

Chapter 2

Process of the Self Study

Phoenix College delivers teaching and learning experiences that inspire the lifelong pursuit of educational, professional, and personal goals for our diverse urban community. To continue to fulfill its mission, Phoenix College continuously monitors programs, processes and outcomes in order to ensure quality. As part of the dedication to continuous improvement of teaching and learning, Phoenix College participates in the voluntary accreditation process offered through the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association (NCA) whose mission is, "Serving the common good by assuring and advancing the quality of higher learning."

The self-study process at Phoenix College used the information provided in *The HLC Handbook of Accreditation* to guide the self study. Particular attention was paid to the five criteria for accreditation, the core components of these criteria, and the examples of evidence that support the criteria. The cross-cutting themes of being future-oriented, learning focused, connected, and distinctive are not discussed in separate sections; however, recognizing their importance to the self study, the themes are highlighted throughout the report.

Good preparations are critical to a successful self-study process and report. Phoenix College faculty and staff recognize that the self-study process must fit with the vision, mission, and goals of the institution. In addition, the report must reflect the true character of the self-study process as well as the findings of that process. Therefore, this chapter will describe the following: mission and goals of the self study, the committee structure, conducting the self study, writing the report, the allocation of resources to the project, and the methods of communication with the college constituencies.

Self-Study Mission and Goals

The self-study Steering Committee developed the mission and goals for the Phoenix College self study and the Phoenix College Leadership Council (PCLC) approved them. These were designed to provide guidance for the process of the self study as well as a framework within which the work of the self study could be organized.

Mission

In support of its primary purpose, student learning, Phoenix College will use this self study to prepare for continuing accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, to evaluate strengths and opportunities for improvement in accordance with the college mission statement, and to use as a guiding document for continuing educational and institutional improvement.

Goals

The following four specific goals for the self study were developed including:

Accreditation

- Achieve a ten-year accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.
- Engage all college constituencies in the self study and publicize the results.

Evaluation

- Demonstrate responses to concerns from the last self study.
- Provide evidence that practices and processes are aligned with the college vision, mission, and goals.

Improvement

- Evaluate the viability of college practices and processes.
- Utilize outcomes of the self study as a guide to improvement.

Leadership

- Provide learning opportunities for faculty leaders in preparation for accreditation efforts beyond 2006.

Committee Structure and Membership

Early in the process, the college identified committees working on the self study. Committee structure and membership selection were guided by the following:

- Committees consisted of individuals with experience in the particular area to be studied
- Committees were representative of the diversity at Phoenix College, including gender, ethnicity, and employee group membership
- Committee composition and structure were based on input from individuals with prior self-study and leadership experience

In March of 2003, the President and Dean of Instruction (now Vice President for Academic Affairs) appointed the committee co-chairs and steering committee members. The co-chairs

were a faculty member and the Dean of Instruction. In addition to the steering committee, the self-study team consisted of an Executive Committee, five Criterion Committees, a Criterion Chair Committee, and a Writers' Group. One major change in July of 2004 was the retirement of the Dean of Instruction, a self-study co-chair. She was replaced by another faculty member. The following table outlines the membership and the role of each of these committees.

Committee	Membership	Role
Executive Committee	President; VP for Academic Affairs; Self-Study Co-chairs	Clarifies direction and priorities of the self-study process and supports the Criterion Committees. Makes recommendations to the Steering Committee.
Steering Committee	President; Executive Assistant to President; Self-Study Co-Chairs; VPs for Academic, Administrative, and Student Affairs; Associate Dean of Community Education; Director of Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness; Director of Institutional Advancement; Criterion Chairs; Lead Writer; Editor	Gives overall direction and support to the self-study process. Makes decisions regarding recommendations received from the self-study Executive and Criterion Chair Committees.
Criterion Chair Committee	Self-Study Co-Chairs; Criterion Chairs; Lead Writer; Editor; Director of Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness	Identifies, coordinates, and requests information/data for collection; determines guidelines and processes for collecting and evaluating data; identifies interrelationship of criteria; determines criterion chapter content for writers based on Commission guidelines
Criterion Committees	Criterion Chairs; Writers; Committee Members	Interprets components for the criterion; identifies information/data requirements; determines guidelines for assessing best practices; determines best practices; assists the chair in determining contents for chapter.
Writers' Group	Lead Writer; Editor; Writers for each criterion	Suggests draft outline of report based on Commission guidelines and Criterion Chair input; participates in Criterion Committee meetings and writes findings as directed by Criterion Chair; submits drafts for review; edits final copy.

Table 2-1: Self-Study Committee Structure and Membership

Phoenix College widely supported the self-study process with more than eighty individuals serving on the self-study committees. In addition, other college committees supported the self-study committees, including the Phoenix College Leadership Council, Strategic Planning,

Budget Review, Assessment, and Curriculum Committees. One feature unique to Phoenix College was the inclusion of a group of writers, one assigned to each criterion, from the outset of the process. This facilitated the overall writing of the report.

Conducting the Self Study

In order to conduct an efficient and effective study, it was necessary to ensure that the process was orderly and efficient with a framework to guide the activities, that the leaders of the committees were cognizant of their roles, that the college community in general was educated to the purposes and process of the self study, and that there were sufficient resources allocated to the project.



A copy of the self-study timeline is included in Appendix B.

A detailed self-study timeline was created to provide guidance and structure for the process and was shared with all self-study participants and the campus community. The timeline outlined the major activities of the study, including meetings, deadlines, and scheduled presentations. The executive committee reviewed the timeline frequently. Progress on the timeline was reviewed at campus and community meetings.

Early in the process, the leaders of the self study took advantage of the opportunities provided at the annual HLC meetings which offered educational opportunities, guidance, and information regarding the self study. In April 2003 and 2004, 12 members of the self-study team attended and 16 team members attended in 2005.

The Criterion Chair Committee organized the collection of information by the individual Criterion Committees. This process eliminated duplication of efforts and enhanced discussion of the interrelatedness of the criteria. As part of the continuous improvement process, the college already has a process of systematic reporting in areas such as planning, institutional effectiveness, assessment, budgeting, and general institutional data reports, so these were used as part of the foundation of the study. Further discussions within the criterion committees produced requests for additional data to document fulfillment of the criteria. Surveys, syntheses of information from various sources, and interviews with college administrators, department chairs, community members, and students were used to fulfill these requests for data.

In June 2004, Phoenix College held the first of three retreats. This working retreat enabled the criterion committee chairs to work together to review the initial phase of their research efforts. During the retreat the self-study co-chairs facilitated discussions regarding the relationships among the college mission and goals and the five criteria, the nature of description and evaluation in the final report, and the relationship of the cross-cutting themes to the criteria. Finally, the criterion chairs discussed their needs for information and the best way of collecting that information without inundating the campus with surveys. A plan for a common faculty practices survey was developed.

The second retreat was held in January 2005, and was attended by the criterion chairs, the writers, and the Executive Committee. Since Dr. Anna Solley had just been appointed Acting President at Phoenix College, she was formally introduced to the criterion chairs and to the work that had been done. This gave her the opportunity to reassure the criterion chairs and to provide her leadership vision of the project. In addition, results of the faculty practices survey, administered in Fall 2004, were presented and discussed, the job of writing the chapters was reviewed, and writing deadlines were established.

A third retreat was held in September 2005, and every person who was involved with the self study was invited to attend. Over 50 people participated. The retreat had two purposes. Since the majority of the chapters had been drafted, the five criterion groups reviewed their chapter drafts. They also collaborated in developing strengths and opportunities for each of their criteria. Colleagues from two Maricopa colleges, Mesa Community College and Paradise Valley Community College, who had recently gone through the accreditation process, gave information and guidance about our next steps: how to prepare for the visit, what to expect when the team arrives, how to organize the resource room and other logistics.

Writing the Report

A clear and accurate report of the self-study process allows the college, the community, and the visiting team to understand how Phoenix College meets the criteria for continued accreditation. From the beginning of the process, a writer was embedded in each of the criterion committees. This enabled the chair to focus on collection and analysis of evidence, and it also resulted in initial drafts that closely mirrored the committees' workings. Upon receipt of the initial drafts, the executive team, the lead writer, the editor, and the Director of Planning, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness met and reviewed each chapter for content, flow, completeness, and organization. After they added information and input from criterion committees, the document was placed on the college website for public review. Final revisions and editing followed. Then, self-study co-chairs working with a campus graphic designer produced a final product that presented the self-study information in a way that was easy to follow and reflected the culture of the college.

Resources Allocated to the Self Study

From the start, the self study has been a priority at Phoenix College. The college allocated financial and human resources to ensure a thorough and well-documented process. Faculty led the self-study committees. The self-study co-chairs, criterion chairs, and writers were given reassigned time to enable them to focus on the self study. The self-study co-chairs, the criterion chairs, some criterion writers, and the lead writer and editor were paid summer stipends to continue working on the self study. The college assigned a librarian to assist in the preparation of the resource room, online documents, and the electronic resource library. The college also hired a full-time secretary for the self study and assigned a college graphic and web designer to the preparation of the report and to assist with the electronic resources.

The designation of a room on campus as a meeting room was invaluable for the self study. Committees met there, pertinent documents were stored there, and the co-chairs functioned from a central site. All materials were in one location, which avoided duplication of efforts and fostered a closer collaboration among the criterion chairs.

The college allocated financial support for the self study in a responsible and effective manner. Monies were available to fund retreats, awareness events for the campus, professional production of the report, and attendance at conferences and workshops for key personnel.

Methods of Communication with the College Constituencies

Throughout the self-study process, communication with various college constituencies has been a priority. One of the main vehicles for communication was *PCPerspective*, the campus

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HLC newsletter. Seven newsletters were produced and distributed between May 2004 and February 2006. Several editions of the *Bear Essentials*, the President's campus newsletter, also discussed the self study. From early in the self-study process, the Phoenix College website has included a section with self-study information and progress.

The campus and community were updated regularly on the findings and progress of the self study. On campus, the self-study coordinators attended all meetings of the Phoenix College Leadership Council and the Strategic Planning Committee where the self study was a regular item on these committees' agendas. At the beginning of each semester, at regular all-employee meetings and on the college's Days of Learning, the self-study co-chairs and others presented updates.

The college held three all-campus awareness events. The first, an ice-cream social held in April 2004, introduced the campus community to the criteria, the self-study teams, and the timelines. The second, an open house with a Halloween theme held in October 2004, updated the progress of the criterion committees and solicited input from the campus on various aspects of the report, including cross-cutting themes. The third event, held in April 2005, was a series of round-table discussions concerning the mission and vision statements of the college.

Phoenix College also held several discussion sessions to update the campus on the progress of the self study and to solicit input for the criterion committees. Student focus groups were held to collect student input. Finally, a mock visit by consultant evaluators who are faculty and staff at other Maricopa Colleges was held in early in Spring 2006. These evaluators visited Phoenix College and facilitated a mock site visit to prepare the campus with what to expect when our visiting team arrives in April 2006. Community members were kept abreast of the self-study findings at meetings of the President's Advisory Council, the Education and Partnership Commission, Alumni Board meetings, and through the newsletters that were mailed to community members.

The first drafts of the self-study report were posted on the Phoenix College website, and the college and external communities were invited to review and give input about the report's contents. This enabled a wide distribution of the report and facilitated feedback to the college self-study team. Care was taken to enable the readers to submit comments in a convenient manner through a link on the website.