

Some Considerations for PEAQ Self-Studies

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As Commission staff liaisons, we have observed that institutional self-studies have often overlooked or have not fully addressed certain points in the Criteria. The purpose of this document is, without attempting to be encyclopedic, to highlight some common points of difficulty and to suggest (not dictate) ways to meet the expectations. Please keep in mind that this discussion focuses on addressing the Criteria but does not assume that self-studies must be organized in criterion order. Also, the inclusion here of certain points for a given core component does not mean that other points are less vital - rather that these points have been more often overlooked or not fully addressed.

Criterion One

Core Component 1d

Frequently organizations describe their governance and administrative structures with great care. While such description is certainly relevant, it does not actually demonstrate that such structures promote effective leadership or support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission. An actual demonstration might include the results of a survey or of focus groups involving faculty. Or there might be a study of issues considered within governance/administrative structures to see how many or what proportion of those issues were successfully dealt with.

Core Component 1e

To show that an organization upholds and protects its integrity takes more than an account of the methods by which the organization checks its publications for accuracy and completeness and of the processes the organization employs for handling complaints, though it would be important to know about both the methods for insuring accuracy/completeness and the processes for complaints. How do campus stakeholders (faculty, staff, students) actually perceive the organization's publications and the fairness of treatment they receive?

Criterion Two

Core Component 2b

Organizations often do not adequately address all of the key areas of finances, staffing, and facilities. For finances, the organization sometimes covers only the immediate past and provides no financial or enrollment projections for the future. Or the self-study will focus on one area of finances (such as fund-raising) without a broader analysis of revenue and expenditures that includes an understanding of their constituent factors. For staffing, sometimes the organization will give a demographic breakdown of faculty and show the change over time, but there will be no analysis of faculty staffing in relation to enrollment. And if there is an analysis of faculty staffing in relation to enrollment, it may be so general as to mask differential changes in demand for broad areas of instruction. For facilities, the coverage is frequently descriptive, with neither a sense of whether users feel facilities are adequate nor a sense of plans for changes in facilities.

Core Component 2d

In order to demonstrate that all levels of planning align for the fulfillment of the mission, it is vital to show that the budgeting process takes specific account of the institution's strategic plan. While self-studies usually say that is the case, many self-studies fail to identify where and how in the budgeting process the strategic plan is actually considered and incorporated. And even if consideration and incorporation of the plan in the budget is specified, there are often no actual examples of the funding of key planning initiatives other than those involved with new buildings or renovation.

Criterion Three

Core Component 3a

Nearly all organizations understand that much of the discussion of assessment belongs with this core component. However, some organizations fail to address the expectation that all programs (including general education) have measurable and appropriate objectives. While it is generally not feasible to put all such objectives in the self-study directly, there need to be both some representative examples in the self-study and an indication of where the others can be found either in the resource room or in an appendix. A particular issue with the appropriateness (for degree level) of the objectives is how the organization determined that they are appropriate - advisory group, professional standards, etc. There is also sometimes a failure to show that the instruments being used for assessment actually measure progress against the stated objectives. A separate issue arises for institutions with off-campus degree programs or online delivery. How well does the institution monitor whether the same expectations for student learning is in place at different locations, and does the institution maintain sufficiently disaggregated data to tell whether the same level of learning is occurring?

Core Component 3b

Some institutions get so involved in discussing faculty professional development and encouragement for excellence in teaching (which are both properly included here) that they miss talking about faculty credentials. Some analysis over time is generally useful as is some breakdown among major units and/or by undergraduate and graduate faculty (where applicable). Another frequently important consideration is the balance between full- and part-time faculty and their respective credentials.

Core Component 3c

This is the key core component for discussion of student success in retention and persistence, though such discussion often lacks support in quantitative data. Some indication of whether such indicators are improving over time is generally important as is some sense of whether they are at acceptable levels. Some institutions also fail to report on student satisfaction in key support areas such as advising.

Criterion Four

Core Component 4a

While most organizations recognize the importance of faculty development, many do not deal adequately with staff development. Some items to look at beyond a description of the development programs and policies (e.g., tuition discounts), are the level of

funding for staff development and the proportion of full-time staff who have participated in formal development activities during some recent period of time. It may also be useful to know how the staff views their development opportunities.

Core Component 4b

For organizations with undergraduate programs, this is the key core component in which to report actual results (as opposed to objectives and instruments, which are in Core Component 3a) for general education outcomes and to analyze those results. Many self-studies are thin in this area, consigning such results and analyses (if they exist) to the resource room, where they may be buried in lengthy documents and hard to find. Out of concerns over length and readability of the self-study, most such results and analyses would not go in the narrative directly, but there should be some representative examples, along with a *clear* indication of where the remaining ones can be found. Most self-studies do recognize the need to exhibit a feedback loop, so examples of interventions taken in response to assessment results are generally (and properly) included. However, the analyses underlying those interventions are often absent, leaving the team uncertain as to the connection with assessment.

Core Component 4c

This core component, in contrast to the previous core component, is focused on major fields. However, the same observations above apply here as well. In addition, organizations often fail to provide quantitative data and analyses for (as relevant) job placement or placement in more advanced educational programs. Analysis of performance in major field learning and placement should distinguish the level of achievement for different sites and online delivery, where appropriate.

Criterion Five

Core Component 5a

Self-studies often do not distinguish very well between this core component and Core Component 5b. While the response to 5b properly describes the organization's service activities and the resources put into them, this core component should include the organization's *analysis* of its capacity to serve the needs and expectations. That analysis is not provided by a list of activities and resources. What is needed are things like reports on advisory groups and other mechanisms to gather information about expectations and needed services and about processes that take such information and get it into the planning process.

Core Component 5d

The problem with this core component is how to demonstrate that the organization's services are actually valued. In some cases, there may be actual user evaluations, some of which could be summarized and reported in the narrative. In other cases, it may be impractical to get evaluations (say, at events open to the public), but the level of attendance/participation may be quantifiable. Another avenue in special circumstances may involve individual letters from persons who are in a position to represent a certain class of users. For example, a school district superintendent might write a letter about the value of in-service activities provided by the organization to teachers in the district.

