

# Michigan State University Self-Study

## *Practical Lessons Learned*

### **Combining the Special Emphasis and Assurance Self-Study**

- Constituents in the area of special emphasis were eager to be involved in the self-study. Consider how to involve other university constituents who may not feel included in the special emphasis.
- Have some committee members participate on both the special emphasis and assurance self-study committees to insure effective communication between the two groups.
- We had only two steering committees: one for the special emphasis self-study and one for the assurance self-study. This proved less burdensome and more effective than a separate committee for each criterion.
- Design a good communication process to keep everyone involved. Update the community on a monthly basis (at least).
- As much as possible, involve the writers for the assurance self-study in writing and revising for the special emphasis self-study to insure a cohesive final document.

Consider the following:

- How will you integrate the two self-studies? Will they be two separate documents? Will the special emphasis be its own chapter in the comprehensive self-study document? Or, will you weave the special emphasis throughout the response to the criteria for accreditation?
- To what extent does the purpose of the special emphasis self-study differ from the purpose of the assurance self-study? How does this difference effect the writing?
- What do you want to receive from the consultant evaluators in response to the special emphasis self-study?

### **Collecting and Organizing Data**

- Begin thinking about how you will organize data early in the process as it will take time to construct a database (we began collecting and organizing data for the assurance self-study 8 months before writing). Consider the following:
  - Who will need to access the data?
  - What purposes will the data serve?
  - What is the most efficient design to meet the needs of users?
  - Will the database be available to the public? If so, are there presentation and access considerations that need to be built into the design?
- Ask others to analyze and summarize data submissions (e.g. are there any trends in response to the criteria for engagement?).

### **Writing, Revising, and Publishing the Report**

- Allow a lot of time (it took our specialist 65 hours) for formatting the final document – reserve a specialist’s time in advance.
- Similarly, reserve time well in advance for technology staff to create a cd version
- Build in time for your self-study document to be printed (you’ll need a lot of copies, we printed 180).
- Build in room in your budget for unexpected costs and time for unexpected delays.
- Publicize opportunities for campus review of the draft document.
- Establish a process for entering revisions so that there is only one, complete self-study document.

### **Preparing for and During the Site Visit**

- Drivers should be familiar with the self-study and/or the University (e.g. one of ours was a Development Officer adept at handling difficult questions); they will also have to break-up meetings that are running over their scheduled time.
- Having separate people responsible for logistics and writing in the last six months worked well for us.
- If you will be helping Consultant/Evaluators with technology, budget a lot of time to configure their laptops to use your network, etc. (this is always more difficult than it would appear).
- Provide office supplies in the Resource Room and/or work room in addition to snacks and beverages.
- Send frequent reminders to campus representatives scheduled to meet with the Consultant Evaluators.
- Be flexible with the schedule, it will change.
- Collect Resource Room documents (or at least a list) as you are writing the self-study.
- Work with the Higher Learning Commission to get an experienced Consultant Evaluator Chair.
- Establish a central “hotline” for your own staff to call during the site visit and report on their meetings with evaluators, problems/concerns, etc.