Self-Study Guide & Workbook

For Institutions Undergoing Comprehensive Evaluations 2028 and Onward

NECHE

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INTRODUCTION

The Self-Study Guide and Workbook is designed for institutions preparing for a comprehensive evaluation for accreditation or candidacy. It is designed for use in conjunction with the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* and relevant policies and procedures found on the Commission website http://www.neche.org/. Additional information is provided through campus visits and consultation by Commission staff.

Questions about the guide and workbook or the self-study process are best directed to the office of the Commission. The Commission welcomes suggestions and feedback. Please address questions or comments to:

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U.S. ACCREDITATION: AN OVERVIEW

In the United States, accreditation is the primary process for assuring and improving the quality of higher education institutions. Accreditation traces its roots to 1885. Today's enterprise is based on decades of experience and refinement, both leading and reflecting the development of American higher education. Current accreditation standards go beyond inputs and processes – for example, do students have access to learning resources and are they using them? – to focus increasingly on outcomes: How well are students gaining skills of finding, evaluating, and using information? Over the past decade, accreditation commissions have been leaders in helping colleges and universities develop trustworthy and useful ways to understand what and how their students are learning and to use the results for improvement.

Today, the accreditation of nearly 2,800 colleges and universities is carried out through a process known as 'institutional accreditation.' In 2020, the Department of Education discontinued differentiating between "regional" and "national" accreditation bodies, and "institutional accreditation" is the term now used to describe applicable accreditation bodies that are recognized by the United States Secretary of Education. The process of peer review is based on standards set by the higher education community. Colleges and universities are evaluated on how well they meet these standards, in light of their mission. Following review by a team of peers, accrediting commissions determine the accreditation status of the institution and ensure follow-up and further evaluation as appropriate.

Institutional Accreditors oversee the quality of research universities; community colleges; liberal arts colleges; state colleges; religiously affiliated institutions; special-purpose institutions in the arts, sciences, and professional fields; military academies; historically black and Hispanic-serving institutions; and tribal colleges.

Accredited institutions include public and private, for-profit and not-for-profit, secular and religious, urban and rural, large and small, old and new, traditional and non-traditional. The quality of these colleges and universities – and the talent they have contributed to develop accreditation over the decades – means that U.S. accreditation is highly regarded around the world.

Annually the work of accreditation is carried out by thousands of volunteers who serve on visiting teams and on the commissions. These volunteers include college and university presidents, academic officers, faculty, and campus experts in finance, student services and library/technology. At least one of every seven commissioners is a member of the public unconnected with higher education.

NEW ENGLAND COMMISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

THE COMMISSION

The Commission comprises at least twenty-seven members elected by its member institutions for staggered three-year terms. A Commissioner may be elected for a second three-year term. Membership on the Commission is drawn from different types of institutions and the general public. Federal regulations provide that at least one of every seven Commissioners represents the public interest and has no connection to higher education. Commissioners serve without compensation and meet in four regularly scheduled meetings each year, as well as at an annual retreat for discussion of topics critical to higher education. Various sub-committees may meet more frequently to facilitate the Commission's work.

PEER EVALUATORS

Accreditation is a system of peer review. The Commission has a database of approximately 1500 evaluators -- full-time faculty members and administrators at accredited institutions who are qualified by their credentials and experience to apply Commission standards.

Commission staff consult with the institution being evaluated to determine the composition of the visiting team, in the light of each institution's specific situation and the Commission's requirement that all standards receive appropriate coverage. The team as a whole is chosen to represent diverse groups and talents from comparable institutions, as well as both experienced and new evaluators.

Evaluators are provided with intensive training prior to the evaluation visit. They are expected to make sound professional judgments, based on the *Standards for Accreditation*, that will help the Commission evaluate and enhance the quality of higher education. All evaluators are responsible for excusing themselves from participating in any review that might represent or be perceived as a conflict of interest. For further information on how the institution and its self-study are evaluated by peer evaluators, consult the Evaluation Manual, which is available on the Commission website http://www.neche.org/.

Chapter 1: COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION

Accreditation is a non-governmental, non-profit, self-regulatory, peer review process based on rigorous standards. Colleges and universities are evaluated on how well they meet these standards, in light of their missions.

Because accreditation is a process of self-regulation, it requires that institutions engage periodically in a comprehensive and candid self-study of their own strengths and weaknesses. Self-study is at the heart of accreditation, serving both external and internal purposes: quality assurance and institutional improvement through rigorous self-analysis. It also provides a basis for the Commission's evaluation in accordance with its *Standards for Accreditation*.

THE STANDARDS AT A GLANCE

The *Standards for Accreditation* represent the Commission's articulation of the membership's expectations for quality in a system of self-regulation. Derived through a highly participatory process involving member institutions, the Standards were fashioned to afford institutions opportunities to be creative, innovative, and collaborative in approaching self-study and engaging in self-examination for purposes of institutional improvement.

The Standards are almost entirely qualitative rather than quantitative. Their non-prescriptive quality acknowledges the diversity of institutions of higher learning and enables evaluation in light of institutional mission.

Five separate standards have been developed, each with specific detail and emphasis elaborated in a series of numbered paragraphs. The *Standards for Accreditation* set aspirational goals toward which institutions are expected to strive. Notwithstanding the importance of each of these

discrete standards, the Commission's judgments about accreditation are made about the institution as a whole.

Following are the statements of each of the five standards. *The Standards for Accreditation* in their entirety, with numbered paragraphs of further detail, can be found on the Commission website http://www.neche.org/.

STATEMENTS OF THE STANDARDS

Standard One: Mission, Organization, Governance, and Planning

The institution's mission defines its distinctive character, provides direction for institutional activities, and forms the basis for institutional planning, resource allocation, assessment, and improvement. The institution has a system of governance, internal and at the Board level, that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission, provides for effective planning and evaluation, and supports institutional improvement and innovation. The institution has sufficient autonomy and control of its programs and operations to be held accountable for meeting the Commission's Standards for Accreditation.

Standard Two: The Academic Program, Faculty, and Students

The institution's academic program and student services are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes. The institution works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the quality and integrity of its academic programs and credits and degrees awarded as well as its student services and co-curricular programs. The institution supports teaching and learning through a well-qualified faculty and academic staff, who, in structures and processes appropriate to the institution, collectively ensure the quality of instruction and support for student learning. The institution sets a standard of student achievement appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded and develops systematic means to demonstrate how and what students are learning and to use the evidence provided to improve the academic program.

Standard Three: Institutional Resources

The institution has and maintains sufficient human, financial, information, physical, and technological resources and capacity to support its mission wherever and however its academic programs are offered. Through periodic evaluation, the institution demonstrates that its resources are sufficient to sustain the quality of its educational program and to support institutional improvement now and on an ongoing basis. The institution demonstrates, through internal and external evidence, its financial capacity to graduate its entering class. The institution administers its resources in an ethical manner that assures effective systems of enterprise risk management, regulatory compliance, and internal controls.

Standard Four: Educational Effectiveness and the Success of All Students

The institution demonstrates its educational effectiveness and the success of all students by ensuring appropriate levels of student achievement on mission-appropriate student outcomes. Based on sustained, evidence-based reflection and study, the institution employs comprehensive quality assurance processes to demonstrate and continually improve institutional effectiveness and student learning and success.

Standard Five: Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure

Through its commitment to ethical practices, transparency, and accountability, the institution upholds high standards in all its operations. It provides accurate, timely, and accessible information to all constituents, including the public and the Commission.

The full text of the Standards for Accreditation can be found on the Commission website.

COMMISSION EMPHASES

Two themes permeate the *Standards for Accreditation*: institutional integrity and institutional effectiveness. The Commission expects that institutions demonstrate their integrity by complying with standards and policies, acknowledging candidly their challenges, and engaging in open discussion with the Commission on ways they could improve. The Commission's Policy Statement on Institutional Effectiveness articulates the expectation that institutions' evaluation of their own effectiveness, including assessment of student learning, is systematic and ongoing.

One of the indicators of institutional quality is the capacity of the institution to evaluate its success in carrying out its purposes, with a primary emphasis on educating students, and to use the results of that evaluation for improvement, through efforts that are

- a regular part of the institution's agenda, not just as part of an accreditation review;
- approached thoughtfully—not in a formulaic way—to reflect the institution's mission and character;
- focused on understanding, through the analysis of evidence that reflects the central purpose of the institution to educate students, what and how students are learning at the course, program, and institutional levels; the success of all its students; the effectiveness of its co-curricular programs and student services; and the post-enrollment and post-graduation success of its students.
- supported by the faculty, the president, and other institutional officers and accorded appropriate levels of institutional support to produce useful findings;
- concentrated on using the results of evaluation and assessment for improvement;
    - regularly reviewed and integrated so that assessment and evaluation are not simply individual efforts but also contribute to a shared understanding of the institution's fulfillment of its purposes.

THREE COMPONENTS OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION

The comprehensive evaluation has three distinct components:

- an institutional self-study, in which the institution evaluates how well it meets the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* and identifies Priorities and Actions that facilitate improvement;
- an on-site evaluation by a trained group of peers, which provides a valuable external perspective to the institution and to the Commission;
- a review and decision by the Commission.

The institutional self-study is a process and a product that addresses the *Standards for Accreditation* and presents a clear, concise, accurate picture of the institution as a dynamic entity with a sense of its history, an understanding of its present, and a vision of its future. Self-study as a process demonstrates the institution's capacity for reflecting candidly on its strengths and weaknesses and using that analysis for improvement. Effective self-study is an integral part of ongoing planning and evaluation efforts, not an isolated phenomenon that occurs only when an evaluation team is expected.

The on-site evaluation by a group of faculty and administrators provides the institution and the Commission with a valuable external perspective. Evaluation team members are selected because of their experience at an institution comparable to the one being evaluated. They are trained by Commission staff to validate the self-study in light of the institution's mission.

Commission review of the self-study, team report, and any institutional response occurs at one of the Commission's four regular meetings each year. In addition, in keeping with federal regulations, the Commission seeks and considers public comments regarding each institution undergoing a comprehensive evaluation. The Policy and Procedures for Public Comments, including information for institutions about their role in soliciting public comment during the comprehensive evaluation, can be found on the Commission website http://www.neche.org/.

Chapter 2: SELF-STUDY - THE PROCESS

Undertaking a self-study is a major enterprise. The institution mobilizes its community – including faculty, staff, and students both on- and off-campus and in online programs, trustees, and others – to reflect on its effectiveness, to examine its strengths and areas in need of improvement, and to commit to specific methods for the resolution of problems identified. Done well, self-study is a rewarding experience for the entire institution.

Because it helps various constituencies come together with a common purpose – candid self-evaluation and direction-setting – self-study is well suited to the development of a comprehensive strategic planning process or the audit of quality assurance systems. The process can also be especially valuable during institutional transitions, expansions, and system changes, as it helps institutions define challenges and create plans for addressing them. Each institution is unique. An institution is free to orchestrate its self-study process in a manner appropriate to its own circumstances and community. The Commission does not prescribe a specific self-study process but expects that the effort will:

- focus on the institution as a whole. The Commission accredits the entire institution, not departments, programs, locations, or means of instruction. However, the *Standards for Accreditation* require that all the institution's component parts be examined and that all locations, student populations, and modes of offering its academic program be included. Ultimately, the information gathered through evaluation of each part is used to formulate an evaluation of the institution as a whole.

- evolve from a plan of action. Self-study involves detailed planning and consideration of its significance both within and beyond the home campus. It is best done with foresight and thoughtful structuring of the process to gain maximum benefit from the time and energy expended.

- be an integral part of ongoing self-evaluation efforts. The self-study exemplifies the institution’s systematic process of analysis and self-improvement.

- emphasize student achievement and success. The central purpose of higher education is student learning. The self-study places particular attention to what the institution knows about student learning and how it seeks to improve student achievement.

- evaluate overall institutional effectiveness. An effective self-study report analyzes how well the institution functions. By identifying strengths and weaknesses along with plans for the future, the institution demonstrates the capacity to be forthright about how it meets its objectives and works to improve its performance in all areas.

TIMEFRAME FOR THE SELF-STUDY

Self-study cannot be done well under rushed conditions. Preparation generally begins at least eighteen months before the date of the team evaluation visit, and some institutions begin planning more than two years in advance. Institutions are encouraged to invite a Commission staff member to come to campus early in the process to meet with the steering committee and the faculty as they consider the nature of the enterprise and to help them to plan it advantageously.

Though the self-study is completed prior to the arrival of the visiting team, its impact lives on long after. Accreditation is an ongoing relationship and dialogue with the Commission, rather than a single event. A well-planned comprehensive self-study, visiting team evaluation, Commission decision, and follow-up processes can encompass three to five years. These activities are most useful when integrated with other institutional planning and evaluation. To the extent possible, they can build on and enhance existing resources, processes, and data.

ROLES FOR VARIOUS CONSTITUENCIES

A self-study by its very nature is a complex project that requires perspectives from various institutional constituencies. Widespread institutional participation is likely to lead to the most beneficial results. Committees are most effective when organized so that their work represents the institution as a whole, including off-campus locations, distance and/or competency-based education, and all student and faculty populations. Institutions may also consider how to involve the governing board, administrative staff, alumni, and other significant institutional groups.

The president's role is to set the tone and provide the appropriate context conducive for pursuing self-study. They need to stimulate interest, encourage participation, be involved without dominating the process, and see that the results of the effort are channeled into planning, evaluation, and decision-making processes. Typically, the president first appoints a chair to lead the steering committee.

An effective self-study chair is an active, interested person with extensive knowledge of the institution. The chair plans and oversees the work of various committees, suggests approaches, and assumes the responsibility for having the final report edited. Being a chair, with its demands on time and energy, is a major assignment. It is also a rewarding and valuable one. Some institutions appoint co-chairs, typically a senior academic officer and a faculty member.

The steering committee is generally representative of faculty, administration, and, as appropriate, students. Since its role is to help the chair coordinate the self-study process, its members are familiar with Commission standards and are well-informed about the institution so that it can initiate ideas and suggest cross-references. It will shepherd the narrative from a collection of committee reports to an institutional report with one voice. Clear editorial authority enables the steering committee or its designees to build a cohesive 75-100- page narrative. A clear and concise self-study is most useful to the institution, the evaluation team, and the Commission.

STEPS TO AN EFFECTIVE PROCESS

Once a steering committee and self-study chair (or co-chairs) have been determined, they can begin planning for the activities ahead.

1. Review the *Standards for Accreditation* and recent communication from the Commission to the institution. A broad understanding of the Standards will help provide an overview and set of boundaries for the self-study. The Commission's most recent notification letter will highlight any areas the Commission has identified for special attention by the institution.

2. Determine what self-study committee structures will best serve the institution. The steering committee coordinates inquiry across working groups, tests cross-cutting findings, and ensures that each NECHE sub-head uses the common sequence of Evidence of Institutional Approaches, Evidence of Effectiveness, with an end-of chapter Reflection and end of self-study Priorities and Actions. The editor shapes a cohesive narrative from analysis that has already been discussed and owned institutionally. The steering committee may serve as a group of overseers, with other committees or task forces addressing each of the standards individually. Or it may be composed of the chairs of the committees for each standard. A third approach is to charge already existing campus committees with gathering the information for the standard in their area. There is no correct way. The goal is to create an effective means for the institution to analyze itself.

3. Encourage wide participation. Opportunities for committee participation, input to the document, regular information sharing, and timely feedback help keep the institution – including off-campus populations such as trustees, online students and faculty, and alumni – motivated and aware of the purpose of the self-study. An inclusive process ensures that the whole community understands and takes responsibility for the entire report.

4. Adopt a definite timetable. Plan backward. Give enough lead time for tasks to be accomplished and insist that such a timetable be maintained. Set a publication date for the self-study report at least ten weeks before the team is due so that it can be in the hands of the evaluators six weeks before the campus visit. Having determined the completion date, allow at least a month preceding that for final editing and duplicating. Then work back toward the beginning, allowing the necessary intervals for each stage. Keep in mind what a major undertaking this is and how many people will be involved. Although self-study addresses separate aspects of institutional life, it also focuses on the institution's total effort, overall educational impact, and effectiveness across its units. That takes time.

5. Ensure that each committee becomes especially familiar with the standard to which it has been assigned and the relevant NECHE Data Dashboards. Committees evaluate institutional components encompassed by the standard, using data to support their evaluation. Ample committee time is best devoted to in-depth analysis of how well the institution meets the standard.

6. Gather data and evidence early. The Commission expects that claims and assertions in the self-study will be supported by data and other evidence. Self-study is an ideal occasion to evaluate existing institutional research and consider whether the institution would benefit from additional measurements. An inventory of assessment efforts, using the Commission's E-Series forms and the measures of student success in the NECHE Data Dashboards, can form a baseline for discussion of how results have been or can be used for improvement. Committees benefit from reviewing the NECHE Data Dashboards relevant to their chapters before beginning to write the narrative. Integrating dashboard information into the narrative, where applicable, demonstrates thorough analysis of that data.

7. Work from the start to promote reflection and a "culture of inquiry." Encourage all committees to be inquisitive, to question assumptions, and to debate multiple perspectives on institutional issues. Self-study can bring the institution into focus, emphasizing relationships and performance within units, stimulating healthy cross- fertilization of ideas, and encouraging data-based decision-making. Based on their analysis, committees identify significant findings that may warrant inclusion in the end-of-Standard Reflection. Taken together, the Reflections from the five Chapters provide the basis for the institution to triage findings and determine institution-wide Priorities and Actions.

8. Make sure that the self-study content includes all students, all locations, all modalities of instruction, and any planned substantive changes. Full- and part-time, residential and commuter, off-campus, correspondence, and online students are an integral part of an institution. Services and programs are held to the same standard of quality, no matter where in the institution they take place. Multiple instructional locations or contractual relationships with non-accredited institutions may be involved. The institution may be planning a significant change. Some changes require Commission approval prior to implementation. The Policy on Substantive Change can be found on the Commission website http://www.neche.org/. Consult with Commission staff for further information.

9. Allow sufficient time for editing so that the narrative speaks with "one voice." The self- study is an institutional document, not a collection of departmental views. Involving the final editor early and allowing adequate time for synthesis will help ensure a cohesive story.

10. Confirm that all accreditation-related federal requirements related to Title IV participation are fulfilled. The Policy on Institutional Responsibilities Under Title IV and the required Affirmation of Compliance form can be found on the Commission website http://www.neche.org/

Chapter 3: SELF-STUDY - THE PRODUCT

The self-study is a holistic and integrated document. Although driven by five separate Standards and created in parts, the final self-study reflects the unified totality of one institution rather than a checklist response to the Standards. Together, its content, tone, structure, and supporting documents tell the institution's story and create a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Content and Structure

1. **Evidence of Institutional Approaches (*Within each NECHE subhead*):** Presents evidence about the institution's approaches to relevant areas of the Standard in relation to its mission. It answers the questions: What do we do, and how do we know? Relevant evidence may include data and patterns within it; policies and processes; organizational structures and practices; initiatives; and resource allocation, including personnel, finances, and infrastructure. Results may also be included when they help explain how the approach operates in context. The evidence presented in this section provides the basis for the institution's evaluation in the Evidence of Effectiveness section.

   > ***Example***: The institution's annual planning process is led by senior administration through a retreat that results in a set of institutional goals. Retreat agendas, participant lists, and published goals document the process.

2. **Evidence of Effectiveness (*Within each NECHE subhead*):** Presents the institution's evaluation and interpretation of what the evidence reveals about its approaches. It answers: What does the evidence tell us about how well our approaches are working? Depending on the Standard and institutional context, the evaluation may consider results, consistency, mission alignment, participation, change over time, improvements made, or limitations in current understanding. The most significant findings from these evaluations inform the institution's end-of-Standard Reflection.

   > ***Example***: The present planning process is systematic, but participation is limited. The AY2025-2026 retreat included 12 senior administrators and no faculty, staff, or students. In a subsequent campus survey, 60% of responding students and 30% of responding faculty reported that they were not adequately informed about the annual goals. Together, this evidence indicates the need to improve both participation in the planning process and communication of institutional goals.

3. **Reflection *(End of each Standard)*:** Provides the institution's synthesis of its most significant findings and learning across all applicable subheads within the Standard. It answers the questions: So what? Why does it matter? The reflection identifies key strengths, areas for improvement, connections among findings, and matters that may warrant institutional action. Taken together, the institution's reflections across the five Standards will inform the selection of institution-wide Priorities and Actions.

> ***Example:*** The institution has a consistent annual planning process, but its concentration within senior administration limits campus participation and shared understanding of institutional priorities. Broader participation would strengthen the development of institutional goals and the campus community's shared understanding of them.

4. **Priorities and Actions *(End of Self-Study, no more than 3 pages):*** The institution prioritizes findings identified in the five end-of-Standard Reflections to determine a focused set of institution-wide priorities for action. It answers the question: Now what? For each identified priority, a helpful response frame is: Who will do what, and when?

> ***Example:*** By fall 2027, the president will establish a planning committee representing senior administrators, faculty, staff, and students. By spring 2028, the committee will develop and implement procedures for campus participation in planning and for communicating institutional goals and planning decisions.

The self-study structure helps guide the institution from evidence to evaluation, from evaluation to reflection, and from reflection to institution-wide priorities and action. Each section builds on the sections that precede it. Adequate attention is paid to institutional history, but the focus is on present circumstances and future directions.

TONE

Neither dry nor lofty, the tone of an effective self-study narrative illustrates the institution's unique character and its capacity for analysis. Candor is considered a sign of that capacity. To be candid with the Commission, the institution needs to be candid with itself, balancing pride in its accomplishments with frank self-evaluation.

COMPONENTS OF THE SELF-STUDY

To ensure that institutional information is complete and readily accessible to the Commission and the visiting team, institutions are asked to include in their self-study all components required by the Commission.

See the Self-Study webpage on the NECHE Website for the:

- Components of the Self-Study
- Sample Table of Contents for the Self-Study
- Templates for all required forms
- Policies and Procedures related to the Self-Study

All reports, including the self-study, are to be submitted as a single, searchable pdf file to the Commission. The single, searchable pdf file of the self-study will include actual documents for all appendices and be submitted via the NECHE Institution Portal.

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE (Using the NECHE Institutional Portal)

Additionally, remember to log in to the NECHE Institutional Portal and update web page links related to Public Disclosure. This step is required when submitting a self-study. Click on the "Other" tab in the Institutional Portal and then select "Public Disclosure and Key Documents."

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE DOCUMENTS

Self-study assertions are expected to be supported by concrete evidence within the narrative and in supporting documents. These documents will vary according to the areas under examination. Some document institutional facts, structures, practices, and activities; others provide results or analysis that support the institution's evaluation of effectiveness. Taken together, the evidence provides the basis for the institution's reflections and resulting Priorities and Actions.

Each institution is unique. The list below offers examples of the types of documents that may be found across institutions. Many apply to more than one standard, and an institution will certainly have additional pieces of evidence and supporting documents. A list of suggested documents to support each standard can be found on the Commission website http://www.neche.org/.

The examples below also illustrate how evidence may be used; they do not classify documents exclusively. The same source of evidence may help explain an institutional approach and support the institution's evaluation of its effectiveness.

Examples of Evidence used for Institutional Approaches

- ✓ Institutional charter, license to operate
- ✓ Institutional and program catalogs
- ✓ Enrollment trends; graduation and retention rates
- ✓ Statistics on library and technology usage
- ✓ Faculty, staff, student, Board handbooks, bylaws, and orientation materials
- ✓ Contracts with outside agencies, vendors
- ✓ Policies on academic freedom; plagiarism; award of credit; award and transfer of credit; research ethics; conflict of interest; non-discrimination; grievance procedures; student complaints, faculty hiring, evaluation, promotion, and tenure; Board evaluation of CEO; risk management; investment and endowment spending; financial aid; faculty workload; IT security, etc.
- ✓ Departmental annual reports (These are sometimes also Evidence of Effectiveness)
- ✓ Minutes of committee meetings, faculty senate, Board meetings
- ✓ Faculty CVs and syllabi; job descriptions for senior administrators
- ✓ Board membership and affiliations

- ✓ Expected student learning outcomes for general education
- ✓ Academic calendar

Examples of Evidence Used to Demonstrate Effectiveness

- ✓ Reviews of mission statement
- ✓ Board self-evaluations
- ✓ Studies of student achievement and success
- ✓ Evaluations of advising system
- ✓ Analyses of student participation in athletics, arts, student government
- ✓ Satisfaction surveys, course evaluations
- ✓ Evaluations of management information systems, reliability, security
- ✓ Cost/revenue studies by location, program, mission element
- ✓ Evaluations of use and effectiveness of policies and procedures
- ✓ Program reviews of academic and non-academic units
- ✓ Placement studies of graduates
- ✓ Studies of alumni accomplishments, IT proficiency
- ✓ Impact studies of endowment, community service, financial aid
- ✓ Analysis of retention and graduation of specific populations (e.g., first-generation, transfer students, online students, athletes)
- ✓ Records and reports regarding institutional handling of student complaints

Evidence Placement is Contextual not Categorical (the same evidence can do different work)

Evidence may contribute to more than one part of the self-study. For example:

Evidence of Institutional Approaches: The institution in 2024 introduced an annual planning cycle involving academic and administrative units to achieve a goal of 90% of units completing their unit reviews by 2028. In 2026, 85% of units completed their planned reviews.

The 85% result helps establish that the approach is operating and indicates its reach.

Evidence of Effectiveness*:* Completion of planning reviews by academic and administrative units has increased from 62% in 2024 to 85% in 2026, suggesting that the revised planning process has increased participation. However, completion remains uneven across administrative units, and the institution has not yet determined whether completed reviews consistently influence resource decisions.

The 85% result helps draw a conclusion on effectiveness against the institution's stated goal.

Evidence of Institutional Approaches	Evidence of Effectiveness
Establishes what the institution does and how the approach operates	Interprets what the available evidence reveals about the approach
Includes the context needed to understand practices, participation, implementation, and variation	Reaches a supported, appropriately qualified interpretation or conclusion
May include results when they help explain the current approach	Examines results, patterns, consistency, limitations, and unanswered questions when relevant

Key Takeaways on Using Evidence

- The Standard, the institution's mission, and the surrounding text guide placement.
- There are no clear boundaries and no single right or wrong placement. Institutions make and explain these choices during the writing process.
- Ask, what is the evidence doing? Is evidence helping the reader understand the institution's approach? Or is it used to reach a conclusion about that approach?

THE DIGITAL WORKROOM

Key institutional documents gathered to support the self-study are organized in a workroom where the visiting team can work and confer during the campus visit. The workroom typically contains electronic access to (or paper copies of) all documents referred to in the self- study and other relevant materials.

Institutions are encouraged to consider creating an entirely electronic "workroom" that can be accessed by the team once the self-study has been uploaded (six weeks before the start of the visit), thereby offering an opportunity for early preparation and more productive use of time on campus. Electronic workrooms may be created in a variety of ways -- on a secure website, for example. Electronic workrooms require detailed planning and organization, but they can save paper and storage space, in addition to providing a valuable continuing archive for the institution.

Whether the workroom consists of paper or electronic materials, coordinators will want to think carefully how to organize and cross-reference documents so that they are easily accessible to all members of the team. The team will require a physical space in which to work privately during the campus visit. The ideal workroom is a comfortable, lockable meeting space set aside for the team's exclusive use during the visit. It typically includes a phone, computer(s) and printer(s), campus directory, basic office supplies, and occasional refreshments.

Chapter 4: SELF-STUDY SUBMISSION

The self-study report has three audiences: the institutional community, the visiting team, and the Commission. As the self-study may be a reader's first impression of the institution, a complete, well-written report delivered with adequate lead time helps establish a clear understanding of the institution before the campus visit.

INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNITY

The Commission strongly urges that the self-study be widely distributed to the institutional community (including students and faculty at branch campuses and online, alumni, and trustees) well before the evaluation team arrives for its site visit. Many institutions post self-studies on their websites for easier distribution.

The self-study represents a significant commitment of institutional time and resources. Ideally, it is a living document that helps set the stage for the institution's future development. After the evaluation team has departed, the institution can use its Evidence of Effectiveness, Reflections, and Priorities and Actions to guide planning and promote continuous improvement.

VISITING TEAM

At least six weeks before the visit, the institution uploads a single, searchable PDF of the complete self-study and required appendices to the NECHE Institution Portal. The institution mails a paper copy *only* to team members who request one. (Note: institutions may need to secure a version of the financial statements that is not password protected in order to integrate the statements into the single, searchable pdf file.)

At the same time, the institution provides the visiting team with access to its digital workroom.

THE COMMISSION

The semester after the team visit, the institution's leadership is invited to a Commission Meeting to bring the Commission up to speed with developments since the team visit. Therefore, the Commission is a key audience for the self-study

Chapter 5: STAFF ASSISTANCE

Commission staff assist institutions undergoing self-study in several ways. Each year in October, the Commission offers a Self-Study Workshop intended for institutions preparing for comprehensive evaluations in two years' time. Institutions three years out are invited to send a "scout." Participating in the workshop are presenters who have experienced the various facets of the accreditation and self-study process through service as self-study chairs, as visiting team members, or as presidents of institutions recently evaluated. The workshop is designed for teams of key individuals who will be most intimately involved in organizing and directing the self-study, and it provides a valuable opportunity to learn more about the intricacies and complexities involved.

A second workshop is provided to institutions in the semester before self-studies are due to the Commission. Held in a small-group format, this half-day discussion focuses on the challenges of preparing the final version of the self-study and hosting the visiting team.

From the time of the Self-Study Workshop, through the period of intense institutional self-examination involved in self-study, and even during the evaluation team's visit, questions arise and concerns surface. Commission staff are available to assist at any time. The most common requests for assistance include a staff presentation or consultation on campus and staff review of a draft of the self-study report.

At any time, please know the staff are only a phone call away. Names of staff and their direct phone lines and email addresses are on the Commission website http://www.neche.org/. No question is unworthy of being asked as an institution undergoes this intensive and important process.

Through discussion in person during the course of staff site visits, over the telephone and via correspondence and email, every effort is made to ensure that self-study is a fulfilling experience and that the individuals and the institution are able to reach their fullest potential for self- improvement through that effort.

Appendix A - COUNTDOWN TO EVALUATION TWO YEARS OUT

Timing	Activity
2 years before visit	Commission sends letter to institution as reminder of visit; requests selection of dates for visit. Institutions are invited to attend the Self-Study Workshop in October.
1 year before visit	Commission staff appoints team chair (after president's review) and sends chair evaluator materials. Commission Staff contacts Self-Study Committee Chair (or designated Self-Study coordinator) to discuss progress and/or concerns.
Semester before visit	Institution invites team chair for a preliminary visit to: ✓ Gain impression of institution's organization and atmosphere ✓ Talk w/ president and others on self-study progress, goals ✓ Discuss areas for evaluation ✓ Work out arrangements for the team visit (accommodations, schedules, opportunity to meet with Board, etc.) ✓ After visit, team chair communicates with Commission staff about progress of self-study and makes suggestions for team composition. ✓ Commission staff select and invite prospective team members. ✓ Replacements are made, if necessary. Final team list sent to president and team members. Evaluator training materials sent to team members from NECHE office. ✓ Institution is invited to Self-Study workshop Part II to discuss logistical concerns, any last-minute questions. ✓ Institution submits draft of self-study, NECHE Finance Forms, Dashboards, E-Series Forms, and Affirmation of Compliance form for Commission staff review and suggestions. (Optional, but highly recommended)
10-12 weeks before visit	Team chair corresponds with team on schedule, accommodations, and tentative areas of responsibility.
6 weeks before visit	Institution uploads self-study (single, searchable pdf file) to institution portal. Check with team chair to see if any of the team members want a paper copy of the self-study mailed to them.
Team visit (3 days)	Campus interviews. Team develops rough draft of report, list of strengths and weaknesses, and confidential recommendation to the Commission. Chair gives exit report.

TIMELINE FOR VISIT FOLLOW-UP

No later than (4 weeks after visit)	**Chair uploads the first draft of team report to the NECHE portal for review by team and NECHE staff.**
No later than (6 weeks after visit)	Chair uploads **final draft of the team report** to the portal for review by institution of factual accuracy.
No later than (7 weeks after visit)	Chair receives president's comments on factual accuracy of report via the NECHE portal.
No later than (9 weeks after visit)	Chair uploads **final team report** (pdf format) and draft confidential recommendation to portal. Chair receives NECHE staff feedback and uploads final confidential recommendation (pdf format) to the NECHE portal.
No later than (14 weeks after visit)	Institution uploads to the NECHE portal its **formal written response to the team report (single, searchable PDF file)** This response becomes part of the set of materials the Commission receives.
Semester following visit Fall: September/November Spring: March/April	Institution's president meets with Commission; NECHE notifies institution and team of its action on the institution's accreditation status.

Appendix B: WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

The key to making the self-study process useful to your institution is to begin with what you already know and are working on, and then to use the self-study as leverage to get the additional data and focus that you need. The following sample questions can get a self-study steering committee started.

- What areas for development were identified by the Commission since your last comprehensive evaluation and interim report? What progress have you made on those areas? What challenges remain related to those areas? What new challenges have emerged?
- What institutional research is conducted regularly? Is it easily available? How is it used? What story does the evidence and research tell? Does it need analysis and further discussion?
- What institutional data do you wish you had? Why? How could you get it?
- What does your mission statement tell you about how your institution defines student success? What information about student learning and achievement do you collect regularly and use?
- What are your enrollment trends, retention and graduation rates? (The Data Dashboards will provide an essential foundation for a credible, evidence-based self-study.)
- What significant changes do you anticipate for the next decade? Have they been articulated in a Strategic Plan?

Appendix C: SUGGESTIONS FOR CHOOSING YOUR INSTITUTIONAL SELF-STUDY WRITING TEAM

It takes an effective team to pull together a self-study. Keep in mind the traits of good committee members:

- knowledgeable about the institution (or wants to become so);
- prefer evidence to opinion when making judgments
- are creative in thinking about where to look for evidence;
- open-minded and able to listen well to others;
- respectful of schedules and deadlines;
- interested in enhancing institutional effectiveness through self-study.

What follows are suggestions from institutions on the mechanics of getting committee work done and communicated on campus. You will notice that some of these suggestions conflict; there are as many approaches as there are institutions. Choose what works for your institution and feel free to modify as appropriate.

- ✓ *We appointed co-chairs of the Steering Committee: a senior academic administrator and a well-respected faculty member.*

- ✓ *We created subcommittees for each Standard. Standard 2 requires thoughtfulness in terms of composition.*

- ✓ *We assigned Standards to existing campus committees to promote self-study integration into regular work and to avoid committee overload.*

- ✓ *Our Advisory Council was tasked with promoting internal and external communication regularly through the campus paper and alumni magazine.*

- ✓ *Keep things inclusive and strive for balance: senior and junior members of the faculty, faculty and administration, main campus and branch campus, etc. Consider all populations (e.g., graduate as well as undergraduate students; campus-based students (and faculty) as well as those studying at a distance or on branch campuses; international and other remote locations).*

- ✓ *To ensure a candid approach, don't appoint the person in charge on campus to head the Standard (e.g., don't ask the Vice-President for Administration to head the committee on Financial Resources). Appoint someone else who cares about this area, and then ask the person in charge on campus to make sure the subcommittee has the information they need.*

- ✓ *Make sure you appoint one person with good writing skills to be the final Editor.*
- ✓ *Don't forget the Board. Our Board asked only to be informed periodically; others might want to participate in the Steering Committee.*
- ✓ *Students cared more about the process than we expected and were very responsible about coming to committee meetings and reviewing materials.*
- ✓ *"The breadth of Standard Two required several coordinated workgroups, including academic program design, credits and degrees, faculty and academic staff, and students. Assessment leaders worked across Standards Two and Four so that academic program evidence connected to the institution's evaluation of student learning and success."*
- ✓ *Our committees were all assigned to start with a review of the self-study, visiting team report, and Commission letter from ten years ago.*
- ✓ *Our Steering Committee met monthly for two years.*
- ✓ *We created a small "critique team" of people not on the subcommittees to review all drafts.*
- ✓ *The university senate got monthly updates from the chair of the Steering Committee.*
- ✓ *Every draft was posted on the campus intranet with an email response form at the bottom of the webpage. We provided a mechanism for anonymous comments.*
- ✓ *The Steering Committee hosted small focus groups on every standard.*
- ✓ *Copies of all drafts were distributed to student government, department heads, and the Library.*
- ✓ *The President hosted an Open Campus Forum to discuss the final draft.*

Appendix D: ADVICE FROM RECENT SELF-STUDY COORDINATORS

As a follow-up to the October Self-Study Workshop, a one-day small group discussion will be held at the Commission offices approximately 9 months before your due date for the self-study. The goal at that point is to shift focus from the self-study narrative and consider some of the logistical tasks ahead: preparing for the team visit, making hotel reservations, organizing a welcome dinner, setting up a work room (or providing access to an electronic "space"), keeping the community energized, etc.

1. Start early. Go to the October workshop two consecutive years prior to beginning the self-study. The self-study requires two academic semesters for the narrative and data. Add an additional semester for editing and sharing with the campus.
2. Find a good way to schedule and manage deadlines throughout the process of collecting information and drafting.
3. Plan, plan, plan. Have a backwards calendar for initial drafts that is available to everyone early in the process. Set early deadlines for the standards drafts and stick to them!
4. Review the Data Dashboards early so that you can best reflect your institution accurately and honestly.
5. Alert key offices well in advance about the Steering Committee's needs, expectations, as to the significance of the self-study.
6. Prepare for a more challenging effort than you may have expected but realize that it can be extremely helpful to the institution.
7. Support from senior administrators gives significance to the process. Host a campus-wide kick-off. Make the self-study a true campus-wide activity.
8. Get an institutional committee structure set up very early and get institutional buy-in. Clarify roles. Don't let the process of tapping faculty chairs for the standard committees drag out. Despite the potential of a large number of subcommittee members, it's best to identify a few key individuals as responsible parties. Not everyone will carry their weight.
9. The writing is hard and complex. Organize a substantive writing workshop for all standard chairs clarifying how to write to each section of the self-study. The document doesn't always come out with the right balance among Evidence of Institutional Approaches, Evidence of Effectiveness, Reflection, and Priorities and Actions.
10. Figure out how to keep committees from giving the editor fully written pieces. Request a uniform format – bulleted bits of information that can be edited into text that has "one voice."

11. Include trend data from the Data Dashboards and NECHE Finance Forms in tables and graphs and include an interpretation of what those trends mean to the institution.
12. Ways to collect community feedback = meetings with FOOD; chapter-specific focus groups, student surveys, town meetings, invitations to key individuals to attend, intranet site.
13. Present self-study as an opportunity. Emphasize candor and reflection, not "compliance." Stress more fully that the self-study is not a PR piece or evaluation of anyone's job performance.
14. Focus your story on the present and near future; limit history to what's absolutely necessary, plus whatever the Commission requested last time.
15. Maintain a sense of humor. Keep things in perspective.
16. Think about purpose of chair's preliminary site visit: what to expect, how to frame, how much to ask/share, whom to involve.
17. Ensure that final Priorities and Actions are realistic rather than a "pie-in-the-sky" list.
18. Keep a list of "other stuff" throughout the process. It helps keep the focus on the Standard while ensuring that related or non-related issues are appropriately integrated and addressed.
19. Coach Standard chairs about creative ways to get input (focus groups, surveys, etc.).
20. Ask current chairs to create a document with ideas to hand down to future chairs. We often found ourselves saying, "we wish we'd known this before!"
21. Think about how you want to use technology. Then get your IT people involved early.
22. Celebrate! Be positive and very inclusive.
23. Demand to have the self-study on the agenda for regular updates at college-wide meetings.
24. Formulate specific questions and determine how to get the answers. Report results.
25. Use already established committees and groups to obtain feedback and input.
26. Take advantage of the Commission staff offer to read self-study draft. This has been very helpful.
27. Make sure to leave enough time at the end to review the narrative and supporting documents.
28. Figure out how to motivate your committees and community. It's a constant task.
29. Because prior institutional self-studies use earlier Standards and structures, we used the current NECHE guide and sample structure as our template. Prior self-studies were consulted only for institution-specific process ideas, not for organization, headings, or Standards coverage.

Appendix E: INVITATION FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS

It is a federal requirement that institutions and the Commission seek public comment during the time of the comprehensive evaluation. The Commission seeks such comment on its website under "Upcoming Evaluations." Here are some general guidelines for institutions:

- The notice may be published any time, but no later than one month prior to the team visit.
- In order to provide the public with clear and accurate information, the Commission asks that institutions use only the language specified in the Policy on Public Comments.
- The public invitation for comment should not include identification of team members or their institutions. (Such information is appropriate only for internal purposes.)
- Publish the invitation electronically on the institutional website, linked to pages for parents and alumni; in print in local papers; and, as appropriate, in papers with broader circulation.
- Review Policy and Procedures on Public Comments on NECHE website http://www.neche.org/.

Public comments received are screened to be sure they meet the Commission's criteria. They are then provided to the CEO of institution, who is asked to acknowledge receipt and provide a response, if appropriate. All public comments received during a comprehensive evaluation are reviewed by the Commission prior to its decision.

SAMPLE INVITATION FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS

(Name of institution) will undergo a comprehensive evaluation visit on (date of visit), by a team representing the New England Commission of Higher Education (formerly the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, NEASC).

The New England Commission of Higher Education is a U.S. accrediting commission that provides institutional accreditation. Accreditation is voluntary and applies to the institution as a whole. The Commission, which is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, accredits approximately 220 institutions in the United States as well as American-style institutions overseas.

(Name of institution) has been accredited by the Commission since (year of initial accreditation) and was last reviewed in (date of last comprehensive evaluation). Its accreditation by the Commission encompasses the entire institution.

For the past year and a half, (name of institution) has been engaged in a process of self-study, addressing the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. An evaluation team will visit the institution to gather evidence that the self-study is thorough and accurate. The team will recommend to the Commission a continuing status for the institution. Following a review process, the Commission itself will take the final action.

The public is invited to submit comments regarding the institution to:

Public Comment on (name of institution)
New England Commission of Higher Education
301 Edgewater Place, Suite 210
Wakefield, MA 01880
Email: info@neche.org

Public Comments must address substantive matters related to the quality of the institution. The Commission cannot settle disputes between individuals and institutions, whether those involve faculty, students, administrators, or members of other groups. Comments will not be treated as confidential and must include the name, address, and telephone number of the person providing the comments.

Public Comments must be received by (last day of evaluation). The Commission cannot guarantee that comments received after that date will be considered.

Appendix F: WRITING THE SELF-STUDY: ADVICE

GENERAL ADVICE APPLICABLE TO ALL STANDARDS

- ✓ **Periodically re-read the Standard**. While the final product should read as an integrated whole as opposed to sections addressing each numbered paragraph of the Standard, all relevant parts of the Standard should be addressed. Not all elements of the Standard may need equal attention, but it is important not to overlook a relevant expectation. Highlight for the reader those parts of the Standard that are most significant to your institution, either because they are your strengths or areas for improvement. To organize your narrative, the subheadings in each chapter should mirror those in the Standards.
- ✓ **Begin with evidence**. Think about what evidence the institution already has to address the Standard. Consider who has the information (Institutional Research? Registrar? Dean's Office? Admissions? Institutional Advancement? Career Services? Committees? Task Forces?) Determine early in the process what verifiable information or evidence will be useful to gather during the self-study process. The Data Dashboards and NECHE Finance Forms combined with institutional data will provide useful evidence of trends that can then be incorporated in the narrative.
- ✓ **Reserve the main part of your time and attention for Evidence of Effectiveness and Reflection.** There is a temptation to include everything in Evidence of Institutional Approaches, but more value comes from the institution's evaluation and interpretation of the evidence and what it learns through that evaluation.
- ✓ **Include all of the institution's operations**. Where the institution offers instruction through contractual relationships, or has branch campuses, overseas operations or offers 50% or more of a program online, consider how those operations will be included in the self-study for each Standard.
- ✓ **Include all of the institution's student bodies and programs**. Where the institution admits multiple student bodies and/or offers programs at multiple levels and in various formats (competency-based, low-residency, hybrid, online), include sufficient detail in each chapter to clearly distinguish between unique populations, and compare and contrast various programs.
- ✓ **Tell your institution's unique "story."** Write each chapter as a coherent narrative of that area. Make sure your final self-study ties the chapters together with one consistent voice that makes your institution come alive to the reader. Provide specific examples and evidence to support your general assertions.
- ✓ **Gather material for the workroom as you go**. You will provide the visiting team with access to your workroom documents six weeks prior to the visit (when the self-study is uploaded to the NECHE portal). The work of compiling and organizing the electronic workroom will be made much easier if you gather and organize the materials as you go. Maintain a list of supporting documentation that the team will find in the workroom; the last appendix item of the self-study will be the List of Workroom Documents, by standard. Suggestions for workroom materials can be found on the

NECHE website here: https://www.neche.org/institution-reports-evaluations/. Many institutions, especially those without Institutional Research offices, have found that workroom documents become a valuable institutional archive worth sustaining after the self-study is completed.

- ✓ **Electronic Workroom:** Having documents available electronically lets the self-study team have data and evidence available to all committees. Some institutions find that online compilation of institutional products is also a useful resource for the campus community. Teams anticipate receiving access to materials to review evidence before and during the campus visit. This lets the team make better use of their time on campus and has resulted in visits that are more satisfying to institutions as well as teams. Note that the team may request to see some workroom documents in a paper format, such as the strategic plan or financial documents. Check with the team chair prior to the visit to determine which documents, if any, the institution should make available to the team in a paper format.

Appendix G: GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING EACH STANDARD CHAPTER

Following are suggestions for preparing and reviewing drafts of your self-study. You may find it useful to share these with the committees responsible for those chapters at the outset of the self-study process.

CHAPTER 1: MISSION, ORGANIZATION, GOVERNANCE, AND PLANNING

MISSION

In the NECHE process, the mission forms the basis of evaluating the institution against the *Standards for Accreditation*. In this section, the institution conveys its mission and describes the process and timing of arriving at the mission. The chapter also helps the reader understand how widely that mission is understood and how well it forms the basis of institutional action. Include the (short) history of the institution in the preface piece; refer to it in this section if useful, but make sure the section is about the mission, not primarily about the history.

- Include the mission statement early in the chapter, so all readers can see it as part of the information about the institution.
- Discuss the implications of the institution's statement of its mission. Include a few short illustrations of how the institution has used the mission statement as a guide to help make choices among alternatives.

Reviewing your draft of *Mission*

- ✓ Is the mission clear enough to guide the institution in making choices among alternatives? Do you give examples of how the institution's mission has been used to guide the institution in making choices, setting limits, allocating resources, or developing opportunities?
- ✓ Do you indicate how the mission guides the activities of various units within the institution (e.g., through the mission's statement of the institution's distinctive character and specification of the students the institution seeks to serve)?
- ✓ Does this section let the reader know whether the mission is well known and understood and widely accepted? If the institution identifies an area for improvement, does its significance warrant inclusion in the end-of-Standard Reflection and possible consideration in final Priorities and Actions?

GOVERNANCE

Institutions vary widely in how they are organized and in their systems of governance, depending on the institution's control, mission, age, and history. While it is important that external audiences understand how the institution is organized and governed in relation to the Standards, it is key that the institution, through the process of self-study, keep its major focus on the extent to which its

system of organization and governance promotes overall institutional effectiveness.

- Governance is the system by which institutions make major decisions; this section should describe how that happens and offer the institution's own assessment of how well the governance system supports the institution's ability to do that. Focus on the overall effectiveness of the organization and governance system. Specific examples can help with the institution's own appraisal and help the team understand how the institution functions.
- The Commission appreciates the importance of a strong and effective governing board and internal governance structure for the overall success of the institution. The self-study team may want to consult with the President on how this aspect of governance can best be addressed through the self-study process.
- The chapter should also indicate how the system has been improved, as a result of evaluation and assessment, and present any commitments for further improvement. Include examples.
- Institutions having off-campus, continuing education, distance education, international, evening, and weekend programs as well as other variations on a traditional academic calendar (e.g., low residency programs, accelerated degree programs) should assess the extent to which these programs are clearly integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution. It is particularly important here to ensure that through its organization and governance system the institution ensures that these programs meet the same academic standards as do the more traditional programs of the institution. Coordination with the subcommittee writing about the Academic Program is encouraged.

Reviewing your draft of *Governance*

- ✓ Does the chapter go beyond a description of the institution's organization and system of governance to provide evidence of their effectiveness?
- ✓ Are remote locations and special academic programs appropriately and effectively included in the system of organization and governance?
- ✓ Does the institution have a system to regularly review its organization and system of governance and use the results for improvement?
- ✓ Are there sufficient examples and evidence included to demonstrate where the organization and governance is effective and to help the reader understand where the institution has identified its own areas of concern?

PLANNING AND EVALUATION

The narrative in this section demonstrates the institution's ability to assess and ensure institutional effectiveness. The subheading for *Planning* provides the institution the opportunity to show how action is based on planning and how future action and planning come from evaluation.

- Include information to demonstrate that planning is systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution, and that plans are realistic given the institution's capacity. Avoid simply asserting, for example, that planning is "broad-based" or "systematic." How can you demonstrate that it is so?
- Avoid simply stating a description of the various types of planning; a planning focus that includes only a paragraph or two about each planning effort doesn't help the reader understand the overview of planning: how it generally has occurred and the integration of various types of plans (e.g., strategic, academic, facilities, financial, enrollment).
- Discuss major decisions that have grown out of planning (e.g., to internationalize the institution, to increase support for research, to offer programs at the higher degree).
- Have prior planning and evaluation efforts been successful? Have they generally been implemented in ways that have improved the institution or enhance institutional effectiveness? If not, what has the institution learned from its mistakes?
- The self-study can provide a useful opportunity for the institution to review how well the various types of planning are integrated. For example, is academic planning integrated with financial and enrollment planning?
- How does the institution determine its plans are effective? Evaluation can include evidence from surveys, program reviews, outside audits, visiting committees, student assessment, transcript reviews, consultants, and other sources.
- Include enough information about the evaluation to indicate some findings and some follow-up action – don't just say that an evaluation was done. Refer the visiting team to evaluation studies (and program reviews, etc.) that will be available in the team work room.
- Talk about who gets evaluation results and how they use them. Include examples of when systematic evaluation has been used to improve the institution. Talk about the processes that the institution has in place to ensure this will happen.

Reviewing your draft of *Planning and Evaluation*

- ✓ Do you demonstrate that planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution?
- ✓ Do you provide evidence that plans are realistic and achievable based on the capacity of the institution?
- ✓ Do you show how the various aspects of institutional planning – e.g., strategic, academic, facilities, financial, enrollment – are integrated? Do you discuss areas in which integration has been lacking or could usefully be improved?

- ✓ Do you indicate how useful and effective planning activities have been? Have they set the institution on realistic and effective courses of action? Has the institution's planning been effective at helping the institution anticipate issues as well as respond to problems?
- ✓ Is there a clear relationship between the institution's planning activities and its ability to attain its purposes and objectives both inside and outside the classroom?
- ✓ Have you included examples of evaluation – including the findings – where the findings influenced subsequent institutional planning?

CHAPTER 2: THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM, FACULTY, AND STUDENTS

THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

From an accreditation point of view, the institution's *Academic and Co-curricular Programs* get at the heart of the matter: "The institution's academic program and student services are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes. The institution works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the quality and integrity of its academic programs and credits and degrees awarded as well as its student services and co-curricular programs. The institution supports teaching and learning through a well-qualified faculty and academic staff, who, in structures and processes appropriate to the institution, collectively ensure the quality of instruction and support for student learning. The institution sets a standard of student achievement appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded and develops systematic means to demonstrate how and what students are learning and to use the evidence provided to improve the academic program." (Standard Two: Statement of the Standard).

- Discuss how the institution sets a standard of student achievement appropriate to the degrees it awards and how the institution assesses student learning.
- Discuss how the institution complies with the Commission's Policy on Credits and Degrees and expectations regarding transfer of credit and credit hour regulations.
- This part of the self-study should address all student bodies, academic programs, faculty and staff, and support services offered by the institution, regardless of their location or mode of delivery.
- Discuss how the academic program, co-curricular and student services come together in the delivery of the student experience.

- **Reviewing your draft of *The Academic Program***

- ✓ Does the chapter address all students, all programs, all locations, and all modes of instruction?
- ✓ Does the chapter clearly articulate and provide examples of how the institution "works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the quality and integrity of its academic programs?"

- ✓ Does the chapter reflect institutional findings with respect to what and how students are learning? Does the chapter go beyond assertions of findings and include summaries or sufficient examples? Does the chapter discuss how the institution has or is developing a systematic approach to understanding student learning?
- ✓ Does this chapter address applicable policies, including the Policy on Academic Freedom, Credits and Degrees, and Transfer Credit?
- ✓ Does this chapter address its distance education, competency-based education and dual enrollment programs (if applicable)?
- ✓ Does this chapter address the standard of student achievement established for the degrees awarded?

FACULTY AND ACADEMIC STAFF

The quality of an institution's academic program, and thus its overall educational effectiveness, depends centrally on its faculty and academic support staff (e.g. advisors, librarians, instructional designers). The *Faculty and Staff* section concerns itself with the qualifications, employment, assignment, professional development, and evaluation of the institution's faculty and academic staff. The self-study will demonstrate the ways in which it protects academic freedom for all faculty.

- Remember to include faculty teaching in all programs, all locations, all modes of delivery (e.g., off-campus, distance learning, branch campus, overseas sites, instruction carried out through institutional 'contractual relationships').
- Where the institution has undergone significant change in its academic program or mission, or where the institution has added programs at remote locations or through distance learning, issues relating to faculty may be more complex than has previously been the case. The self-study can be a useful opportunity for the community to consider the extent to which changes in the institution are appropriately reflected in how matters relating to faculty and other academic staff are addressed.

Reviewing your draft of *Faculty and Academic Staff*

- ✓ Are the roles and responsibilities of the faculty and academic staff consistent with the institution's mission?
- ✓ Are faculty categories, including full- and part-time, clinical, research, or adjunct, and qualifications clearly defined?
- ✓ Are the roles, responsibilities, and qualifications of academic staff (librarians, advisors, instructional designers, and others involved in the academic enterprise) clearly defined?

- ✓ Is appropriate regard given to faculty teaching in all aspects of the institution's programs, regardless of location, mode of offering or of the employment circumstances of the individuals?
- ✓ Is the policy on academic freedom discussed in this section?

STUDENTS

Attracting and retaining students is fundamental to an institution's sustainability. This section of the report will demonstrate to the Commission that the institution has clear policies and procedures in place to admit students (all programs, all locations, all modalities) consistent with its mission, that it sets realistic enrollment goals, and that sufficient support services are available to all students.

- Is the institution successful in attracting and retaining the student body it seeks to serve, based on its stated mission?
- Has the institution identified the needs of its students?
- Has the institution identified the appropriate services for its student body (bodies), and are those services being delivered effectively?
- Are all students being served appropriately, regardless of degree level, campus location, or mode of program delivery?

Reviewing your draft of *Students*

- ✓ Does this section introduce the reader to the institution's student body (all programs, all locations, all modalities)?
- ✓ Does this section start from the ability of the institution to attract and retain a student body consistent with the institution's mission?
- ✓ Does the institution understand the characteristics and learning needs of the students? Does the self-study provide an integrated look at the services offered and their effectiveness?
- ✓ Are all student populations, regardless of degree level, location, and mode of program delivery included in the consideration?
- ✓ Does this section discuss the advising, academic support, and other student support services appropriate to the student body.
- ✓ Does this section clearly articulate the ways in which students are made aware of information about cost, debt, and repayment, and include information on how their degree will benefit them post-graduation?

CHAPTER 3: INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The Commission will be eager to understand the institution's approach to ensuring financial viability and sustainability. The visiting team will expect to review policies and procedures that are in place to monitor the effectiveness of its financial resources. Among the Commission's membership are some of the very wealthiest institutions of higher learning in the country, as well as institutions whose financial viability is fragile. NECHE membership includes both public and independent institutions, along with a few who rely heavily on a historically narrow base of support. *Financial Resources* also has some overarching considerations. These include adherence to generally accepted principles of sound financial management, integrity, participatory and integrated financial planning, and a clear focus on ensuring that financial resources – considered to be limited at even the wealthiest institutions – are purposefully directed toward achieving the institution's mission.

- Institutions with fragile financial resources are encouraged to demonstrate to the Commission that they are fully aware of their own financial circumstances and have the capacity and commitment to monitor their own circumstances, make prudent decisions, and maintain appropriate academic integrity while seeking additional sources of revenue.
- A reminder that you will want to complete the NECHE Finance Forms early in the process and use trend data from the Data Dashboard and the NECHE Finance Forms to provide the reader with a picture of the overall financial health of the institution.
- Tables, charts, and graphs can effectively show financial trends over time. Include specific numbers in this section that give a clear picture of the present reality. Demonstrate that financial planning for the future is realistic considering past and present financial circumstances.
- The institution's financial well-being: Are physical resources made available without imposing undue debt burdens on the institution? Are budgets constructed to provide support for or elimination of deferred maintenance?
- Impact of and support for technology: What kind of consideration is given to the integrity and security of data, privacy, and reliability of systems?

Reviewing your draft of *Financial Resources*

- ✓ Are the financial circumstances presented in sufficient detail to demonstrate the institution's understanding of its financial position?
- ✓ Does the institution's description of its financial circumstances reflect the data presented in the Data Dashboards and NECHE Finance Forms?
- ✓ Are the bases for institutional choices, such as the discount rate on tuition for financial aid, clearly understood, and their effects monitored as part of institutional planning?

- ✓ What other institutional choices are clearly related to financial resources? How has the institution's planning and evaluation integrated financial considerations into those choices?
- ✓ Where the institution has undertaken significant new ventures, is there a clear accounting of all direct and indirect costs as well as the revenue, so that the institution can monitor the effect of the new activity on the financial status of the institution?

HUMAN, PHYSICAL, INFORMATION, AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES

This section of the self-study will demonstrate that institutional resources are sufficient to support the institution's mission. In addition to faculty, are there enough staff to support the mission? Is the institution's physical and technological infrastructure sufficient to support growth plans?

- The discussion related to Human Resources should demonstrate that staffing is sufficient across the institution to support its mission and purposes.
- Make sure to consider institutional resources as they relate to all students of the institution wherever and however they are pursuing their academic program (e.g., branch campuses, other instructional locations, students enrolled in distance learning programs, and students at overseas locations);
- Ensure a major focus on the use and impact of the library and technology, particularly on student learning to demonstrate that the "institution has sufficient and appropriate physical, information, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes and to support student learning. Sufficient resources are allocated to maintain and enhance them."
- Consider the level of materials and services in relationship to the institution's mission. Institutions with missions that include graduate study and research require additional resources and expertise.
- The emphasis should be balanced to include considerations of effective use and impact of library and other information resources, not simply an accounting of inputs.
- The academic program: Are changes in the academic program supported by changes in physical and technological resources? Do teaching spaces support the methods appropriate to the disciplines?
- Planning: Is facilities planning coordinated with other key elements of institutional planning, such as strategic planning, academic planning, and financial planning?

Reviewing your draft of *Human, Physical, and Technological Resources*

- ✓ Does the self-study demonstrate that staffing is sufficient across the institution (all locations, all programs, all modalities) to support the institution's mission and purposes?

- ✓ Does the discussion of library and technology planning and resource allocation align with or reference discussions in related sections *(Planning, The Academic and Co-Curricular Programs,* and *Educational Effectiveness*, for example)?

CHAPTER 4: EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND THE SUCCESS OF ALL STUDENTS

This section emphasizes the Commission's continued attention on student success and achievement. In addition to understanding all students by degree level, location, modality, or other variable, the visiting team will also want to understand the institution's goals related to student learning and success including retention, graduation, and the post-enrollment and post-graduation success of its students, as well as the institution's success in achieving those goals.

- Does your draft identify "a set of mission-appropriate goals for student learning and success at the institution, program and course levels, for all students, across all locations and all modalities. It establishes metrics to facilitate the assessment of its goals, including retention, graduation, and success rates."
- Does the institution define and assess measures of success if IPEDS data do not fully reflect your student population? Standards related to retention and graduation provide the opportunity to consider appropriate measures of success in this regard and to assess the institution's effectiveness.
- Consider the variety of methods used by the institution to assess and evaluate student learning and achievement for all student bodies. Are assessment plans and measures applied consistently to all student populations?
- Consider the process for setting retention, graduation, and job placement goals, gathering and evaluating data, and using assessment results to inform decision-making and resource allocation.
- How does the institution assess the effectiveness of its co-curricular and student services programs?
- How does the institution define ROI? What are its measures or proxies?

Reviewing your draft of *Educational Effectiveness and the Success of All Students*

- ✓ Does the chapter provide specific and quantitative information regarding how the institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement including rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates, and employment?
- ✓ Does the self-study discuss how goals for students' co-curricular learning are established and assessed? Does the discussion relate appropriately to the discussion on co-curricular experiences in the section on *Students*?
- ✓ Does trend data from the Data Dashboards capture evidence of student success and achievement?

- ✓ Are data appropriately integrated into the narrative to reflect "all students, all locations, and all modalities" and in a manner that "tells the institution's story" as it relates to student success and achievement?

CHAPTER 5: INTEGRITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

Because accreditation is a process of self-regulation, the Commission relies on institutions to act with integrity when dealing with internal and external constituencies. Through the self-study process, the institution is afforded the opportunity to examine its policies and procedures for assuring institutional integrity and to review – or, as appropriate, to develop – evidence that speaks to the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms and to help assure that such evidence is used for improvement.

The self-study can provide a structured opportunity to demonstrate that "Through its commitment to ethical practices, transparency, and accountability, the institution upholds high standards in all its operations. It provides accurate, timely, and accessible information to all constituents, including the public and the Commission." (Standard Five Statement of the Standard). In addition, many institutions must now reach students and prospective students who are studying at remote locations or through distance learning programs. The self-study process can provide a useful opportunity to review or audit publications, both print and electronic.

- Where are statements about educational goals for students and information on student success at reaching those goals?
- In order to be effective, policies and procedures to ensure fairness and integrity must be generally available and well known to the campus community. Consider what kinds of evidence will demonstrate that such procedures are trusted and used regularly.
- Institutions that offer academic programs at multiple locations or through distance learning as well as on-ground instruction should include all locations and instructional modalities in their consideration of *Integrity*.
- How does the institution demonstrate its responsibility for ethical administration and oversight of all activities bearing its name?
- Elements of other standards also concern themselves with matters related to institutional integrity. It may prove fruitful to establish early in the process how the self-study team wishes to deal with such instances.
- While a review of current work can be useful, institutions are also encouraged to examine whether the institution has the mechanisms in place to ensure that appropriate consideration to timeliness, usefulness, accuracy, comprehensiveness, and availability will characterize the institution's publications into the future.
- Visit your website as though you were a prospective student (for the main campus, or branch campuses). Can you readily find information that informs you about (or tells you how to get

information about) important information such as admissions? Educational costs and the availability of financial aid? Expected student indebtedness at graduation? Program requirements? Special opportunities for students? Services for students with disabilities?

- Do publications, electronic as well as on paper, clearly communicate essential information about the institution (e.g., location, contact information, range of programs and locations, faculty, policies, affiliations of Board members, where to find additional information)?
- Can prospective students and other members of the interested public clearly tell what's on offer at the institution through its readily available publications, including its web pages, blogs, or other forms of social media?

Reviewing your draft of *Integrity, Transparency*, and *Public Disclosure*

- ✓ Does the self-study consider how and how well the institution assures integrity at all locations and for students studying through all modalities?
- ✓ Does the chapter address information available to students and prospective students at all instructional locations where students might complete all or essentially all of their academic program? Where applicable, does it address information for students and prospective students studying at a distance?
- ✓ Does the institution provide information through its website and other means that is accurate, timely, readily accessible, clear, and sufficient for intended audiences to make informed decisions about the institution, including details on the total cost of education, net price, student debt, loan repayment and default, and student success, and include information on how the student's degree will benefit them post graduation.
- ✓ Have you addressed the institution's ready availability of valid documentation to support any statements of its goals for students' education and the success of students achieving those goals? Do those statements present a fair representation of the institution?
- ✓ Does the institution have a regular process to ensure the accuracy, currency, and comprehensiveness of its publications?
- ✓ Does the self-study go beyond inputs (e.g., having a policy on non-discrimination) to looking at effectiveness (how well is the policy working)? Is the atmosphere supporting integrity part of the considerations discussed in this chapter?

Appendix H: ADVICE FOR HOSTING THE TEAM

A word about balance

Visiting team members are guests on your campus, so your hospitality should be considerate. At the same time, they are outside evaluators with a job to do, and their objectivity is crucial to their work. Lavish arrangements, significant gifts, and casual socializing are not appropriate.

Communication with the visiting team and campus community

- Identify a single staff person who will handle all the logistical arrangements for the visit (hotels, reimbursements, transportation, etc.).
- Communicate early and often with the team chair to review plans for the visit. Collaborate on a draft schedule but be prepared for last-minute changes.
- 6 weeks before the campus visit, upload your self-study with appendices as a single searchable PDF; provide paper copies if requested by visiting team members.
- Provide as much supporting documentation as possible to the team electronically before the visit, through temporary access to a secure site or drive. Not only does it save time, paper, and expense, team members will thank you! Best practice is to have this "electronic workroom" available to the team 6 weeks before the visit.
- Communicate with the campus community about the team visit – the purpose of visit, dates, names and institutions of team members, schedule (including time of "open" meetings).
- Remind key personnel to clear their calendars and be available for the days of the visit, either to meet with a team member or to provide a document that is requested.

Hotel arrangements

- Select a hotel near campus so transportation back and forth is easy. Choose one that offers a full breakfast and business facilities, if possible. Reserve a single room for each team member.
- Reserve a comfortable meeting/conference room for the team at the hotel. Team members will need 24-hour access to the work room and it will need to be locked when not in use. Ask the hotel to provide light refreshments (cold drinks, snacks) in the team work room.
- Even if team members are bringing their own laptops, provide computers with Internet access, a printer, and office supplies in the hotel team work room.
- Identify a technology contact person from the campus who will be available at any time should there be a problem with the computers at the hotel.

- Provide a welcome packet at the hotel for each team member (welcome letter from president, directions to campus, campus map, schedule, name tag, list of documents in the workroom).
- Arrange for all hotel expenses to be put on one bill and sent directly to the institution. (Liquor and personal phone calls are the responsibility of individual team members.)
- In consultation with the team chair, make arrangements for team dinners (at the hotel or nearby restaurant) on Monday and Tuesday. As with other arrangements, there is no need for elegance. Consider convenient location, variety of choices (including vegetarian), and prompt service, since the team has work to do in the evening.

Transportation

- Send team members travel options, along with directions to the hotel and campus.
- Team members will make their own travel arrangements, but for those arriving by plane or train, arrange transportation between the hotel and the airport/train station, if necessary.
- Arrange transportation to take team members between the hotel and campus each day, and around campus if necessary. If team members are driving their own cars, provide reserved parking spaces on campus.

Schedule

- Use the sample timetable and schedule in the Self-Study Guide and Workbook as a guide. Coordinate with the team chair before the visit to arrange the schedule. 6 weeks before the visit, the draft schedule should be complete including which members of your community, based on title, will be attending which meetings.
- Provide some unscheduled time for team members to conduct follow-up meetings, review documents, or walk around campus.
- Be prepared for frequent changes to the schedule. Encourage the team chair to coordinate all such requests and communicate them to a single staff person who will arrange changes to the schedule.
- Schedule meetings, without the president or senior administrators present: one for students/alumni, one for faculty and one for staff.
- The noon hour can be a convenient time for team members to meet with each other or with individuals on campus. If you schedule a lunchtime meeting, arrange for food. Consider serving lunch one day in the team work room, as team members may wish to use that time to review documents.

- The team should return to the hotel by 5:00 pm to allow for some free time before dinner and the evening's meeting.

The Sunday night welcome dinner/reception

- The team gets its first in-person introduction to the institution at the welcome dinner/reception. This event need not be fancy; arrange something in keeping with your institutional culture. The event is hosted by the president, who normally invites a selection of senior officers, faculty leaders, student leaders, trustees, and members of the self-study steering committee. The president generally makes a few brief remarks, followed by the team chair, who introduces the members of the team.
- Arrange seating so that team members responsible for particular standards sit with staff members who work in those areas. Provide nametags for all guests.
- Be sure the staff member responsible for arranging changes to the visit schedule attends the Sunday night event to respond to any requests from the team.
- This event should not run too late. The team has a scheduled evening meeting when they return to the hotel.

Workroom for team on campus

- Choose a room that is centrally located, large enough to hold the entire team, well lit, and comfortable. Make sure the room can be locked and is not accessible to anyone else while the team is on campus.
- Provide computer(s) with Internet access, printer(s), a phone, campus directory, and office supplies in the workroom.
- Make sure coffee, tea, and light refreshments are available in the workroom.
- Identify a staff member for team members to contact if they need a document brought to the workroom.

Visits to branch campus/off-campus location(s)

- Refer to NECHE's Guidelines for the Review of Off-Campus and Distance Education Programming during a Comprehensive Evaluation for information about when a visit to an off-campus location needs to be made and what team members will evaluate at the site.
- Consult with the team chair and NECHE staff in advance of visit about the timing of the visit to the off-campus site. If locations are nearby and classes in session when the team is on campus, the off-site visit can take place at that time. If the site is farther away – including in another

state or another country – and/or classes are not held during the three-day team visit, then one or two team members will need to visit the site at another time, preferably before the visit to the main campus.

The Exit Report and departure of the team

- In the late morning on Wednesday, the team chair gives an oral summary of the team's major findings and says farewell on behalf of the team. There is no Q&A period.
- The president decides how to structure the meeting to hear the exit report. On some campuses, the president meets alone with the team. On others, the president may invite the cabinet and/or the Board chair to attend. On other campuses, the exit report is open to all members of the campus community. Choose a room for the exit report accordingly.
- If W-9 is required by your business office for reimbursement of team expenses, have team members complete form before leaving campus.
- Provide a box lunch for team members to take with them as they leave campus directly after the exit report, around noontime on Wednesday.

After the visit

- Write to the team members to thank them for the visit and to remind them to submit their request for reimbursement to the NECHE office.
- Reimburse all expenses promptly.

Sample Letter from Team Chair Arranging Preliminary Visit

President I. M. Curtius Notreal College
Mount Hope, New England

Dear President Curtius:

I have made the following arrangements for the NECHE preliminary visit, and unless you advise otherwise, I will hope to see you or your representative at the Mount Hope airport on DATE at 8:40 p.m.

DATE

7:10 p.m. Depart Boston on Random Airlines, Flight #1712 8:40 p.m. Arrive Mount Hope

DATE

3:55 p.m. Depart Mount Hope on Random Airlines, Flight #41

It is my understanding that the purpose of the preliminary visit is two-fold (1) to help Notreal College understand how the team will operate; and (2) to help me understand the institution so that I may plan how best to deploy members of the team. Within this context, I expect our time will be well spent if I accomplish the following objectives during the preliminary visit:

1. gain a clear impression of Notreal College to learn how it is organized and to sense its atmosphere and style;
2. talk with a number of administrators, faculty and student leaders to determine how they are involved in the self-study and what they expect to achieve as a result of the study and evaluation process;
3. determine from you the names and titles of key people on the campus with whom team members should meet (other than those in line and staff positions);
4. make arrangements for a meeting with appropriate members of the Notreal College staff and with Board of Trustee members during the evaluation visit;
5. make arrangements for visits to off-campus locations;
6. check up on the practical arrangements for the team visit; and
7. discuss plans for the team's first evening of the evaluation visit.

It would be helpful, President Curtius, if you would send some reading materials to me that would fulfill, in part, the first objective, since the preliminary visit will only be eight hours or so in length. A current draft of your institution's self-study would also help provide me with a sense of progress being made and the issues that are emerging.

Additionally, if it is convenient, I think I should stay in the facility the team will be using. In this way, I will be able to become familiar with the accommodations and give appropriate advice to the members of the team.

I look forward to meeting you and your colleagues next month. If I can clarify the contents of this letter or be of any assistance, please feel free, President Curtius, to call me at my office or home.

Sincerely,

Donald T. Frett President
DTF/slo
cc: Lawrence M. Schall

Sample Letter to Institution After Preliminary Visit on Arrangements for a Comprehensive Evaluation

March 20, 20XX

Ms. Alma Halper Assistant to the President Notreal College
Mount Hope, New England

Dear Alma:

I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet you, and I am pleased that you will be the contact person for the NECHE visit in October. I will try to keep you informed of all details related to the visit so that you will have ample opportunity to make the necessary plans and to anticipate our needs.

Let me outline a number of items that will need attention and indicate ways that I think they should be handled. You may contact me for further clarification on any of these.

1. Travel arrangements. Members of the team will be coming from states other than Massachusetts. I would anticipate that most people would drive but there is a chance that someone would choose to fly. If a team member decides to fly, I would like to know if someone at Notreal College would be able to pick them up at the airport and transport them to the hotel.
2. Lodging, meals, conference rooms at hotel.
    a. Each team member should have a single room reserved for them for Sunday, Monday and Tuesday nights.
    b. A conference room should be reserved for the team at the hotel from Sunday noon until Wednesday noon. We will need a room that can be locked when we are not using it.
    c. We will need at least one computer and a printer available in the room from Sunday morning until Wednesday noon. The PC should have standard word processing software (Microsoft Word, if possible). As some members of the team will bring laptops, the room should accommodate their use as well.
    d. We would like to have all bills for rooms and meals put on a master slip to be billed to the College. We would like individual team members to be able to sign for their meals and rooms.
3. Team workroom on campus. Beginning on Monday morning, the team will need a conference room on campus to use as a team meeting place and workroom. The exhibits compiled for the team can be made available in that room, as well as electronically. We will need to have a room that can be locked and secured during our visit. As I discussed with the President during my preliminary visit, we would like to have a computer and printer available in the room. May we please also have a telephone in that room and a campus directory.
4. Timetable. Enclosed is a draft timetable for the visit. Please note the sections checked which need to be arranged by you or some other appropriate individual on campus. The major items to be scheduled are the following:
    a. *Sunday*–Social hour and dinner with selected staff.
    b. *Monday*–Lunch with (three groups): student leaders/alumni, faculty and staff.

Also, three open meetings for members of the college community (one for faculty, one for students, one for staff). Please select rooms conducive to informal discussion. In addition, we would like to have coffee, tea, soft drinks, and cookies or some sort of pastry available. These events should be widely publicized on campus in the weeks before the team visit. It would be our expectation that the president, deans, and division chairs would not attend these meetings, since they have ample other opportunity to talk to the members of the team on other occasions.

Two members of the team will visit two off-campus locations, per our discussion. The scheduling of these visits should ensure that the team members get to meet the location director, a sample of faculty who teach in the program, and some students. I understand the larger location has library and student services regular staff there; it will be useful to meet them as well.

Monday–Morning meeting with Trustees. This can be scheduled either on- or off-campus in a location that is most convenient for the Trustees.

Wednesday –Scheduling of a room in which to conduct the exit report and the invitations to those who will attend this meeting. The room needs to be large enough to accommodate the members of the team and whichever members of the college community are invited.

I believe this covers the essential details of the visit. Many of these will not need to be dealt with until the beginning of school in the fall, but I wanted you to be aware of the range of logistical details.

Please feel free to call or write to me with any questions you may have. I'm looking forward to seeing you again in October.

Cordially,
Donald T. Frett President
DTF/akl
cc: Lawrence M. Schall

TIMETABLE FOR VISIT - Sample

SUNDAY

3:00-5:00 p.m.	Initial meeting of the visiting committee (conference room, hotel) Introductions; General discussions of purpose and procedures; Discuss timetable; Agree on individual committee member responsibilities; Prepare a schedule of meetings with the visiting team members on Monday.
6:00-9:00 p.m.	Social hour and dinner with president and selected staff
9:15 p.m.	Meeting of visiting committee (hotel) General observations; Reports from visits to off-campus locations (in any); identification of strengths, weaknesses, and issues to explore on Monday.

Monday

8:00-11:00 a.m.	Scheduled meetings with members of the college community; workroom time to review syllabi and other supporting documents
11:00 a.m.–noon	Meeting with trustees
12:00-1:00 p.m. Lunch (2 groups)	with student leaders with faculty leaders
1:00-3:00 p.m.	Scheduled meetings with members of the college community; visits to off-campus sites
3:00-4:00 p.m.	Open meetings for faculty/staff to meet with members of visiting team
4:00-5:00 p.m.	Open meetings for students to meet with members of visiting team
6:30 p.m.	Dinner and meeting of visiting committee. Discussion of observations, strengths, weaknesses, findings (hotel)

TUESDAY

9:00 a.m.-noon	Scheduled meetings with members of the college community; workroom time to review syllabi and other supporting documents
12:00-1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00-5:00 p.m.	To be arranged: Follow-up meetings … document review … writing time
6:30 p.m.	Dinner and team meeting of committe

WEDNESDAY

11:00 a.m. Exit report

VISITING TEAM APPOINTMENT CALENDAR AND VISITATION SCHEDULE - Sample

The schedule below indicates team meetings. It also includes selected availability of key institutional officers, open meetings, and other opportunities to meet with campus groups. Individual team members should construct their schedules, including time to examine exhibits, based on the framework below.

TIME	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
7:30 a.m.		Breakfast at Inn	Breakfast at Inn	Breakfast at Inn
8:30 a.m.		Meeting with President	TBD	TBD
9:00 a.m. 9:30 a.m.		Meeting with Vice Presidents (see #1 below)	CFO, CIO available	TBD
10:00 a.m. 10:30 a.m.		Meeting with V.P. and Deans	Graduate Dean, Librarian available	President and Team Chair (Private)
11:00 a.m. 11:30 a.m.		Meeting with Trustees	Student Affairs V.P. Dean of Students	Exit report
12:00 Noon 12:30 p.m.		Lunch (see #2 below)	Lunch (see #2 below)	Box Lunches Available
1:00 p.m. 1:30 p.m.		TBD; 2 team members to visit instructional site in neighboring city	TBD	Depart
2:00 p.m. 2:30 p.m.		Academic Vice President available	Department Chairs available	
3:00 p.m. 3:30 p.m.	Team Meeting at Inn	Open Forum for Faculty and Staff	V.P. Development	
4:00 p.m. 4:30 p.m.		Open Forum for Students	TBD (Campus tour can be arranged)	
5:00 p.m. 5:30 p.m.	Reception at Inn	TBD	TBD	

TIME	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
6:00 p.m. 6:30 p.m.	Dinner at Inn	Dinner at Inn (Team)	Dinner at Inn (Team)	
7:00 p.m. 7:30 p.m.		FREE	FREE	
8:00 p.m. 8:30 p.m.	Team Meeting at Inn Conference Room	Team Meeting at Inn Conference Room	Team Meeting at Inn Conference Room	

1. The four vice presidents will be available at this time for any member of the team.
2. On both Monday and Tuesday, there will be three simultaneous luncheons on campus as follows: (a) some team members with faculty leadership (governance and union); (b) some team members with administrative leadership; (c) some team members with students (leadership and others).

Appendix I: HOW TEAMS REVIEW THE E-Series Forms

All institutions select one (or more) approaches offered through the E-Series Form – or have worked with Commission staff to adopt a modified or new approach. All programs – at all degree levels and offered through all modalities – are included.

Dimension	Questions
Complete?	1. Are all programs included? 2. Is general education included? 3. Are institution-wide learning goals included? 4. Reading left-to-right, are all columns completed? (i.e., does the institution have learning goals, collect data, review the data, make changes based on the data?)
Reviewed?	5. As part of the self-study, was the material in the E-Series forms reviewed by faculty and academic administration?
Discussed?	6. Is the material in the E-Series forms discussed in the self-study? (Standards 2 and 4)
Useful?	7. Has the institution developed an assessment system that is useful for improvement? Has it made specific plans to improve the system?

Appendix J: PLANNING BACKWARDS - EXERCISE

Event	Date	Point Person(s)
Team visit		
Upload a single, searchable pdf file of entire self-study to the NECHE Institutional Portal. Provide team members with a paper copy if requested.		
Documents for workroom gathered (and copied to shared drive or uploaded to a secure intranet or portal)		
Send self-study to editor for "one voice"		
Final content revisions		
Campus review and comment on self-study		
Host Team Chair on Campus for preliminary visit		
Make logistical arrangements for Team visit*		
COMPLETE SELF-STUDY ACCORDING TO CAMPUS PROCESS		
Publish notice for Public Comment		
Send draft self-study, including Appendices to Commission staff for comment	6 months before team visit	
Review Affirmation of Compliance with Federal Regulations Relating to Title IV. Verify that all requirements are covered sufficiently in the Self-Study		
Complete the E-Series Forms		
Initiate process for determining materials for team work room		
Invite NECHE staff person to campus *(highly recommended)*		
Meeting of entire group working on self-study		
Appoint steering committee		
Begin compiling data, evidence, support material		

Event	Date	Point Person(s)
Review relevant Commission letters (President can request copies from NECHE); prepare Summary of NECHE Actions, Items of Special Attention, or Concerns that the Commission has requested the institution address in its Self-Study		
Review NECHE policies for special concerns (substantive change, branch campus, distance learning, contractual relationship, move to the higher degree)		
Appoint coordinator(s)		

**Arrangements for team visit include*

- ✓ Hotel arrangements, including workroom with computers
- ✓ Lockable campus workroom, with technology and telephone
- ✓ List of documents available to team; send list prior to visit. Make documents available electronically, if possible.
- ✓ Scheduling contact assigned for team during visit
- ✓ Technology for team needs – on campus and at hotel
- ✓ Visits to off-campus locations, if relevant
- ✓ Open meetings for faculty, staff, students
- ✓ Meeting with Trustees
- ✓ Other meetings, as requested by chair

Appendix K: PROJECTING A BUDGET Exercise

Every institution's expense for a comprehensive evaluation will be different. The table below provides a way to project a budget.

PHASE OF PROCESS	ITEM	COST
Preparation		
	Institutional representatives to October Self-Study workshop	
Visiting Team expenses		
	Visiting Team chair makes preliminary visit to campus	
	(travel, lodging, meals)	
	Visiting Team expenses	
	(travel, lodging, meals; W-9)	
	Sunday welcome dinner	
	Team visit to branch campus (if necessary)	
Duplication & postage		
	Upload team report to NECHE institutional portal; 1 electronic copy to each team member (paper copy upon request)	
Comprehensive evaluation fee	Equivalent to institution's annual NECHE dues	
Commission Meeting		
	President's travel to meet with Commission (team, if applicable)	

Other possible expenses

- Survey development and processing and other data gathering
- Refreshments at self-study meetings
- Extra clerical, IT support
- Release time or summer support for self-study coordinator and/or other committee members
- NECHE staff campus visit (meals only; transportation and lodging covered by Commission)

Appendix L: REFLECTING ON CHALLENGES EXERCISE

The following questions can and do arise during the course of planning and writing a self-study. They are intended for purposes of reflection and discussion during your team meetings and on your campus. There are no "correct" answers.

1. The Commission expects that the self-study process be "participatory." What does that mean for us?

- How many people should be involved?
- What are the potential problems if too many people are involved?
- How can we build on group efforts that have worked in the past?
- What challenges do we have in getting institution-wide initiatives accomplished?

2. All institutions have problems. How honest should the self-study be?

- Do we need consensus on a matter before we include it in the self-study?
- Where do we anticipate conflicting data or differences of interpretation of that data?
- How can our self-study candidly reflect differences of opinion without appearing indecisive?

3. The self-study needs to be cohesive and consistent. How can different committees' views be brought together in a unified picture?

- What are realistic deadlines for the various phases of the process?
- How much text should committees write? How much information should be provided only in outline form?
- Who will review the data and ensure "one voice" to the final document?

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