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To Chronicle And Celebrate

Loyola University Chicago
North Central Association
Reaccreditation Process

Self-Study: 2003-2004
Site Visit: April 11-13, 2005



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Introduction

“In the United States, accreditation is voluntarily sought by institutions and is conferred by non-governmental bodies—membership organizations that accredit and thereby grant membership to educational institutions.” These words, from the North Central Association’s Website, present the essence of accreditation in the United States. In contrast to the practice in some other countries where government provides accreditation, in the U.S. it is provided through a network of peer professional groups.

In the United States, six peer professional groups are distributed geographically. In our area, the group is the North Central Association (NCA). Loyola has been an accredited member of NCA since 1921. Most recently, our accreditation was renewed in 1995; it will be reviewed in Spring 2005.

NCA does not accredit individual programs. Rather, it accredits the institution as a whole, verifying that it has the wherewithal to offer whatever programs it proposes. So, this accreditation does not look only at our academic programming, but also at the other aspects of university life—financial, administrative and interpersonal. And, since universities differ so much among themselves, NCA does not impose a single vision of what should occur. Rather, it measures the individual university against general criteria that apply to higher education as a whole.

In our case, the specific criteria being used will present their own issues. NCA has just completed a multi-year process of revising its criteria (see pages 5–6). The new criteria have been announced, but they have never yet been used. So it is impossible to know exactly how this will work.

But one thing is clear: NCA, in concert with the other regional agencies, has decisively changed the focus of the criteria. In the past, accreditation criteria focused on resources: Do you have what you need to do your job? Money? Buildings? Books? Faculty? The new criteria are much more interested in processes: Is your operation characterized by competence, creativity, responsiveness, etc. As NCA literature states: Are you future-oriented, learning-focused, connected and distinctive?

The question used to be: *Are you good?* Now the question is: *Are you getting better?* Answering this question will be our goal in the next two years.

Self-Study Plan

The image that will guide Loyola's process of preparing for the reaccreditation site visit is a **conversation**. The partners in the conversation are the Reaccreditation Steering Committee and the wider university community. And the conversation will advance not through a single interaction, but rather through repeated interactions that are, in fact, responses to what has gone before.

Each step in the conversation involves dialogue between those knowledgeable about activities across the university—especially administrative leaders but also the whole community of faculty, staff and students—and the Steering Committee responsible for gathering the information and weaving the report. We envision three—and perhaps even four—repetitions of this conversation, each time at a higher level of detail, sophistication and comprehensiveness.

This “conversation” model has been chosen because it fits this moment at Loyola. Some universities use the self-study process to mount new initiatives; and toward that end, they create many committees involving even more people. At Loyola, however, we are at a point when many initiatives are already under way: mission statement review; strategic planning; core curriculum revision; academic assessment assistance; restructuring and relocation in advancement, finance and information services; increasingly active university policy committees; and many others.

So, our Self-Study Plan does not envision activities that would, in fact, be duplications. Rather our role is simply to observe, to document and, by doing this, to contribute.

This process of conversation will be complemented by document collection and publication. Our “Resource Room” will be largely electronic, with online access to all relevant documentation.

We envision completing this process in approximately a year, providing us a widely supported report and a comprehensive collection of documents by late 2004. The remaining months will be devoted to updating our report with new information and ensuring a flawless site visit in April 2005.

Leadership Input Plan

This Input Plan has three goals. Obviously, writing our Self-Study Report requires full knowledge of what Loyola does. So, our first goal is **comprehensive information**.

But pursuing this goal is a two-pronged task. The Steering Committee has spent this summer assembling all the information it can. But doing this has made clear that many things are known only—or at least better—by the leaders in the various sectors of the university. This Leadership Input Plan is designed to make use of that knowledge.

At the same time, over a year remains until our accreditation site visit. So, this is a time of new initiatives, as well. But to do that, we all need to consider possible intersections between various areas of the university and the five criteria as quickly as possible. Our second goal is **immediate reflection**.

But both of these goals must be achieved in an environment already occupied with important and exciting work. Anything that distracts from that work, blocks its momentum or inappropriately complicates it, is not helpful. So, our third goal is **simplicity and flexibility**. To achieve these three goals, we make these requests:

INPUT QUESTIONS. The Steering Committee wants to gather from across the university answers to two questions:

- 1) What is happening in your part of the university that demonstrates fulfillment of the NCA criteria of evaluation?
- 2) What further activities might occur this year in your part of the university that would provide further demonstration of that fulfillment?

INPUT PROCESS. This input may be provided to the Steering Committee in two different ways:

- 1) A simple Word template is available at www.luc.edu/nca. An individual or small group can easily complete the template, thereby providing the information.
- 2) A member of the Steering Committee will, if invited, participate in a conversation with an individual or small group. The input can be collected through this interview.

INPUT SUPPORT. This booklet is intended as an element of support for the input process. In addition, members of the Steering Committee will happily meet with individuals and groups to assist. A brief visual presentation is available, and even a few minutes of conversation can help greatly.

NCA Criteria of Evaluation

(<http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/restructuring/newcriteria/NewCriteria.pdf>)

1. *Mission and Integrity*

The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

- The organization's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization's commitments.
- In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.
- Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.
- The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.
- The organization upholds and protects its integrity.

2. *Preparing for the Future*

The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

- The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.
- The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
- The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.
- All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

3. *Student Learning and Effective Teaching*

The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

- The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.
- The organization values and supports effective teaching.
- The organization creates effective learning environments.
- The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

4. *Acquisition, Discovery and Application of Knowledge*

The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

- The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.
- The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.
- The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.
- The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.

5. *Engagement and Service*

As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

- The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.
- The organization has the capacity and commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.
- The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.
- Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.

Report Outline

The following is a proposed outline for the Self-Study Report we intend to prepare. Through the successive steps of data collection, writing and review, the outline will surely evolve. Still, even a preliminary outline can guide our common efforts over the coming months.

Chapter One

Introduction and Historical Setting

Chapter Two

Loyola's Mission and Its Embodiment

Chapter Three

Strategic Planning at Loyola: Past and Present

Chapter Four

Effective Learning at Loyola: Assessment and Development

Chapter Five

Loyola as a Knowledge Community

Chapter Six

Loyola and Its Many Constituencies

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

Appendix One

Printed Documentation

Appendix Two

Table of Contents for Online Documentation

Self-Study Schedule

August 15, 2003

Initiate Collaborative Process

October 1, 2003

Deadline for Providing Leadership Input

October 15, 2003

First Draft of Discussion of Criteria 1 & 2

November 15, 2003

First Draft of Discussion of Criteria 3 & 4

December 15, 2003

First Draft of Discussion of Criterion 5

January 1 - March 1, 2004

Facilitated Discussion of First Draft

May 1, 2004

Second Draft (now including Introductory Chapters)

May 1 - July 1, 2004

Widespread Review Process

August 1, 2004

Third Draft

August 1 - October 1, 2004

Final University-wide Review

November 1, 2004

Publication of Final Draft

January 1 - April 1, 2005

Final Site Visit Preparations

Accreditation Site Visit

The self-study process outlined here and the preparation of a written report will be followed by a visit to Loyola by a team of consultant evaluators. Loyola's site visit will take place April 11-13, 2005.

Appointed by The Higher Learning Commission of NCA in consultation with Loyola, the team will be comprised of administrators and faculty from other colleges and universities who are members of NCA. It may include as many as 10 to 12 people. We can expect that individual members of the team will visit each of Loyola's Chicago-area campuses, including the Medical Center Campus.

Team members will want to have conversations with representative members from all segments of the Loyola community: administrators, staff, faculty and students. Some of these conversations will occur in small group settings or individual meetings. Others will be larger, open forum events at which all are welcome.

In the case of faculty, staff and students, the availability of a typical cross-section of each population will be sufficient to meet the needs of the consultant evaluators. But in the case of university leaders, the availability of all will be essential. This means that vice presidents, deans, department chairs, directors and managers should expect to be directly involved in the site visit. The same can be said of members of UPCs, faculty, staff, student councils and the like.

It is not too early to enter these dates in your calendar and protect them. April 11-13, 2005, is a time when all university leaders should be present and available.

At the end of their visit, the team members will summarize their findings in a preliminary report, which will include their recommendation regarding reaccreditation. This preliminary report will be presented in an exit interview with the President.

Later, the consultant evaluators will craft a final team report, which is part of the official evaluation process. The final report is submitted to The Higher Learning Commission of the NCA. It is the Commission which makes the final determination regarding reaccreditation.

Self-Study Participants

Coordinator

Timothy E. O'Connell

Administrator

Marian Claffey

Steering Committee

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Darice Birge

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Vice Presidents, Deans, Department Chairs & Directors

Faculty, Staff & Students