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**MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION
ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

Self-Study Design Template

Self-Study Institute | Fall

Tool for Institutions in Self-Study with Visits in 2025-2026

INTRODUCTION

While embarking upon Self-Study is meaningful at any time, this year's cohort of institutions will be the first to conduct their self-study process using the *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation (Fourteenth Edition)* and *Evidence Expectations by Standard*, which went into effect July 1, 2023. As you embark in this important process of self-reflection and renewal, we encourage you to refer to these essential documents frequently as they should help you carry out a rewarding process that aligns with the Commission's standards and expectations.

The development and submission of a Self-Study Design is a required step in the self-study process (*Accreditation Review Cycle and Monitoring Procedures*). The Self-Study Design will communicate important information to three audiences: institutional constituencies, the Commission staff liaison, and the Team Chair. It will serve as a guide for the self-study process and assist the Steering Committee and Working Groups with conceptualizing and organizing relevant tasks.

This document provides a template for institutions to develop their Self-Study Design, which must include each section outlined. It will be reviewed by the Commission staff liaison as it is developed and revised until it is accepted. Once the Commission staff liaison accepts the Self-Study Design, the institution will engage in the self-study process in accordance with the timeline established in the Self-Study Design.

I.   INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

This section provides contextual information about the institution that is pertinent to the self-study process. Include a brief relevant history, the institution's mission statement and institutional goals, key external and internal environmental factors (recent events, developments, challenges, significant changes expected in the near future, etc.), main programs of study, and descriptions of the student populations served by the institution. Include relevant data that provide a context for the chosen institutional priorities. Think about what the Team Chair needs to know but may not be able to glean from the

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institution's website or publicly available materials to understand and evaluate the institution in context. Relevant data in this section may include student achievement metrics (retention rates, graduation rates, transfer rates, pass rates – disaggregated by student populations); enrollment trends over the last four years and projections for the next two years; faculty, administrative, and staff headcount; student to faculty/staff ratio; key assessment data points; and any other data that is significant for the institution.

II. INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE SELF-STUDY

Identify three to four realistic, relevant, and achievable institutional priorities that will be addressed during self-study. Provide a brief description of each priority, especially if the chosen priority utilizes terms that have specific meaning for your institution. Additionally, include a narrative about the processes the institution employed to identify these priorities. This section should include information about:

- Consultative process with institutional stakeholders to identifying the priorities.
- Alignment of the selected institutional priorities with the institution's mission and goals.
- Assessment and other data considered to determine the priorities (align with data required in the Evidence Expectations by Standard as well as data reported in the Annual Institutional Update).
- Alignment of the selected priorities to the *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation (Fourteenth Edition)*.

III. INTENDED OUTCOMES OF THE SELF-STUDY

MSCHE expects that institutions will state at least the following outcomes:

1. Demonstrate how the institution currently meets the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation (Fourteenth Edition)* and provides evidence by Standard in alignment with the *Evidence Expectations by Standard*.
2. Leverage periodic assessment through each standard, using assessment results for continuous improvement and innovation to ensure levels of quality for constituents and the attainment of the institution's priorities, mission, and goals.
3. Engage the institutional community in an inclusive and transparent self-appraisal process, including analysis of a range of data, including disaggregated data, to ensure students are appropriately served and institutional mission and goals are met.

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Identify one or more additional outcomes that the institution intends to achieve as a result of engaging in the self-study process. Consider how the self-study process can help the institution meet its mission, assist it in meeting key institutional goals, and enhance its overall effectiveness.

IV. SELF-STUDY APPROACH

Identify one of the following self-study approaches to be used to organize the Self-Study Report:

☐ Standards-Based Approach (preferred approach)

☐ Priorities-Based Approach (alternate approach by request)

Provide a brief rationale for selecting either of the two approaches.

V. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE AND WORKING GROUPS

Provide information about the membership of the Steering Committee and Working Groups, including how the selection process was conducted.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Include the following:

- **Membership:** Identify the Steering Committee Chair/Co-Chairs. Include the names and job titles of the other members of the Steering Committee.

- Responsibilities of the Steering Committee: Include information about

  - Strategies the Steering Committee will use to encourage Working Groups to interact with one another in the interest of engaging in common areas of inquiry and reducing undue duplication of effort;
  - How the Steering Committee will provide oversight to ensure that Working Groups will receive appropriate support for evaluation and assessment of Commission Standards and the priorities selected for analysis in the self-study document; and
  - How the Steering Committee will ensure that institutional mission, the selected priorities, and the Commission's Standards for Accreditation and

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Requirements of Affiliation will be analyzed in the Self-Study Report utilizing the institution's existing evaluation and assessment information.

WORKING GROUPS

- **Membership:** Names and job titles of chairperson(s) and members of each Working Group. As appropriate, include other relevant areas of responsibility at the institution (e.g. University Assessment Committee, Faculty Senate, etc.).

- **General Working Group Charge:** Include a general charge for all Working Groups which outlines the tasks that all Working Groups must complete, such as

  - Expectations for inclusion and analysis of various types of data related to compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation (Fourteenth Edition)*, as well as the *Evidence Expectations by Standard*;
  - How relevant assessment and institutional effectiveness data will be gathered, reviewed, summarized, and used by the Working Group to accomplish its work;
  - Strategies to ensure that appointed Working Group leaders facilitate open, objective discussion and analysis of the institution's compliance with their assigned standard.
  - Strategies for how the Working Groups will interact with one another in the interest of engaging in common areas of inquiry and reducing undue duplication of effort; and
  - Processes to use to ensure that Working Groups stay on task, such as scheduled discussions and updates within the Working Groups, with the Steering Committee, and among the Working Groups, and the form and frequency of such interactions.

- **Lines of Inquiry for Each Working Group:** Working Groups may be organized by Standard or by Institutional Priority, depending on the selected approach to self-study. Identify broad lines of inquiry, specific for each Working Group, to examine compliance with the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation (Fourteenth Edition)*. Identify which institutional priorities will be addressed by each Working Group (if it is a standards-based design); or, which standards will be addressed (if it is a priorities-based design) by each Working Group.

VI. GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING

Include the format of interim and final reports. At a minimum, information in this section of the Design should include the following:

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- A list or description of all products to be completed by the Working Groups and Steering Committee, such as initial outlines, inquiry plans, Working Group reports, preliminary drafts, and final reports;
- A template for submission of inquiry plans;
- Deadlines for the submission of various draft documents and reports;
- A template for the preparation of Working Group Reports; and
- A statement describing the process for vetting and approving self-recommendations identified by the Working Group.

VII. ORGANIZATION OF THE FINAL SELF-STUDY REPORT

Include an outline of the organization, format, and structure of the final Self-Study Report, including information that will be found in the document's introduction and conclusion, and initial indications of the focus of each chapter. The standards-based approach is the simplest and most straightforward way to ensure that the institution addresses all standards. If the institution elects the priorities-based approach, it must clearly identify and label where in the report each standard and requirement of affiliation is addressed so that the peer evaluator can readily verify that all have been incorporated.

VIII. SELF-STUDY TIMELINE

Include a timeline for each major step in the process, beginning with early preparation to completion of the process. In this section, list major milestones in the self-study process, and when the milestones will be achieved. Additionally, clearly indicate whether you will host a fall or spring On-Site Evaluation Visit. Institutions are strongly encouraged to consider fall On-Site Evaluation Visits as this allows the Commission to review the institution's evaluation and issue an action earlier in the year. When spring evaluation visits are chosen, institutions should provide a rationale; please note that all visits must conclude prior to April 15, 2026.

IX. COMMUNICATION PLAN

Include a Communication Plan with a listing of intended audiences, communication methods, and timing. This plan is used to guide the Steering Committee and its Working Groups in gathering feedback from institutional stakeholders and updating them about major developments related to the self-study process. It should include the process whereby the Board of Trustees, and the institution's related entity(ies), as appropriate, are apprised of progress on the self-study and ultimately endorses the final draft.

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X. EVALUATION TEAM PROFILE

The Evaluation Team composition is governed by federal regulation as well as Commission policies and procedures. The Commission will consider additional information provided by institutions in the Commission's role of selecting an Evaluation Team to evaluate the institution's compliance with the _Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation (Fourteenth Edition)_, as well as the _Evidence Expectations by Standard_, MSCHE policies and procedures, and federal requirements. While the Commission provides meaningful feedback to institutions relating to their compliance, the Commission also provides feedback on matters that go beyond mere compliance with a goal to support continuous improvement across its membership. The Self-Study Design must include the following information (separate lists for Team Chair and Team Members):

- **Team Chair:** Indicate the specific experience or expertise desired in the Team Chair, such as experience at similar institutions, experience with the identified institutional priorities, or expertise in a program or process. The Team Chairs are usually chief executive officers, presidents, or chief academic officers. Indicating a preference for any of these will be helpful but does not guarantee selection of a specific person as the Team Chair.
- **Team Members:** The team includes evaluators that have expertise and experience with academic affairs, assessment, student affairs, faculty, and financial matters. As with the Team Chair, outlining specific expertise desired in the evaluators, such as expertise in a discipline or process, or a background working with a certain type of institution or population, will be helpful in identifying potential team members. If the institution has distance education programs, a team member will be identified with that expertise.
- **Peer, Aspirant, and Competitor Institutions:** Include a list of institutions that are considered comparable peers; institutions that are considered aspirational peers; institutions that are primary competitors or that have common student recruitment target areas; and, if necessary, institutions whose representatives might present conflicts of interest should they serve on the self-study evaluation team, as outlined in the Commission's _Conflict of Interest: Commission Representatives Policy_.
- Including a listing of the institution's top programs by enrollment would be helpful as well, along with signature, albeit lesser enrolled, programs.

Although the institution's expressed preferences will be given consideration, the final decision about team membership remains with the Commission and its staff.

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XI. STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING ANNUAL INSTITUTIONAL UPDATE INDICATORS AND METRICS

The Commission monitors data using indicators and metrics in the areas of student achievement, annual enrollment-FTE, and financial health as well as federal financial responsibilities. This is conducted through the Commission's Annual Institutional Update (AIU) based on the *Accreditation Review Cycle and Monitoring Policy and Procedures*. Institutions should assess their student achievement, annual enrollment, financial health, and federal financial responsibilities against the indicators and metrics as part of the self-study process. The Evaluation Team will use these data in their evaluation of the institution's compliance, as required in Section F of the Self-Study Team Report directs the team to review Student Achievement and Verification of Institutional Data and determine whether the institution's approach to realizing its student achievement goals and the institution's processes and procedures to verify institutional data and the data provided in the self-study report appear to be effective, consonant with higher education expectations, and consistent with the institution's mission. Include a brief description of how the AIU data will be analyzed and integrated into the self-study process.

XII. EVIDENCE INVENTORY STRATEGY

Describe the institution's strategies for populating and managing the Evidence Inventory, including ensuring compliance with the *Evidence Expectations by Standard* from the beginning of the self-study process forward. Strategies might include designating a separate Working Group, assigning the refinement of the Evidence Inventory to members of the Steering Committee, among others. Be sure to include the types of institutional data points that will be analyzed for each standard, with the understanding that peer evaluators will follow closely the *Evidence Expectations by Standard* and determine whether and to what extent the institution has met these expectations. Please note that institutions should make the relevance of each piece of evidence clear in the self-study narrative. Also, since some pieces of evidence may apply to more than on standard, the Evidence Inventory allows institutions to cross reference or assign uploaded data to more than one standard.

If the institution functions in a language other than English, document your strategy to translate to English all documents that will be relied upon as evidence.

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