

7 self-study pro tips from peer reviewers

Higher education professionals lose a lot of sleep over preparing an accreditation self study. It's a daunting project, but these pro tips from peer reviewers will help you best represent your institution's achievements to your accreditor.



1 Start smart - and early

- 📅 Begin assembling evidence 2-3 years before your next reaffirmation.
- 🔗 Be aware of changes to standards and guidance from the accreditor after you start.
- 🗣️ Have a peer reviewer on campus – their insights invaluable as you prepare your self study.



2 Rally key (and unexpected) resources



- 📅 Engage a PMP-certified project planner. They're trained to keep long, complex projects on track.
- 📅 Assign a logistics coordinator to set committee schedules, book work space, and set deadlines so you meet critical milestones.
- 📄 Establish an organized document repository to capture the evidence you intend to use to support each part of the narrative.

3 Base your argument on your data

- Let the evidence you have drive your approach to the narrative.
- Reports from campus systems are strong evidence, and show your dedicated, ongoing effort to continuously improve.
- Connect the dots for peer reviewers by clearly showing your evidence, your growth, and how you got from A to B.

“When you're annually plugging your way through entering data, you're essentially creating a repository to pull that information from over time. Pull assessment reports, interlink those into the argument to show continuous improvement and that every program was making an annual report. If you're using a faculty activity reporting system, log faculty's research and service as well as their teaching assignments so you can pull out of that to authenticate qualifications.”

Summer DeProw
Interim Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Director of Assessment, Arkansas State University

4 Speak to the standard, and support it with evidence

- 📄 Address each section or phrase of the standard.
- 🎯 Keep your narrative precise to the topic of each standard.
- ⊖ Exclude “additional” information that belongs with a different standard to avoid introducing discrepancies.



Tell your (whole) story

“Don't hide anything, even if it seems problematic. Everyone has Google. Whatever you hide is just something the evaluators will find, and you'll have to respond to later.”

Jacob Ashby
Assistant Dean of Assessment and Articulation
Frederick Community College



5 Share your unique story, and speak with one voice

“I tell my doctoral students to write their dissertations as if the reader knows nothing about their topic. For the institution, that means sharing your history, your culture – that needs to be quite evident in the self-study document. Be sure to tell your story under every single component of that standard in a way that I know who you are by your narrative. Many of your recommendations will stem from the reviewers just not having enough information about who you are as an institution.”

Michele Atkins,
Assistant Provost for Accreditation & Research
Union University

- Reflect your unique mission and culture in every standard.
- Engage an editor to mesh the narratives for each standard and give a cohesive voice to your self study.

6 Apply polish – and validate your links



- ★ Polish the final narrative so the writing reflects well on your institution's work.
- ✔ Check the link or attachment for each piece of evidence

“Something that we look for in a self study is how easy it is to move through the links. Providing evidence means that it really has to be accessible, the link has to work or the PDF has to be there.”

Sharon Enzor,
Provost & Vice President
Blue Mountain College

7 Trust the peer review process

- 🔍 Use your self study as an opportunity to demonstrate that your institution is a good steward of your mission and resources.
- 🚀 Trust the peer review process rather than fearing it. Peer reviewers want you to succeed!



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“The team from a regional accreditor is checking to see that you're making good on your promises. They just want to see that you actually do what you say you do. It's an assurance. It's a question of a rising tide raising all ships. Accreditation is in many ways that rising tide.”

Cheryl Torsney
Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs
Middle Tennessee State University

Many thanks to these peer reviewers for sharing their insights:

- Kathy Adair**, Director of Development and Assessment, Bay Mills Community College
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