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*—a president interviewed as part of the Presidents Project*

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## Preparing for the Self Study – the President’s Role

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**T**his Guideline focuses on the appropriate role of the president or chancellor in providing leadership for the institutional or program self study in preparation for an accreditation review.

The self study is generally regarded as the most valuable element of the accreditation process. We also know, however, that when faced with an accreditation review, faculty and staff members on a campus rarely respond with overt enthusiasm! Attitudes are more likely to range from grudging acceptance to outright disdain. Some will view the accreditation process as a necessary evil, and many will avoid involvement to the extent possible. Conducting a self study is a great deal of extra work for faculty members who are already fully engaged, to be sure, but perhaps even more important as a reason for less-than-enthusiastic attitudes is that many on a campus do not think of accreditation's value for institutional or program improvement. The president's or chancellor's role is therefore, first and foremost, to set the tone for a positive attitude about what the accreditation process can do for an institution and its future. Following are some specific suggestions for how you as president or chancellor can make accreditation a positive and beneficial experience for your institution.

### **Set the Tone for Emphasis on Institutional Improvement.**

Before the self-study begins...

- Insist that the self appraisal be rigorous, honest and forthright. Seek common agreement on the institution's weaknesses—areas where there is clearly room for improvement—as well as on the institution's strengths and points of pride.
- Send a signal to the campus by appointing highly respected faculty members—people who are not only outstanding academics but who are also good campus citizens—to lead the self study effort.

- Emphasize the importance of evaluating/measuring/observing student learning outcomes, over and over and over! Although we in higher education have talked about “outcomes assessment” for some years now, many faculty members have avoided addressing it because it is truly difficult to do in many of the most important learning objectives. Even though it may often be impossible to quantify learning results, some observation, if not measurement, of learning outcomes is expected in the accountability to the public that we call accreditation. The accreditation process may be the stimulus needed on many campuses to attend to the issue of student learning outcomes.
- Make sure that the campus understands the quality improvement function of accreditation. Obviously, issues of compliance with accreditation standards must be addressed thoroughly and effectively, but for many institutions the greater challenge will be to approach the self study in a way that takes advantage of the required investment of time and effort to generate a climate of pride and commitment to improve.

### **What is the Appropriate Level of Involvement for the President or Chancellor?**

Certainly it is neither possible nor appropriate for the campus leader to be involved in every detail of the accreditation self study process, but here are some specific actions that will be most helpful to a successful process.

- Take personal interest in appointing the leadership team or steering committee for the self study, along with your provost or academic dean. In order to attract the very best people for this task the president's or chancellor's personal invitation is important.
- Confer with the leadership team/steering committee regarding the work plan for the self study

process, including the number and makeup of committees and subcommittees, timelines, etc. Although the work plan should be developed by the steering committee, the president should take the time to be informed about it, to contribute to it, and to approve it.

- Help the leadership group to formulate the desired outcomes of the self study so that it will become a useful document for future planning. Determining the key issues to be addressed in the self study is an area in which consensus between faculty and administration is especially important.
  - Be certain that the self study process focuses on such critical issues as academic integrity and student learning outcomes.
  - Assist with communication to the campus throughout the self study process, to encourage participation or invigorate people as needed. Sometimes one needs to be a cheerleader!
  - As the self study progresses determine any key issues that you wish to bring to the attention of the site visit team when they arrive on campus, i.e., issues that may be on your agenda but not necessarily addressed thoroughly in the self study document.
  - Provide brief progress reports to your governing board on a regular basis throughout the process so that they are informed and involved at the appropriate level.
  - Make certain that the review process is supported with adequate resources, both in personnel and funding.
  - Finally, take time to meet with accreditation teams when they visit your campus...to express your point of view and also to hear directly from them. You may not have time to participate in both introductory and exit interviews, but both are important.
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