4 The Self Evaluation Process

4.1 Purpose of the Self Evaluation Process

An ACCJC member institution accepts the obligation to undergo a comprehensive review every seven years to maintain its accredited status. The first step in this process is a self evaluation. The self evaluation process serves several purposes.

First, it is an opportunity for the institution to conduct a thorough self evaluation against the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, including federal requirements, Commission policies, and the institution's own mission and objectives. The process should enable the institution to consider the quality of its programs and services, the institution's effectiveness in supporting student success, and the degree to which the institution is meeting its own expectations (institution-set standards). See also Section 5.4.vii.

During the institutional self evaluation process, the institution should reflect on the extent to which it has:

1. designed and implemented an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, re-evaluation, and improvement,
2. considered its programs and services while paying particular attention to program review and achievement of student learning outcomes,
3. prepared and implemented institutional plans for improvement supported by adequate sources of data and other evidence, and
4. established its own institution-set standards of performance regarding student achievement and student learning.

Second, self evaluation is the foundation for the preparation of an Institutional Self Evaluation Report and for the Commission's team evaluation process. A well-organized and thorough self evaluation process will enable the institution to consider the quality of its programs and services and institutional effectiveness, to report its findings, and to share its evidence and analysis with the evaluation team and the Commission.

4.2 Organization of the Self Evaluation Process/Roles of Campus Groups

It is important for an institution to have a designated committee responsible for the overall planning and supervision of the self evaluation process and the preparation of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report. One possibility is to vest the responsibility for the self evaluation process in an existing college committee that has oversight of the institution's continuous evaluation, student success, planning and/or improvement functions. Another option is to establish a new committee whose membership is drawn from existing committees that have a role in the institution's evaluation, planning and improvement activities. The designated committee should include representatives of faculty and staff with special responsibilities relevant for the topics to be covered in the self evaluation process, such as the chief instructional officer (CIO), Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO), institutional effectiveness officer, chief student services officer (CSSO), chief financial officer (CFO), institutional researcher, and technical support staff.

The self evaluation process should be self reflective and consider the institution's strengths, weaknesses, and achievements. Analysis of institutional data against the institutional mission and objectives undertaken by the relevant personnel, and dialog about the results and effects of the analysis is a crucial element in the process to ensure that the self evaluation provides a comprehensive review of the institution. Below is a list of the stakeholders that may be relevant for the institution to involve in the self evaluation process.

- Administrative leadership
- Faculty, including adjunct faculty
- Students, typically student leaders
- Support staff, including researchers and technology staff
- District/system office representatives for colleges in multi-college districts/systems
- Governing boards

As governing boards are ultimately responsible for educational quality and monitoring of institutional performance, including student success, planning, implementation of plans, and participation in accreditation processes, they should be kept current of the progress of the self evaluation process. When the institutional self evaluation has been completed, the Board must read and certify that they have been involved in the process by signing the Certification page of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report (see Appendix B).

Role of the Designated Committee

The designated committee is responsible for organizing and coordinating the self evaluation process and for ensuring that appropriate progress is made. In addition, it is an important role of the committee to ensure that evidence is shared within the institution and that relevant internal stakeholders, who have knowledge of data and who can contribute to the analysis of data and evidence, are involved in the process as appropriate.

The institutional intranet or the faculty/staff section on the institution's website can be an effective resource for sharing information relevant for the self evaluation process. One possible approach is to create an electronic repository on the intranet or the website for sharing information, e.g., the timetable for the self evaluation process, minutes from committee meetings, and drafts of the various sections of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report in order for college representatives to post input to the Report. If the institution already has a permanent electronic platform for sharing institutional data, a separate repository for the self evaluation process may not be necessary, or the repository for the self evaluation can provide links to the general information platform so that data is easily accessible for everyone involved in the self evaluation process. If the institution has well organized electronic data and other evidence in place, the presentation of the evidentiary information in electronic format to the evaluation team at the time of submission of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report will be facilitated (see Section 5.2 below).

The institution should give the designated committee sufficient time to assume its responsibilities and provide it with the clerical support needed to complete its work. The Commission encourages the institution to select an editor for the Institutional Self Evaluation Report at the outset so that the editor can participate throughout the process. The editor has multiple roles. The editor must ensure that the Report reads as a coherent text and that it is clear and succinct without excessive repetition and redundancies across the various sections of the report.

A suggested formatting and style sheet is provided in Appendix C. The length of a quality Institutional Self Evaluation Report depends on the size and complexity of the institution. The target length of a good quality report would be approximately 25,000 words (printed on both sides), excluding evidentiary information. (See Section 5.1 below)

Finally, the designated committee is responsible for disseminating the final Institutional Self Evaluation Report to the college community. The evaluation team will expect that trustees, faculty, staff, and administrators are familiar with the content of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report when it meets with them during the evaluation team visit.

In summary, an effective and useful self evaluation process has to balance two needs: 1) to be organized in a manner best fit for the institution's mission and processes, and 2) to address the requirements of the Commission.

Regardless of how an institution chooses to align these needs, there are a number of principles that support a successful self evaluation process. It should:

- address the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies (together Commission's Standards), and meet other Commission requirements,
- provide content and evidence for the Institutional Self Evaluation Report,
- include institution-set standards for student achievement and learning outcomes,
- provide and analyze existing evaluation, planning, and improvement data,
- lead to an assessment, based on analysis of data, of the quality of the institution's programs and services and its institutional effectiveness as well as the formulation of plans and actions for improvement, and
- involve the institutional stakeholders who have a role in improving institutional quality.

5 The Institutional Self Evaluation Report

5.1 Purpose of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report

The outcome of the self evaluation process is an Institutional Self Evaluation Report. An important purpose of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report is to provide a written analysis of strengths and weaknesses of educational quality and institutional effectiveness based on the institution's continuous evaluation and quality improvement activities which have been considered in the self evaluation process.

Unnecessarily long reports can make them difficult to follow. A good Institutional Self Evaluation Report should concisely state the institution's current and sustained compliance with Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies (together Commission's Standards). If additional work remains for the future, the Report should generate concrete details and actionable improvement plans including timelines and outcomes for that work. Self-identified actionable improvement plans (formerly Planning Agendas) should be integrated into planning processes of the institution for implementation and follow-up. And the institution may wish to use them as evidence to demonstrate planning processes and results.

The College is asked to discuss, in a **Quality Focus Essay**, two or three areas it has identified for further study, improvement, and to enhance academic quality, institutional effectiveness, and excellence (see Section 5.3 below).

The evidence appended to the Report should clearly verify the statements made in the Report. When possible, the Report should incorporate passages from the evidence. This approach provides the evaluation team with the best starting point for the review of the institution's ability to assure and improve its own quality. In the preparation of the Report, it is useful if the institution reviews previous college reports, team reports and Commission action letters.

Furthermore, a good Institutional Self Evaluation Report, when addressing the Accreditation Standards, makes direct reference to the institution's mission and institutional objectives. The Report also makes reference to evidence of achieved results, evaluation of the results, and examples of improvements which are integrated into the institutional planning processes rather than only describing processes and/or intentions which are not supported by evidence of achievement. Through this approach, the institution will demonstrate to the evaluation team how the institution's evaluation, improvement, and planning cycle functions. At the same time, the Report should be clear and concise. It should make reference to previous sections in order to avoid unnecessary repetition.

In summary, a good Report must be meaningful and useful to the members of the institution as well as provide sufficient information for the evaluation team about the institution, evidence of its achievements, and how it meets the Commission's Standards.

5.2 Evidence and Data

Using Evidence and Data

A quality institution acts on evidence and data when making judgments. Access to and use of evidence and various data sources that relate to the institution's mission, institutional objectives, and educational goals as well as planning processes are necessary parameters for thorough self reflection and continuous self improvement. This information is also necessary for the institution to determine what action it should take to improve educational quality and institutional effectiveness in order to support student success (learning and achievement).

Data is categorical information that represents quantitative or qualitative attributes of variables or a set of variables. Data and data analysis should both be referenced in the Report narrative and included as source material in evidence. For data to be a useful and reliable source of information for reflection, planning, and decision-making, it should be accurate and tested for validity and significance, current and complete, consistently used, derived from reliable sources, and used longitudinally and in disaggregated form, as appropriate.

There are several sources of data, internal and external, from which an institution can draw information. Examples of sources of data are institutional demographic data at the local, district, system, state, or federal level; assessment data; survey results; and data reported to the state/local government. The data that an institution collects, analyzes, and reflects upon should be designed to answer questions related to issues that the institution needs or wants to explore.

Evidence can be selected from every source of information an institution uses to provide verification of a particular action or existing condition. Evidence can include policies, operational documents, minutes, reports, research and analysis, screen captures from websites, and other sources of information.

The Commission expects an institution to apply the principle of data-driven decision-making. Therefore, the data the institution uses in its regular planning and improvement activities should be used and reported in the Institutional Self Evaluation Report. In addition to this evidence, the Commission requires the institution to provide specific kinds of data and other sources of evidence to show compliance with the Commission's Standards, and with United States Department of Education (USDE) requirements. These data requirements are related to an institution's continued eligibility for Title IV financial aid funds and are presented in Section 5.4.

Reference and Access to Data and Evidence

The Institutional Self Evaluation Report should include reference to evidence and data that substantiate the statements made in the Report that the institution meets or exceeds the Commission's Standards. **All evidence and data included in the Institutional Self Evaluation Report must be cited and quoted or discussed with** the institution's analysis of the various Accreditation Standards and sub-**sections, where reference to the information is relevant.**

The institution will provide to the evaluation team members an electronic copy in Word of the Self Evaluation Report and electronic access to evidence (which can be in PDF format) in advance of the visit. Evidence should be fixed in time and not be changed or altered during or after the Evaluation Team visit. This enables the

Commission to base its decision on evidence that was available to the team at the time of the evaluation visit. During the visit, the team members should also have access to the evidence and data upon which the institutional analysis is based at the time of the institution's submission of the Self Evaluation Report. It is helpful for readers when the electronic copy of the Report contains hyperlinks to the relevant evidence. Links should be to evidence stored on an electronic memory device (flash drive/USB stick). Links to websites or other materials should be for supplemental information only and not content for the Report itself. Screen shots of relevant online material can be included in the electronic evidence files. The institution should ensure that all links are active and all evidence on flash drives is correct (see Appendix J).

The numbering of the evidentiary documents referenced in the Self Evaluation Report should align with the relevant Standards, together with a brief title, e.g., Strategic Plan. Documents which are relevant to more than one Standard should be allocated a number in the first chapter where they are relevant and referenced thereafter. In addition to the evidence and data the institution submits with the Self Evaluation Report, the evaluation team may also request additional evidence to be available during the site visit.

5.3 Content for the Institutional Self Evaluation Report

The Commission has developed a list of content that an Institutional Self Evaluation Report must include. The content requirements for a Self Evaluation Report are presented below.

Cover Sheet

The cover sheet should include the name and address of the institution, and a notation that the Institutional Self Evaluation Report is in support of an application for candidacy, initial accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation, and date submitted (see Appendix D).

Certification Page

The Institutional Self Evaluation Report should include a certification page which includes the college Chief Executive Officer's confirmation of the purpose of the Self Evaluation Report and that the Report accurately reflects the nature and substance of the institution. The certification page should attest to effective campus participation in the Report preparation, accuracy, and that the governing board has read the Report and was involved in the self evaluation process. The institution should include signatures of the district/system chief executive officer (if appropriate), governing board chair, and other campus constituent groups as determined by the institution (see Appendix B).

Table of Contents

The Institutional Self Evaluation Report should include a table of contents to facilitate the evaluation team's use of the Report.

Structure of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report

A. Introduction

The introduction should include a brief history of the institution, including the year of establishment. The introduction should highlight the major

developments that the institution has undergone since the last comprehensive review, including student enrollment data, summary data on the service area in terms of labor market, demographic and socio-economic data. The introduction should also include the names and locations, including addresses, of sites where 50% or more of a program, certificate or degree is available to students and any other off-campus sites or centers, including international sites. Institutions should clearly state in the Self Evaluation Report, as it does to the public, any specialized or programmatic accreditation held.

B. Presentation of Student Achievement Data and Institution-set Standards

Institutions are required to gather and analyze data on student achievement. Student achievement data provides the institution with basic information about achievement of its educational mission (see 5.4 i). ACCJC has developed a generic template for the presentation of disaggregated student achievement data that will assist institutions in implementing data-driven and informed evaluation and planning processes (Appendix G).

Institutions are also required to establish institution-set standards for success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission. Institutions are expected to set expectations for each of the areas of student achievement (See 5.4 vii), demonstrate that they gather data on these standards, analyze the results on student achievement, and make appropriate changes/improvements to increase student performance (Appendix H).

Evaluation teams will verify that institutions collect student achievement data and use it in the decision-making and integrated planning processes. Teams will also review the institution-set standards, determine their appropriateness and whether the institution is meeting its own expectations, and ensure that plans to improve student performance are developed and implemented whenever the standards are not met.

C. Organization of the Self Evaluation Process

The institution should explain, either in narrative or chart form, how it organized the self evaluation process, the individuals who were involved, and what their responsibilities were.

D. Organizational Information

The Institutional Self Evaluation Report should include organizational charts for the institution and for each major function, including names of individuals holding each position. In a corporate structure, the relationship to the accredited institution, including roles and responsibilities of both entities, must be included in this section. The institution should provide a list of its contracts with third-party providers and non-regionally accredited organizations.

Colleges in multi-college districts/systems must provide an account of whether primary responsibility for all or parts of specific functions that relate to the Standards are vested at the college or district level. The overview of the responsibilities of key functions in institutions in multi-college districts/systems must be presented in the form of a Functional Map. (Examples of Functional Maps can be found in Appendix E.) The institution should also provide an analysis of the effectiveness of this division of responsibilities.

E. Certification of Continued Institutional Compliance with Eligibility Requirements

The USDE, as part of the recognition process of accrediting commissions, requires that the accrediting commissions ensure their accredited institutions provide evidence they meet the commissions' eligibility requirements at any given time. The Institutional Self Evaluation Report must include the institution's analysis and evidentiary information demonstrating that the institution meets the Eligibility Requirements (see 3.1 above). The Eligibility Requirements as well as the list of documents needed to substantiate continued eligibility can be found in Appendix F.

F. Certification of Continued Institutional Compliance with Commission Policies

The Accreditation Standards reference specific Commission policies. The Institutional Self Evaluation Report must address how the institution is in compliance with these policies in conjunction with their assessment of how they meet the Standards. Some Commission policies are not integrated in the Accreditation Standards. The Self Evaluation Report must include the institution's analysis and evidentiary information demonstrating that the institution addresses policies specific to the college mission and activities. A complete list of the policies that institutions must specifically address can be found in Appendix A.

G. Structure of the Institutional Analysis

The main body of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report must identify and address each of the Accreditation Standards including the subsections. When preparing this part, it is useful for institutions to keep the principles underlying the Accreditation Standards in mind, i.e., the Commission expects institutions to:

- design and implement an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, re-evaluation, and improvement,
- analyze its programs and services while paying particular attention to program review data, student achievement data, and student learning outcomes data, and
- take action to improve based on the analysis supported by adequate sources of data and other evidence and make improvement plans when warranted.

The following elements should guide the structure of the analysis of each of the Standards.

Evidence of Meeting the Standard

The institution should describe and document the factual conditions at the college, including college practices and policies, which demonstrate how each Standard is being met.

Analysis and Evaluation

Based on the evidence provided, the institution should analyze and systematically evaluate its performance against each Accreditation Standard and its institutional mission. This analysis should result in actionable conclusions about institutional effectiveness, educational quality, and decisions for improvement. The basic questions to explore are whether or not, and to what degree, institutional evidence demonstrates that the institution meets each Accreditation Standard and how the institution has reached this conclusion. The Commission expects current and sustained compliance with Standards, focusing

on accomplishments and outcomes that have been achieved and not just structures or processes used.

H. Quality Focus Essay

Continuous quality improvement is a mark of institutional effectiveness. As an institution evaluates its programs and services in the continuous cycle of data analysis, planning, resource allocation, and evaluation, it examines its effectiveness in accomplishing its mission **in the context of student learning and student achievement**. During that examination, it identifies areas of needed change, development, institutionalization, and expansion. Within the accreditation focus on continuous quality improvement, the institution will identify two or three areas coming out of the institutional self evaluation on which the institution has decided to act (action projects), and which will have significance over a multi-year period. These will be described in a Quality Focus Essay (QFE). The Essay will have a 5,000 word limit and will discuss in detail the identified areas to be acted upon, including responsible parties, timeline, and anticipated outcomes, and the impact on academic quality and institutional effectiveness. The Essay will be related to the Accreditation Standards; institutions should select the "action projects" for the QFE from college data and analysis. The projects described in the QFE should be realistic and culminate in a set of observable and measurable outcomes. The Essay should be consistent in its factual basis and analysis with the other portions of the college's Self Evaluation Report. It will provide the institution with multi-year, long-term directions for improvement and demonstrate the institution's commitment to excellence. The areas identified in the Essay will become critical focal points for the institution's Midterm Report. Evaluation teams and the Commission will comment on the institution's QFE and may offer constructive advice or assistance.

I. Changes and Plans Arising out of the Self Evaluation Process

During the process of self evaluation, institutions commonly find areas where institutional effectiveness can be improved or changes are needed in order to meet the Commission's Standards. Both the changes made during the self evaluation process and plans for future action should be included in the institution's Self Evaluation Report. The plans should also be integrated into the institution's ongoing evaluation and planning processes for implementation and follow up. The institution should include changes it has made in response to its self evaluation, and of future actions planned. These changes and planned changes demonstrate the necessary linkages between the self evaluation process and institutional planning, decision making, resource allocation, and continuous improvement. The changes made and plans for future action should be placed in the Self Evaluation Report following the relevant grouping of standards (for example, I.A, I.B, I.C, II.A, etc.). The discussion should include any timelines for implementation and expected outcomes. It is suggested that the institution develop a chart summarizing changes made in response to its self evaluation process and future actions planned for ease of institutional tracking and monitoring.