



Starting the Self-Study Process

Middle States Commission on Higher-Education Self-Study 2024

February 21 2023

Self-Study Co-Chairs:

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Outline

- Overview of reaffirmation of accreditation and self-study process
- Structure of the Working Groups
- Timeline
- Anticipated Outcomes and Institutional Priorities
- Lines of Inquiry
 - Introduction
 - Table Discussions
- Next Steps

Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)

Institutional Accreditor—previously known as a “regional accreditor” but no longer restricted by region—MSCHE does not accredit individual programs

Holistic Evaluation—verification of compliance with standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, and federal regulations

Title IV “gatekeeper”--unaccredited institutions may still operate, but accreditation is required for students to be eligible for federal financial aid, for courses to be accepted for transfer credit at other similarly accredited institutions, etc.

Focus on Quality—for the most part, MSCHE is not prescriptive. Institutions need to provide evidence that they do what they say they do; that they follow commonly accepted practices in higher education; and that they use assessment results for program improvement..

MSCHE Accreditation Cycle

Annual Institutional Update (AIU)--a yearly check on the overall health of an institution; significant changes from one year to another would trigger follow up from Middle States. Each year, we provide, and Middle States monitors:

Student Achievement metrics (such as retention and graduation rates)

Financial Sustainability metrics (audited financials and other finance data)

Self Study--has moved from a ten-year review to an eight-year review, with AIUs taking the place of the old mid-point review.

Assesses the health of the institution in the context of accreditation standards

Engages the campus community

Self Study Components

Wide Engagement: An opportunity for comment from all constituents, including the general public, one year before the team visit

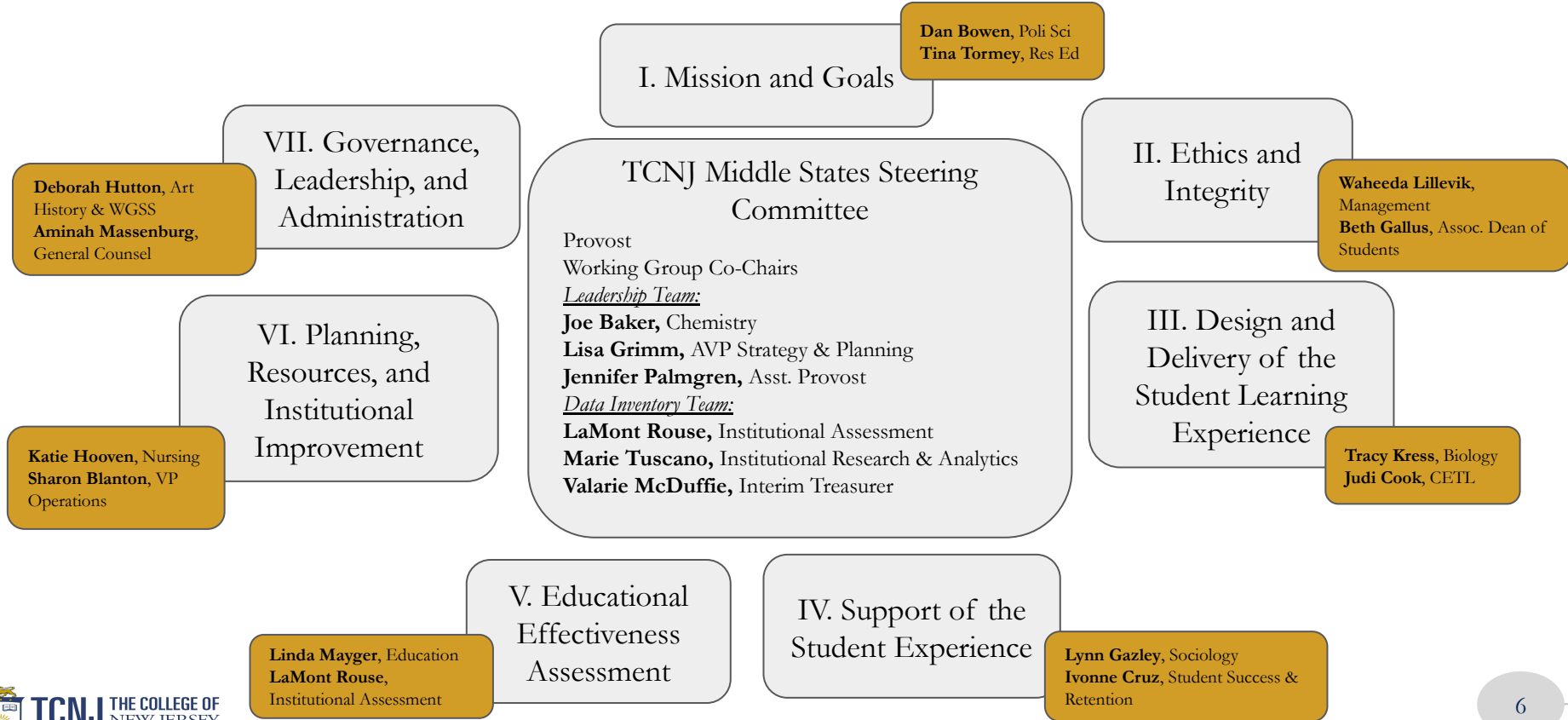
Narrative Report: A single narrative/analytical report, in “one voice,” no longer than 100 single-spaced pages

Evidence Inventory: Repository of documents referenced in the narrative, demonstrating compliance with standards and requirements

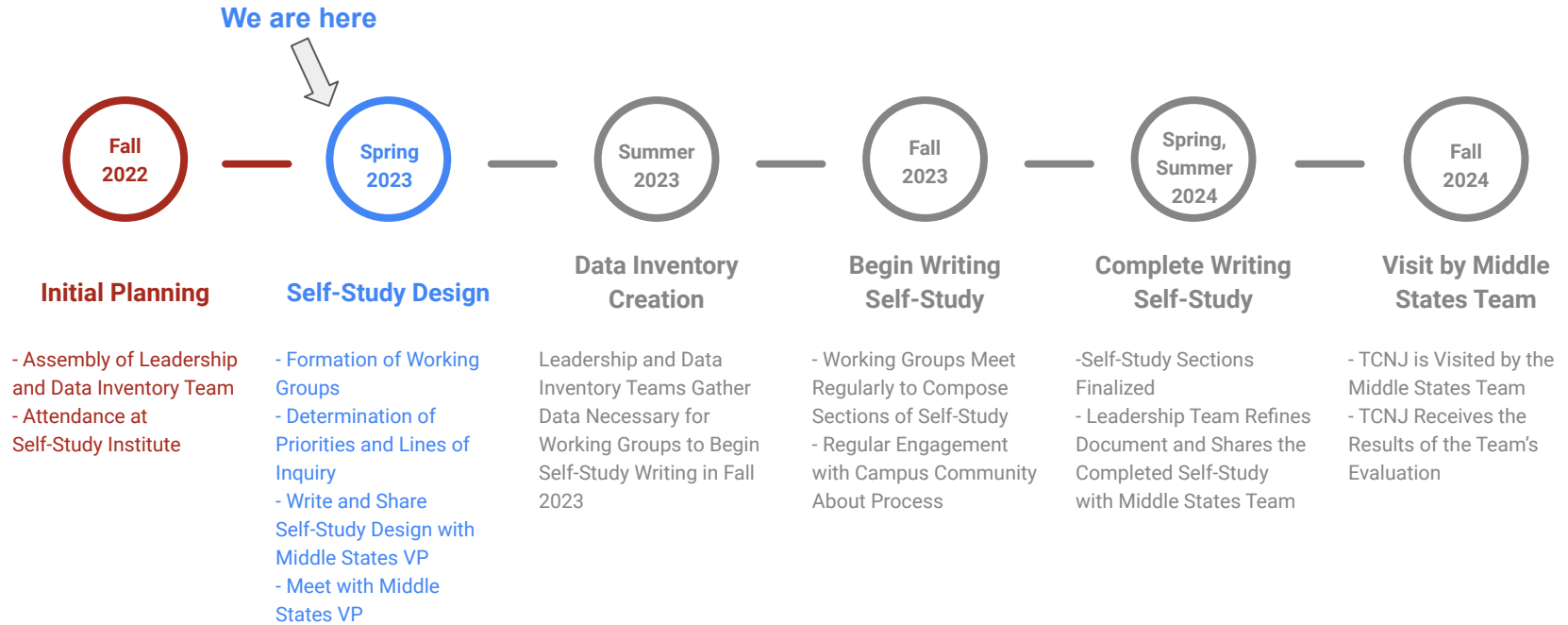
Team Visit: A peer review process—team members are volunteers drawn from peer institutions and assigned to standards based on their areas of expertise

Structure of the TCNJ Middle States Accreditation Team

Working Groups: Faculty and Staff Co-Chairs, 2 additional Staff, 2 Additional Faculty, Dean, Cabinet member, student



The Middle States Accreditation Timeline



Developing Institutional Outcomes and Priorities

To make the self-study process beneficial to the institution, we must develop at least one institutional outcome and several institutional priorities, which can be inspired from, but not identical to, priorities in our strategic frameworks.

The TCNJ Strategic Frameworks (*TCNJ 2027* and *We Are TCNJ*) emphasize:

1. Financial Sustainability
2. Diversifying who we are and what we do
 - a. Our student population
 - b. Our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice
3. Distinguish ourselves in impact and outcomes

Self-Study Outcomes

TCNJ affirms that we will seek the following 3 required outcomes:

1. We will demonstrate how TCNJ “currently meets the Commission’s Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation.”
2. We will demonstrate our commitment to “continuous improvement in the attainment of the institution’s mission and its institutional priorities.”
3. We will demonstrate our commitment to an “inclusive and transparent self-appraisal process that actively and deliberately seeks to involve members from all areas of the institutional community.”

Additional draft outcome:

We will develop a shared vision for how to implement graduate education on a wider scale. This will include improving our integration of graduate education into the daily life of the campus, support services, and marketing.

DRAFT

Draft Institutional Priorities for Campus Consideration

Inspired by TCNJ Strategic Frameworks

1. **Strengthening our Financial Position**
 - Given the financial implications of the impending demographic decline of traditional-age college students in the Northeast and the anticipated removal of Travers and Wolfe Halls from our housing portfolio, to what extent is the college diversifying our revenue streams and optimizing the use of our resources? Are the college's divisions and units supporting our strategic priority to ensure future financial sustainability in their practices and policies?
2. **Expanding to Serve Broad Audiences of Learners**
 - How can we best position TCNJ to reach new transfer students and support them once they arrive on campus? How can we improve our support for students, like post-baccalaureate students, who are neither undergraduate nor graduate students?
 - How are we leveraging the strengths of the college's core programs and mission to realize synergies in new graduate and continuing education programs, offerings, and credentials? To what extent will our infrastructure for graduate and continuing education allow us to grow and thrive at supporting new audiences of learners at the college?
3. **Deepening our Work to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
 - Given the national context to hinder DEI work in higher education, to what extent are we positioned to protect and support our DEI priorities? What initiatives, programs, and services have proven to be most impactful in supporting a diverse student body and equitable outcomes? What are we learning from those efforts to help scale success across the college as we move forward?
 - How are our efforts leading to long-term, sustainable structural and cultural change at the college?
4. **Enriching our Curricula**
 - To what extent are our curriculum and co-curriculum relevant and meeting the educational needs of our students and broader college community (e.g., employers, graduate schools)? How effectively are career-readiness competencies integrated into the curriculum? How are we preparing students to make a difference in their communities and contribute to the greater good?
 - As we prepare to revise the undergraduate college core curriculum and first-year experience, how will the core's learning outcomes need to be adjusted to prepare students for college and lifelong success?
 - Additionally, explore how we are collaborating across college divisions/units to develop and deliver curricula to meet the educational needs of our students.

Discussion of Draft Institutional Outcome and Priorities

Each table has a Co-Chair for one of the Standards who will take notes to share with the MSCHE Steering Committee and has a copy of the draft proposed outcome and priorities:

Please consider the proposed additional self-study outcome. What are the institutional advantages and disadvantages for selecting this proposed outcome? What are your suggestions for improvement?

Please consider the proposed institutional priorities. What are your suggestions for improvement?

Alignment of Standards of Accreditation and Institutional Priorities

Institutional priorities help structure the narrative related to the Standards of Accreditation

The Self-Study Final Report will have approximately 15 pages on each Standard with evidence for how we are meeting the Standard.

The cited evidence should support the institutional priorities most relevant to the Standard.

Standards for Accreditation	Priority 1. Financial Sustainability	Priority 2. New Audiences	Priority 3. Diversify	Priority 4. Focus on Curriculum
Standard I. Mission and Goals	Secondary	Primary	X	X
Standard II. Ethics and Integrity	X		X	
Standard III. Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience	X	X	Tertiary	Primary
Standard IV. Support of the Student Experience	X	X	Primary	Tertiary
Standard V. Educational Effectiveness Assessment		X	Secondary	Secondary
Standard VI. Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement	Primary	Secondary	X	
Standard VII. Governance, Leadership, and Administration	Tertiary	Tertiary	X	

Standards of Accreditation

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education specifies seven Standards of Accreditation

Standards I to IV	Description
Standard I. Mission and Goals	The institution's mission defines its purpose within the context of higher education, the students it serves, and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals are clearly linked to its mission and specify how the institution fulfills its mission.
Standard II. Ethics and Integrity	Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions. In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully.
Standard III. Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience	An institution provides students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence at all program, certificate, and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences, regardless of modality, program pace/schedule, level, and setting are consistent with higher education expectations.
Standard IV. Support of the Student Experience	Across all educational experiences, settings, levels, and instructional modalities, the institution recruits and admits students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals are congruent with its mission and educational offerings. The institution commits to student retention, persistence, completion, and success through a coherent and effective support system sustained by qualified professionals, which enhances the quality of the learning environment, contributes to the educational experience, and fosters student success.

Standards of Accreditation

Standards V to VII	Description
Standard V. Educational Effectiveness Assessment	Assessment of student learning and achievement demonstrates that the institution's students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their program of study, degree level, the institution's mission, and appropriate expectations for institutions of higher education.
Standard VI. Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement	The institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges.
Standard VII. Governance, Leadership, and Administration	The institution is governed and administered in a manner that allows it to realize its stated mission and goals in a way that effectively benefits the institution, its students, and the other constituencies it serves. Even when supported by or affiliated with governmental, corporate, religious, educational system, or other unaccredited organizations, the institution has education as its primary purpose, and it operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy.

Each of the Self-Study Working Groups will focus on one of these Standards of Accreditation and consider how we are in compliance with the Standard using targeted lines of inquiry.

Lines of Inquiry

Example line of inquiry

Standard II. Ethics and Integrity: “Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions. In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully.”

Bucknell University: “ How does the institution establish a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, and staff, and administration from range of diverse backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives?”

Lines of inquiry need to be impact-oriented so that they will lead to institutional improvement

- cannot be ‘yes/no’ questions
- how well** are we meeting...
- what does the evidence show
- based on the findings...**

Each working group needs to have a line of inquiry related to assessment/institutional effectiveness

Small Group Work

Goal: Provide the Working Groups with initial lines of inquiry to consider this spring as we prepare the Self-Study Design. This is your opportunity to contribute to the kinds of questions and associated evidence that will be considered.

Each table has a Co-Chair for one of the Standards who will take notes:

1. Please generate **5-10 possible lines of inquiry** related to the Standard represented by your table Co-Chair with at least one being related to assessment and/or institutional effectiveness.
2. Be prepared to share the line of inquiry your group is most excited to have explored.

As a reminder:

Lines of inquiry need to be impact-oriented so that they will lead to institutional improvement

-cannot be 'yes/no' questions

-**how well** are we meeting...

-what does the evidence show

-**based on the findings...**

Each working group needs to have a line of inquiry related to assessment and/or institutional effectiveness.

Reporting and Discussion