

Self-Study: Much More Than a Report, or Is It?

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Far too often I hear colleagues state "We are being evaluated by CAATE next year, so I have to write a self-study this summer." I cringe at such a statement. Either the person speaking is using imprecise language or does not understand the power of a properly executed self-study in improving their curriculum. I fear it is the latter in far too many cases.

An accreditation self-study is a process, not a product. It is a process of introspection and analysis of an educational program, or institution; not something you write. The culmination of a self-study is to write a self-study report. It is a small point, I know, but important in conceptualization.

As the author of 9 self-study reports, and a contributor to 3 others, including an institution-wide accreditation self-study, I have experienced the difference. With some, I gathered all the necessary information, interpreted it, and wrote the report. As such, the self-study reflected only my thinking and impressions of the program. And the goal, although unstated, was only to satisfy the accreditation agency so that we could keep on doing what we were doing. Admittedly, there were a few ideas for improving the program, but these were minimal.

The most effective self-studies were conducted by a team of faculty, administration, and athletic staff who met together regularly to analyze all aspects of the program. In the end we had a report to satisfy the accrediting body, but we also had many specific ideas for improving the program. The following instructions from the CAATE website outline this concept more fully:

"The Comprehensive Review for Accreditation Process (Comprehensive Review), when utilized to its fullest potential, allows an educational program to critically examine, in structure and substance, its overall effectiveness relative to its mission and outcomes and to assist the institution in determining necessary programmatic modifications and improvements. The Comprehensive Review for Athletic Training Education programs involves two components – the Self-Study Process and the On-Site Review. Self-study by an educational program is the first step in the Comprehensive Review by an educational program."

"The Self-Study Process involves a critical analysis of all aspects of an educational program, using set criteria (Standards), and performed by the leadership of that program in cooperation with others who are stakeholders in the quality and effectiveness of

that Athletic Training Educational Program. These stakeholders usually include institutional administration, program and faculty, alumni, students, clinical staff and the employers or supervisors of program graduates. The Self-Study Report is the culmination of those critical reviews; it is an evidential document that summarizes the methods and findings of the self-study process. When done correctly, this report can identify programmatic strengths, weaknesses, areas for improvement, and potential opportunities to improve the effectiveness and quality of an educational program. *The term "report" is a misnomer, because when done correctly, the culmination of the Self-Study Process should provide the Program with the necessary data to assist it in making continual improvements in the education program.*"¹ (emphasis added)

Statements by two institutions regarding their institutional accreditation process emphasizes the concepts advocated herein. The cover sheet of Santa Rosa Junior College's self-study report contained the following statement: "We certify that there was broad participation by the campus community, and we believe the Self-study Report accurately reflects the nature and substance of this institution."² It was signed by the president's of the board of trustees and the junior college district, as well as the vice-president of academic affairs and chair of the accreditation steering committee. The second was from the final report by Michigan Technological Institute regarding their accreditation, that the institution would "submit reports over the next few years on developing a regular review of academic programs."³

Lets resolve to make every self-study a true study of the strengths and weaknesses of the program, with many stake-holders involved and with a goal to improve the education of our students.

References

1. Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education. Overview of the Accreditation Process. Available online from <http://www.caate.net/>. [click on "Report Forms", "Self-Study Documents". "Accreditation Overview"], accessed 28 June 2008
2. Santa Rosa Junior College. Institutional Self-Study in Support of Reaffirmation of Accreditation. Online at <http://www.santarosa.edu/accreditation/>. accessed June 29, 2008.
3. Michigan Technological University. NCA Accreditation Self-Study. Online at <http://www.admin.mtu.edu/admin/nca/>, accessed June 29, 2008.