

## Tips for Conducting a Self-Study in Turbulent, Changing, or Ordinary Times

1. Select the self-study coordinator(s) carefully and strategically. If possible, appoint co-coordinators (with one to serve as “lead”), and urge them to take advantage of *all relevant Higher Learning Commission resources* (e.g., send them to the HLC annual meeting/workshops at least two years before the site visit; maintain regular contact with the institution’s liaison at the HLC; save communications from/with the HLC liaison in writing; consider applying for the HLC Assessment Academy if your assessment processes are less-than-stellar or not perfectly effective).
2. Communicate often and purposefully with your institution’s president, vice presidents, and board of trustees, so that they will understand the purposes of the self-study and the need to be forthright.
3. Construct a self-study timeline with distinct phases and specific targets; incorporate both “leeway” and “real” deadlines. Publish and periodically update these deadlines on the self-study web site. (See <http://www.yzu.edu/accreditation/timeline-accreditation.shtml>.)
4. Establish effective, complementary committee structures with strategic overlap among committee members. Include committees for the criteria as well as committees to address concerns identified in the previous accreditation, any change requests to be submitted with the self-study, and self-study components not specifically covered by the criteria. (See <http://www.yzu.edu/accreditation/committees.shtml>.)
5. Establish a self-study web site, electronic resource room, and physical resource room before the campus “kickoff” event and before committees begin to meet—and update all three resources throughout the self-study process to serve the committees, the self-study coordinators, the university as a whole, and the visiting team. (Our own web site [<http://www.yzu.edu/accreditation/>] and electronic resource room [<http://www.yzu.edu/accreditation/resources-accreditation.shtml>] were life savers that enabled everyone, including us, to access materials any time, from on or off campus.)
6. “Jump-start” the work of the committees (e.g., construct specific questions for the committees to address rather than leaving the committees to flounder; design strategies to lessen overlap and needless duplication [see [http://www.yzu.edu/accreditation/Resources/Addressing\\_Criteria\\_and\\_Evidence\\_Overlaps.doc](http://www.yzu.edu/accreditation/Resources/Addressing_Criteria_and_Evidence_Overlaps.doc) and [http://www.yzu.edu/accreditation/Resources/Addressing\\_Diversity-Item\\_Overlaps.doc](http://www.yzu.edu/accreditation/Resources/Addressing_Diversity-Item_Overlaps.doc)—if asked for a password for *Word*-file links here or elsewhere, hit “Cancel”]).
7. Distinguish between committee reports and final self-study documents “up front,” before the committees start work. If multiple writers will prepare the final documents, take measures to ensure that these final documents will be well organized, unified, complete,

stylistically similar (see [http://www.yсу.edu/accreditation/Resources/Style\\_Sheet\\_for\\_Committee\\_Reports.doc](http://www.yсу.edu/accreditation/Resources/Style_Sheet_for_Committee_Reports.doc)), and minimally repetitive.

8. Involve the lay-out and design team from the beginning. No matter how well you plan, you (and they) will be too rushed at the last minute to make major design decisions just before the documents go to print. (You can see design decisions we made by viewing our completed self-study, available from links in the light-blue box in the left-hand column at <http://www.yсу.edu/accreditation/resources-accreditation.shtml>.)
9. Establish structures (e.g., subcommittees or coordinators) for surveys, data collection, responses to previous concerns, and non-criterion-related matters such as change requests, federal compliance, third-party comment, the institutional snapshot, and logistics of the site visit).
10. Develop mechanisms for involving and soliciting feedback from the entire campus community, alumni, members of the community at large, and (if you are a public institution) your state governing board. Sample surveys we designed are available in the **H (Workshop Handouts)** section of our electronic resource room at <http://www.yсу.edu/accreditation/resources-accreditation.shtml>, as well as under section **S (Surveys)**.
11. Prepare for—and don't be deterred by—catastrophes big and small. These, too, shall pass.
12. Be detail-oriented, but flexible. Presidential candidate Barack Obama came to campus (with two days' advance notice) on the first day of our site visit. If we had not built flexibility into the schedule and reserved parking spaces for the visiting team and other campus visitors, the first day of the visit could have been seriously disrupted.
13. Attend to relationships as well as tasks. Giving frequent positive feed-back to all participants (and to one another) generated cooperation and a willingness to “go the extra mile.”