
Early Planning, the Campus Environment, and the Self-Study Design: Two Experiences

American University (2004)

and

Mount St. Mary's University (2005)

Presenters

- Karen Froslid Jones

Director, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, American University

- Dr. David Rehm

Dean for Academic Affairs; Associate Professor of Philosophy, Mount St. Mary's University

Aims of this presentation

1. Identify commonalities and differences between our two experiences so as to allow you to reflect on issues that may arise;
 2. Prepare you for major decisions you will make as you undergo this process.
-

How will we proceed?

- A. Importance of how institution type, context, and goals shape self-study decisions
 - How we each organized our self-study.
 - Why we chose design type (comprehensive, etc.)

 - B. Keys to Success
-

MSM: Type of Institution

- Catholic liberal arts university
 - 1600 students total; 1300 in traditional undergraduate program
 - others in non-traditional undergraduate and graduate programs (Business; Education); we also have a Seminary
 - Expansion of continuing studies programs in recent years
-

MSM: Type of Institution (cont.)

- Strong Catholic and liberal arts cultures – core curriculum of 54 hours (out of 120 for graduation)
 - At undergraduate level, business, accounting, biology, and education are majors with largest numbers of graduates
 - Mostly residential for traditional undergraduates
-

MSM: Context

- The period of the self-study was one of dramatic change:
 - ❖ New president; change in all executive officers but one
 - ❖ Change in membership of Steering Committee
 - ❖ Designation change: “College and Seminary” to “University”
 - ❖ Significant changes in leadership style
-

MSM: Context (cont.)

- What remained constant?
 - ❖ Co-chairs and their strong and positive interaction
 - ❖ A number of significant Steering Committees and their chairs
 - ❖ Willingness of the Steering Committee and key leaders to make this a real learning experience
-

MSM: How organized?

- 1995 Middle States visit occurred during a very difficult period: deep concerns about governance and the financial health of the institution
 - Wanted to show that we are worthy of accreditation across the board
 - Therefore, chose comprehensive study
-

MSM: How organized? (cont.)

- Small community; limited resources
 - Therefore, rely upon existing committee structure (where possible) – e.g., governance (4), enrollment management (8), campus life (9), assessment (7, 14).
 - Where necessary, create new committees – e.g., mission (1), faculty (10).
 - 4 committees created; 6 standing committees utilized;
 - 3 committees addressed 2 standards each
-

MSM: Goals

From the first steering committee meeting:

- Examination of conscience for institution;
 - How to improve the institution;
 - Assess where we've been, where we are, and where we're going;
 - Set an agenda for the next 10 years.
-

About American University (AU)



- Private Doctoral institution located in Washington, DC
- Approximately 12,000 students
- Selective, residential undergraduate population
- Large percentage of graduate students
- Heavy emphasis on activism and experiential learning
 - “Ideas into Action, Action into Service”

AU: Context

- **Positives**
 - Leadership
 - Financial health
 - Rising academic excellence
 - New strategic plan
 - **Challenges**
 - New strategic plan
 - Bold initiatives
 - Rapid transformation
 - Tuition dependence
 - Concern about impact of 9/11
-

AU: The Planning Context

- AU underwent a series of comprehensive ‘campus conversations’ in Spring 2001.
 - In October 2001 president announced a new strategic plan known as the ‘15- Points’. It was designed to implement three integrated priorities:
 - The quality of academic inquiry
 - The quality of the student experience
 - The quality of extensive engagement with Washington and global affairs
-

AU: Goals

Re-accreditation

- To do a fair, accurate critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the institution.
 - To create consensus – a study that reflected the many viewpoints of the institution while at the same time bringing the American University community together by recognizing our shared vision.
 - To create a ‘living document’ that could be used well after the visiting team left to further advance American University’s mission.
 - Re accreditation
-

AU Structure: Steering Committee Membership

Individuals with:

- ability to commit the time and effort to the project
- expertise/talents in particular areas
- institutional memory

Individuals who are:

- respected on campus
- able to inform the institution's leadership/ faculty/or other constituencies on campus
- well connected to what is happening on campus
- open to different ideas/able to compromise/open to change
- goal-oriented

An overall committee that:

- reflects the diversity of the campus (school/college, position, etc)
 - includes known 'cheerleaders' as well as a few known skeptics
 - includes 'resource' members
 - has membership that is based on skills/respect/knowledge
 - facilitates the free flow of ideas/positions
-

AU Self-Study Organization

- Comprehensive study with an emphasis on “Engagement”
 - Steering Committee covered “Mission, Goals and Objectives”, Intro, and Conclusion
 - 7 task forces:
 - Institutional Resources
 - Leadership, Governance, and Administration
 - Faculty
 - Learning Resources and Campus Life
 - Undergraduate Education
 - Graduate and Professional Education
 - Engagement
-

AU: Why this structure?

Comprehensive

- The tremendous change that had occurred necessitated taking stock of where we were as a university.
- The integrated nature of our strategic plan necessitated a comprehensive approach.

Emphasis on Engagement

- The concept of engagement is a fundamental element of who we are as an institution.
 - It was one aspect of the institution that we touted the most but knew the least about.
 - We felt that this was one aspect of our institution that wasn't captured well by the 'Characteristics of Excellence'.
-

“These standards also affirm that the individual mission and goals of each institution remain the context within which these accreditation standards are applied during the self-study and evaluation.”

Keys to Success

- **Focus on usefulness of self-study to institution**
 - Focus on studying issues of importance to your institution
 - Address all of the standards, but in a way that reflects the concerns of your institution
 - Shape the self-study to fit your needs
 - Make it a 'living document' – one that can be used after the team leaves

 - **Communicate**
 - Communicate the purpose of self-study and re-accreditation process
 - Develop strategies to talk with campus to keep them updated on the process
 - Ask President, Provost, VPs and others to emphasize the importance of the process
 - Use technology to assist you, where possible
-

Keys to Success (cont.)

■ **Logistics**

- Get an early start: a 2½ year timetable allows sufficient time to do everything required
 - Get tech support
 - Expect glitches and the unexpected
 - Depth of community involvement as well as breadth is really important
 - Pick really good people to chair subcommittees
 - Know the standards
 - Reflect upon the relation between the standards and your institution – how your specific local context will tailor your response to specific standards
 - Think carefully about your criteria for who should be on visiting team
 - **Document a culture of ‘continuous improvement’**
 - Collect and describe assessment findings
 - Explain how findings were used
 - Show results
-

Contact Information

■ David Rehm

- rehm@msmary.edu

- <http://www.msmary.edu/studentsandstaff/committees/docs/ACF251A.pdf>

■ Karen Frosli Jones

- kfrosli@american.edu

- <http://www.american.edu/middlestates>
