volunteers may participate in the process. Care should be taken in these selections to avoid the perception of conflicts of interest.

The Commission Standards

The four Commission Standards work together in an integrated way and several themes thread throughout them. These themes can provide guidance and structure to self-reflective dialogue and evaluation of institutional effectiveness as the institution prepares its self study. The themes include:

- *institutional commitments* to providing high quality education congruent with institutional mission, to focusing on student learning, and to periodic reflection on its mission statement;
- *evaluation, planning, and improvement* in an ongoing and systematic cycle that includes evaluation, goal setting, resource distribution, implementation, and reevaluation;
- *student learning outcomes* as the conscious and robust demonstration of the effectiveness of institutional efforts to produce and support student learning by developing student learning outcomes at the course, program, and degree level;
- *organization* demonstrated in having adequate staff, resources and organizational structure (communication and decision making structures) to identify and make public learning outcomes, to evaluate the effectiveness of programs in producing those outcomes, and to make improvements;
- *dialogue* as a means to ongoing participation in institutional self-reflection based on reliable information about the college's programs and services and evidence on how well the institution is meeting student needs; and
- *institutional integrity* demonstrated concern with honesty, truthfulness, and the manner in which it represents itself to all stakeholders, internal and external.

Note--For a more complete discussion of these themes, see *Guide to Evaluating Institutions Using the ACCJC 2002 Standards*.

Preparation for a self study and a Self Study Report under these integrated standards requires that attention be given to weaving these themes with responses given to specific a standard and its sub-parts. Those charged with the structuring of the process for doing the self study should be mindful of the importance of structuring working committees to address both the themes and the standards in a coherent way that leads to assessment of institutional quality.

Calendar for Preparation of the Self Study

Since the date for the evaluation visit is often set more than a year in advance, a realistic and detailed timetable for the organization and completion of the self study report should be developed. In most instances, at least a year and a half should be allowed and, for many colleges, there is an advantage to beginning the activities a full four semesters before the scheduled visitation.

A convenient and effective method for establishing a calendar is to work back from the date set for the team visit. In this way, target dates can be set for the completion of activities and the amount of time necessary for meeting goals can be better estimated. *Note that the completed self study must be in the hands of the Commission and the team members six weeks before the scheduled visit date.*

Several target dates should be kept in mind while planning the calendar. Time needs to be allowed for evidence gathering and interpretation, review of drafts along the way, final editing and rewriting, board approval, and publication. The work of the editor(s) should produce a coherent document that reflects perspectives developed through the process of dialogue.

Resources for the Self Study

Since evaluation and planning are continuous activities complementing and supporting the self study, the Accrediting Commission encourages institutions to integrate the self study with ongoing evaluation and planning, making the six-year self study a culminating activity rather than an activity undertaken only in the last few months before a team visit. Accreditation standards require on-going program review. These data and analyses are a good source for self appraisal.

A primary goal of the self study should be to provide evidence of institutional effectiveness and compliance with Commission standards. This requires that the study include data on students and their learning outcomes. All research and other activities reporting student achievement and learning outcomes done by the institution (formal and informal) since the last visit should be reported. Information on good evidence can be found in the Commission's *Guide to Evaluating Institutions Using the ACCJC 2002 Standards*.

Another source of data on outcomes can be found in public institutions and institutions that are part of a system because they generate considerable information in the form of reports to system, state, or federal authorities. Vocational, specially-funded, or specially-accredited programs, for example, sometimes have reporting requirements that generate valuable data on outcomes.

Because institutions must generate and utilize information in ways and forms that are most useful to them in meeting their institutional purposes, the Commission is more interested in how colleges integrate information into their planning process than in the compilation of unanalyzed reports. Creating new reports specifically for the self study is not necessary.

Most institutions routinely and systematically analyze local and regional demographic data. City and county planning offices, associations of regional governments, state government, U.S. census, local school districts, public utilities, business and trade organizations, and other planning interests commonly produce much pertinent data.

In an effort to provide a forum in which individuals and institutions may profit from the experiences of others, the Commission presents self study workshops each year that are designed to assist institutions as they begin to develop their self studies. This forum offers an opportunity for a good deal of interaction with Commission. The individuals charged with directing the self study should attend this workshop.

The Accreditation Liaison Officer as a Resource

The Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) is the individual appointed by the College to serve as the contact between the campus and the Commission. The ALO assumes responsibility for:

The Self Study

- Attending the self study workshop.
- Facilitating the development of the self study report.
- Facilitating distribution of the self study report.
- Facilitating the team visit.
- Facilitating follow-up with the Commission.

On-Going Activities

- Staying informed about Commission policies, procedures, activities.
- Promoting a campus culture that is concerned about accreditation.
- Promoting a campus culture that focuses on student learning outcomes.
- Act as an archivist for the institution's accreditation documents.
- Facilitate preparation of the annual reports
- Facilitate reports on Substantive Changes.
- Facilitate reports to the Commission.

Format and Content for the Comprehensive Self Study Report

1. Cover Sheet

The cover sheet should include the name and address of the institution, a notation that the self study is in support of an application for candidacy, accreditation, or reaffirmation, and date submitted (see Appendix B).

2. Table of Contents

3. An Introduction

- a. A history of the institution, including a concise and factual description of the institution since the last comprehensive visit should be included.
- b. Demographic information, including summary data on the area served, enrollment figures, and student and staff diversity, including trends and available projections should be provided.
- c. Information regarding the college's off-campus sites and centers as well as distance learning efforts should be included. Teams will evaluate all of the institution's programs and are expected to insure the Commission that quality and student access to services are evident.
- d. A discussion of the results of the last comprehensive visit, including evidence of what the institution has done regarding the previous team's recommendations, should address each recommendation separately.

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- e. Longitudinal student achievement data, including information on course completion transfer rates, number of degrees and certificates awarded, job placement, licensure, persistence rates, retention rates, graduation rates, basic skills completion, success after transfer, etc., should be included.
 - f. The Commission recognizes that institutions are in varying stages of creating and assessing student learning outcomes at the course, program and degree level. The institutions should provide a summary description of the data it has collected, describe how it is being used, and note what plans exist for continued expansion of this effort.

4. **Abstract of the Report**

The Abstract should be a summative assessment of how well the institution is meeting the standards as a whole. It should be based on the themes that pervade the standards: institutional commitments; evaluation, planning, and improvement; student learning outcomes; organization; dialogue; and institutional integrity.

5. **Organization for the Self Study**

In narrative or chart form, show the organization established to conduct the selfstudy. Committees, their chairs and members, timetable, and the person(s) responsible for the overall direction of the self study should be included.

6. **Organization of the Institution**

Organization charts for the institution and for each major function should be included. Names of individuals holding each position should be provided.

Institutions in multi-college district systems must specify whether primary responsibility for all or parts of a specific function is at the college or district level. This organizational “map” is important in evaluating the quality of performance of that function and establishing accountability for doing so. Those who are responsible should be involved in reporting about the function and be held accountable for its improvement. As a result, close cooperation between and among the institutions and the district/system office is expected as a part of the institutional self study. Moreover, the Commission recognizes that institutions in a multi-college system may have lateral relationships with other institutions in the district/system which must be addressed, and these too are part of the plan for developing the self study.

7. **Certification of continued compliance with Eligibility Requirements**

The institution should summarize the review conducted to verify that it continues to meet eligibility requirements. Specific guidance for this requirement can be found in *Appendix C*. These pages include the requirements themselves as well as what documents are needed to verify continued eligibility. The college should develop a statement for each of the 20 elements. The President and the Chair of the Governing Board must sign a statement certifying compliance.

8. Institutional Self Evaluation Using Commission Standards

The primary portion of a self study report reviews institutional performance using the accreditation standards. Each standard is addressed in turn, using the following three elements:

Descriptive Summary

This narrative should spring from institutional dialogue and should be focused on evidence the college has amassed in support of assertions about what it does to meet Commission standards. The underlying question regards what the institution has learned/knows about what it does.

Self Evaluation

The institution is expected to analyze and systematically evaluate what it has learned/knows about itself in terms of the standards. The basic questions have to do with whether or not and to what degree institutional evidence demonstrates that the institution meets the standards and *how the institution has reached this conclusion*. This analysis should result in actionable conclusions about institutional effectiveness and capacity, informing decisions for what needs to be done to improve.

Planning Agenda

As an institution describes and evaluates its programs and services with reference to each standard, it identifies areas in need of change. This activity yields a planning agenda — a vehicle for institutional improvement. For each subsection of the standard, the institutions should forecast progress it plans to make. The planning agenda should include the following elements:

- a. Statements of the plans, activities, and processes (as opposed to tasks) the institution expects to implement as a statement of what the institution thinks it will do.
- b. Discussion of the ways the areas identified in need of improvement will be or have been incorporated into the ongoing, systematic evaluation and planning processes of the institution.
- c. Discussion of how the outcomes of these plans, activities and processes are expected to improve student learning and foster institutional improvement in general.

Note: The standards reference specific Commission policies. The self study report should address how the college is in compliance with these policies. A list of these policies will be found in Appendix D. Text of the policies can be found in the ACCJC's *Accreditation Reference Handbook*.

9. A List of the Evidence Available in the Team Room

Evidence available to the visiting team should include primary sources and reports on which the Self Study Report is based. When evidence is cited in the Report, it should be indexed by standard for easy reference by team members. The *Guide to Evaluating Institutions Using the ACCJC 2004 Standards* contains many suggestions regarding evidence.

Tips for Preparation of the Self Study Report

Following are suggestions for conducting the self study and preparing the self study report.

About Participation

The Commission's emphasis on inclusive institutional dialogue as a continuous process sets the tone for participation in self study and the development of a self study report. Basically, the college is expected to provide evidence of broad participation and a commitment to making a concerted effort to providing the opportunity for all voices to be heard in the self study effort.

The Steering Committee

This committee should assume responsibility for overall planning and supervision of the self study report. The membership of the committee can be drawn from existing committee structures of the college currently being used as a means for conducting institutional dialogue. The committee should be given time to assume this responsibility and the clerical support needed to complete its work. The committee should have easy access to evidence and research.

Writing and Editing the Self Study Report

Given the structure and integrated nature of the Commission Standards and the themes, there are several ways that institutions could configure the work of their committees. One way would be to organize committees utilizing the themes. The six committees would write to the sub-standards that fit an assigned theme. Membership should include individuals from all constituencies of the college. This arrangement would make holistic weaving of themes and standards part of the process of writing the Self Study Report and would yield a product that addresses both the structure of the standards and the manner in which they are integrated.

Another way to organize would be to create four committees, one for each standard. In this model, subcommittees would address the standards, using the themes as the over-arching structure. Once again, the weaving of standards and themes would provide a holistic approach to think and writing about the institution, producing a Self Study Report that uses the integrated standards and themes as its underpinnings.

Whatever model the institution chooses to employ, sharing information across committees is very important and serves to diminish the likelihood of a Self Study Report that is lacking integration and coherency. Circulating drafts among all constituencies of the college through use of technology is a way to encourage multiple voices as well as greater integration of information and evidence.

It is advantageous to select an editor for the Self Study Report early so that he/she can participate throughout process.

Submission of the Self Study Report

After certification of accuracy by college constituencies and approval by the president and the governing board, four copies of the Self Study Report, four catalogs, and four class schedules should be sent to the Accrediting Commission office. The Commission also requires one electronic version of the Self Study Report. A copy of the report, a catalog, and a schedule should be sent to each member of the evaluation team. Distribution of the report should occur at least six weeks prior to the scheduled evaluation visit. Copies of the report should be made available to members of the college community and to the governing board.

Appendix A: Sample Certification

Certification of the Institutional Self Study Report

(To be Inserted in the Report)

Date _____

To: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges,
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

From: _____

Name of Institution

Address

This Institutional Self Study Report is submitted for the purpose of assisting in the determination of the institution's accreditation status.

We certify that there was broad participation by the campus community, and we believe the Self Study Report accurately reflects the nature and substance of this institution.

Signed

Name

Chief Executive Officer

Name

Chairperson, Governing Board

Name

Title

Representing

Name

Title

Representing

Name

Title

Representing

Name

Title

Representing

Appendix B: Sample Cover Sheet

(Name of Institution)

Institutional Self Study Report in Support of Reaffirmation of Accreditation
or in Support of an Application for Candidacy
or in Support of an Application for Accreditation

(Notation of Reason for Self Study)

Submitted by

(Name of Institution)

(Address of Institution)

(Address of Institution)

to

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

(Date Submitted)

Appendix C: Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation

Compliance with Eligibility Requirements is expected to be continuous and will be validated periodically, normally as part of every institutional self study and comprehensive evaluation. Institutions that have achieved accreditation are expected to include in their self study reports information demonstrating that they continue to meet the eligibility requirements.

1. **Authority**

The institution is authorized or licensed to operate as an educational institution and to award degrees by an appropriate governmental organization or agency as required by each of the jurisdictions or regions in which it operates.

In California, authorization, licensure, or approval by the appropriate statutory regulatory body is required for private institutions. If incorporated, the institution shall submit a copy of its articles of incorporation.

2. **Mission**

The institution's educational mission is clearly defined, adopted, and published by its governing board consistent with its legal authorization, and is appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education and the constituency it seeks to serve.

3. **Governing Board**

The institution has a functioning governing board responsible for the quality and integrity of the institution and for ensuring that the institution's mission is being carried out. Its membership is sufficient in size and composition to fulfill all board responsibilities. The governing board is an independent policy-making body capable of reflecting, constituent and public interest in board activities and decisions. A majority of the board members have no employment, family, ownership, or other personal financial interest in the institution.

4. **Chief Executive Officer**

The institution has a chief executive officer who is appointed by the governing board, and whose primary responsibility is to the institution.

5. **Administrative Capacity**

The institution has sufficient staff, with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support its mission and purpose.

6. **Operational Status**

The institution is operational, with students actively pursuing its degree programs.

7. **Degrees**

A substantial portion of the institution's educational offerings are programs that lead to degrees, and a significant proportion of its students are enrolled in them.

8. Educational Programs

The institution's principal degree programs are congruent with its mission, are based on recognized higher education field(s) of study, are of sufficient content and length, and are conducted at levels of quality and rigor appropriate to the degrees offered. At least one degree program must be of two academic years in length.

9. Academic Credit

The institution awards academic credits based on generally accepted practices in degree-granting institutions of higher education. Public institutions governed by statutory or system regulatory requirements should provide appropriate information regarding the award of academic credit.

10. Educational Objectives

The institution defines and publishes for each program the program's educational objectives for students.

11. General Education

The institution defines and incorporates into all of its degree programs a substantial component of general education designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and promote intellectual inquiry. The general education component includes demonstrated competence in writing and computational skills and an introduction to some of the major areas of knowledge. Degree credit for general education programs should be consistent with levels of quality and rigor appropriate to higher education.

12. Faculty

The institution has a substantial core of qualified faculty with full-time responsibility to the institution. The core is sufficient in size and experience to support all of the institution's educational programs. A clear statement of faculty responsibilities must exist.

13. Student Services

The institution provides for all of its students appropriate student services and development programs consistent with student characteristics and the institutional mission.

14. Admissions

The institution has adopted and adheres to admission policies consistent with its mission that specify the qualifications of students appropriate for its programs.

15. Information and Learning Resources

The institution owns, or otherwise provides specific long-term access to sufficient information and learning resources and services to support its mission and all of its educational programs.

16. **Financial Resources**

The institution documents a funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to support its mission and educational programs and to assure financial stability.

17. **Financial Accountability**

The institution regularly undergoes and makes available an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or an audit by an appropriate public agency. The institution shall submit a copy of the current budget and a copy of the current audited financial statement prepared by an outside certified public accountant who has no other relationship to the institution. The audit must be certified and any exceptions explained. It is recommended that the auditor employ as a guide *Audits of Colleges and Universities*, published by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

18. **Institutional Planning and Evaluation**

The institution provides evidence of basic planning for the development of the institution, planning which identifies and integrates plans for academic personnel, learning resources, facilities, and financial development, as well as procedures for program review and institutional improvement.

The institution systematically evaluates and makes public how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes, including assessment of student learning outcomes and documentation of institutional effectiveness.

19. **Public Information**

The institution publishes in its catalog, or other appropriate places, accurate and current information that describes its purposes and objectives, admission requirements and procedures, rules and regulations directly affecting students, programs and courses, degrees offered and the degree requirements, costs and refund policies, complaint and grievance procedures, academic credentials of faculty and administrators, and other items relative to attending the institution and withdrawing from it.

20. **Relations with the Accrediting Commission**

The governing board provides assurance that the institution adheres to the eligibility requirements, accreditation standards and policies of the Commission, describes itself in identical terms to all its accrediting agencies, communicates any changes in its accredited status, and agrees to disclose information required by the Commission to carry out its accrediting responsibilities.

Appendix D: Policies Referenced in the Standards

Policy on Distance Learning, Including Electronically-Mediated Learning

Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education
Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals

Policy Statement on Considerations when Closing a Postsecondary
Educational Institution

Joint Policy Statement on Transfer and Award of Academic Credit

Contractual Relationships with Non-Regionally Accredited Organizations

The Governing Board

Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions
in Multi-College/Multi-Unit Districts or Systems