



WATC

TECHNICAL COLLEGE

CHAPTER 2

SELF STUDY PROCESS



SELF-STUDY
2014



Chapter 2...

Self-Study Process


Wichita Area Technical College (WATC) conducted this self-study to prepare for its reaccreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (HLC-NCA). While WATC continuously monitors its programs, processes, and outcomes to ensure quality, this self-study process allowed the college to thoroughly examine itself in relation to the new Criteria for Accreditation by using the five criteria and core components to evaluate and advance quality processes to guide the self-study. The importance of this self-study in attaining reaccreditation was supported by President Tony Kinkel and the Sedgwick County Technical Education and Training Authority, governing board for WATC (WATC Board). This chapter discusses the mission and goals of the self-study, the committee structure, conducting the self-study, writing the self-study, allocation of resources to support the self-study, and the methods of communicating with the college community.

Self-Study Mission and Goals

The self-study used the college's mission and defined goals to provide guidance and quality assurance of the self-study process to help identify strengths and opportunities. In support of its primary mission of preparing students for employment and lifelong learning, WATC will use this self-study process to become reaccredited by HLC-NCA, to evaluate strengths and opportunities for improvement in accordance with the college's mission, and as a guiding document for continuing educational and institutional improvement.

Self-Study Committee Structure


Sheree Utash, Vice President, Academic Affairs, provided leadership for the self-study process and serves as the self-study coordinator with three co-chairs. The HLC-NCA Steering Committee is comprised of the self-study coordinator, steering committee co-chairs, and the five criterion subcommittee co-chairs. The primary charge of the steering committee was to guide the self-study process and oversee the development of the self-study document. Table 2.1, HLC-NCA Self-Study Committees and Co-Chairs, depicts the accreditation committees and their chairs, [see Appendix L](#), HLC-NCA Self-Study Committees.

 [HLC Criterion Teams - 2012-2014](#)



Committee Name	Co-Chairs
Steering Committee	Sheree Utash (self-study coordinator), Scott Lucas, Beth Buchholz, and Denise Pfeifer
Criterion One Subcommittee	Joe Ontjes, Trish Schmidt, David Young, and Ron Ragon
Criterion Two Subcommittee	Judy Mount, Mike Edwards, Willow Dean, and Todd Kelley
Criterion Three Subcommittee	Chris Martin, Joanne Pafume, Tara Canfield, Pam Doyle, and Linda Grossman
Criterion Four Subcommittee	James Fly, Justin Pfeifer, and Pat Plank
Criterion Five Subcommittee	Randy Roebuck, Colin Gallagher, Kent Irick, and Dawn Brown
PR and Education Committee	Monica Stewart (chair), Casey Eubank, Andy McFayden, Shane Ball, William Benjamin, Sarah Bryant, and Dalisa Turner, Valli Bashor, Lynn Vorak, Katie Garrett and Steve Thompson
Editing Committee	<i>Content Team:</i> Sheree Utash, Scott Lucas, Beth Buchholz, and Denise Pfeifer <i>Form Team:</i> Scott Lucas, Pam Doyle, Sarah Leftwich and Paula Kirkpatrick
Evidence Committee	Sheree Utash, Scott Lucas, Randy Roebuck, Shane Hilt, Willow Dean, Trish Schmidt, Ursula Drake, Chris Martin, Doris Queen, Nathan Hilt, Laura Fowler, and Paula Pitts
Hospitality Committee	Judy Mount (chair) Doris Queen, DavaLynn Joy, Patty Aubert, Kenetta Markelionis, and Kathryn Ake
Federal Compliance Committee	Scott Lucas, Willow Dean, Justin Pfeifer, Casey Eubank, Lacey Ledwich, Joe Ontjes

In February 2012, the [steering committee](#) co-chairs identified key faculty, staff, and administrators to serve on the steering committee and to chair each of the five criterion subcommittees in preparation for the 2014 site visit. The steering committee selected criterion subcommittee co-chairs to provide representation from a cross-section of the various employment groups at WATC. The four co-chairs for each criterion subcommittee include an instructor, dean, staff member, and a senior level administrator. Changes were made to criterion subcommittee co-chairs as required. The theme “Hitting It Big” was chosen by the steering committee to provide common identification for all HLC activities and included a token reward system for the college community as they participated in the self-study. “Hitting It Big” was integrated into all inservices, education, newsletters, and self-study deadlines. At the February [2012 college inservice](#), steering committee co-chairs, and criterion subcommittee co-chairs were introduced. The theme “Hitting It Big” was presented and the token system was described. Entertaining videos and presentations informed faculty and staff of the HLC-NCA self-study criteria, core components, and process. To develop each criterion subcommittee, faculty and staff completed a form indicating the two criterion choices that most interested them. In total, more than 120 employees across the college volunteered to be on criterion subcommittees, which were developed based on the choices submitted. Each subcommittee consists of 15–20 members. In addition, other college committees supported the Steering Committee, including the Leadership Team, Leadership Council, Academic Leadership Team and the Faculty Council.

 [HLC Steering Committee Meeting Minutes](#)



The PR and Education Committee, formed in September 2012, was responsible for ensuring that all internal and external stakeholders were informed of the HLC-NCA process and its progress.

The [Editing Committee](#) was divided into two teams — content and form. The content team's focus during the editing process was to ensure that content for each of the five criterion chapters was accurate and complete. To ensure accuracy and consistency, the steering committee co-chairs served as the content editing team. The form editing team's focus was grammar, language, and flow. Once these steps were complete, these draft versions of each chapter were reviewed by the entire Steering Committee.

The [Evidence Committee](#) examined evidence collected by each criterion subcommittee for relevance and accurate representation. Evidence was categorized and placed in sequential order of reference.

The Hospitality Committee coordinated arrangements for the comprehensive visit.

Conducting the Self-Study

WATC views the reaccreditation self-study as an opportunity to advance a philosophy that emphasizes and fosters success for all students. The steering committee felt it was important that the self-study process adhere to the highest standards of integrity, objectivity, and thoroughness while promoting a sense of enthusiasm and fun. This was attained by involving a diversified group of people from the college in the process.

WATC's self-study process was highly collaborative and participatory, benefiting from the expertise and talents of the members. Steering committee members guided the self-study process and served as liaisons, leaders, and resources for all committees. The charge to each criterion subcommittee was to approach its area of responsibility as a research project to determine the college's strengths, challenges, and opportunities for the future, and to provide supporting evidence. All employees were encouraged to participate on a committee and to engage in the development of the self-study. An incentive program [rewarded](#) members who participated in the writing process and the collection of evidence. Committee members who were actively engaged in meeting established deadlines received HLC-NCA Reward Vouchers from their criterion co-chairs for their contributions. Committee members who did not participate did not receive vouchers. Individual committee members who qualified for a voucher completed a form identifying which pre-selected business [gift certificate](#) they would like to receive. In all, over 75% of deadlines were met and 105 HLC-NCA Reward Vouchers were distributed.

An online shared workspace on WATC's Intranet was developed specifically for the HLC-NCA project to edit and review documents and to organize and store evidence and resources. Project documents were organized by criterion subcommittees, meetings, timelines, resources, and editing documents. Each criterion subcommittee had



[HLC Steering Committee Guide](#)



[HLC Reaccreditation Timeline](#)



its own folder to store meeting notes and draft narratives and to organize evidence. Monthly steering committee meeting minutes, agendas, and notes were organized in shared folders. To remain on task, a full project timeline and an editing timeline were developed and stored on this shared workspace. [Templates](#) were developed to aid committee members in their tasks as they engaged in the self-study process. A [Steering Committee Guide](#) was provided to better educate committee members about their roles, processes, and timelines. This served as a guide to educate new team members who became part of the process. Educational and relevant materials were distributed to criterion subcommittee co-chairs and posted on the internal HLC-NCA workspace. Examples of these include the 2008 team report; examples of evidence; *Criteria for Accreditation*; Steering Committee Guide; and templates for agendas, minutes, evidence, and narratives. Reviewed and edited documents were also stored on this shared workspace, which allowed subcommittees to work from one document when editing for content, grammar, language, and flow.

 [HLC Intranet Site](#)

Over the past four years, WATC has relied upon regular and systematic analysis of trend data, effectiveness indicators, and a strategic-planning process to make better-informed decisions. Throughout any given year, institutional research reports are prepared for strategic planning, learning outcomes are measured, surveys are administered, and strategic conversations are conducted. Results from these ongoing activities were critical to the criterion subcommittees' work. Criterion subcommittees obtained additional evidence from faculty, staff, and community leaders by means of discussion groups and individual interviews.

To build an understanding of, and to remain current with, the accreditation and the self-study process, the steering committee co-chairs and the college president attended the 2012 HLC-NCA-sponsored, self-study workshop and annual meeting. The following year, the self-study coordinator, one steering committee co-chair, and one representative from each criterion subcommittee attended in preparation for the 2014 site visit.


Preparing the Report

The self-study coordinator developed a timeline to project critical dates through spring 2014. The subcommittees began meeting in spring 2012 and continued through spring 2013 for initial data gathering, analysis, and the writing and editing processes. All subcommittees met regularly throughout the self-study process, and each subcommittee identified its own set of tasks and established its operating procedures. The steering committee met the first Friday of each month.

The initial charge to the criterion subcommittee co-chairs was to analyze and interpret their criterion in relation to WATC's mission, culture, and environment. Co-chairs began their work by developing a broad outline based on a common understanding of the criterion and its core components. The intent was to establish a [conceptual framework](#)




to guide the written documents and to ensure that essential elements from the criterion and core components were included in the final narratives. Throughout spring and summer 2012, each subcommittee expanded its outline to define the elements to be included in the final narrative. During fall 2012, the writing began and regular steering committee meetings addressed any questions from criterion subcommittees. The subcommittees gathered, studied, and interpreted the college’s standards of practice. Steering committee co-chairs met with criterion subcommittee co-chairs to provide feedback on the outlines. Criterion subcommittee co-chairs gave update reports at the monthly steering committee meetings.

 [Criterion Expanded Outline - Example](#)

WATC dedicated the September 2012 all-college in-service as an HLC-NCA work day. To kick off the day, a video and HLC-NCA overview were presented. The PR and Education Committee was introduced, and its role in the self-study process was communicated. To engage and educate employees about HLC-NCA and the HLC-NCA process, employees played HLC-NCA Bingo. Each employee received a HLC-NCA Bingo card with various HLC-NCA terms, activities, and processes listed on it. Definitions were read, and employees matched definitions to terms, activities, and processes. Small prizes donated by the bookstore were given to HLC-NCA Bingo winners. Criterion subcommittees were then given two hours to meet. During this time, steering committee co-chairs visited each group to answer questions and gauge involvement. Faculty and staff who were not part of any committee were assigned to the Exploration Team. This team was tasked with visiting each criterion subcommittee meeting to learn more about each criterion. An unexpected outcome of this activity was that several participants volunteered to join criterion subcommittees that day. Resources and evidence needed for the writing process were discussed during the last two hours of the day. Prior to the in-service, the steering committee identified subject-matter experts within the college who could help with questions and evidence identification. These experts were located at tables around the room, so committee members could meet with them to discuss evidence needed to assist in the writing and documenting processes. The PR and Education Committee and the Exploration Team also met during this time to explore future communication strategies.

 [Inservice Agenda - September 2012](#)

 [HLC Education and PR Committee Action Plan](#)

Final deadline dates were established, from October 2012 to April 2013, for each criterion subcommittee to submit first and final draft narratives and all evidence. Draft narratives were submitted to the Editing Committee’s content team, who made recommendations for additional documentation. This feedback was then given to the criterion subcommittee co-chairs for changes to the narratives. To ensure that all members of the Steering and Criterion committees were aware of all content, weekly editing meetings were held. The committee members reviewed each Self-Study chapter line-by-line. Attendees made suggestions of needed content and revisions and approved the final document.



Communication Strategies

Based on past self-studies, WATC recognized a need to be [systematic and organized](#). Templates to build [expanded outlines](#), which were later expanded into narratives, were provided to each criterion subcommittee. Documents were stored on WATC's intranet, where information was updated regularly. To keep WATC's external stakeholders informed, a page on WATC's Web site was developed to provide frequently asked questions, updated HLC-NCA activities, and other information.

To ensure that employees and students were kept informed about HLC-NCA activities and the accreditation process, a [communication plan](#) was executed. This plan included a communication timeline with planned activities that focused on making the reaccreditation process public, fun, and inclusive. A [Hitting it Big](#) Newsletter was developed to assist in educating the college community on the self-study and the criterion.

Activities were organized to be educational, competitive, and entertaining. They consisted of focus articles on each of the five criteria, accreditation, and the self-study process. Through the writing and evidence-gathering processes, steering committee co-chairs were available to answer questions and provide additional support to all criterion subcommittees. The steering committee co-chairs provided updates at all faculty and college in-service events. A [call for public comment](#) was published in [local newspapers](#), [college newsletters](#), and on [WATC's Web site](#).

Resources for the Self-Study

The self-study process could not have been accomplished without the allocation of resources and employees. The self-study coordinator and steering committee co-chairs attended criterion subcommittee, faculty, and staff meetings to provide information, answer questions, and serve as resources. Faculty and staff dedicated significant time to the self-study process. Financial resources were allocated for supplies, food, travel, and team incentives. Co-chairs received stipends as reward for their extra time and efforts. A meeting room was designated for steering committee and criterion subcommittee meetings. Many employees worked on proofing and editing documents.

Summary

This self-study presented WATC the opportunity to evaluate the educational programs and services it provides. Throughout the process, WATC reflected on its mission, vision, values, and strategic goals while celebrating its achievements and identifying the areas that still present challenges.

Many faculty, staff, and administration from different campuses and disciplines were involved in the process. The self-study allowed WATC to systematically examine itself and helped move WATC toward a more future-focused collegiate institution in accor-



dance with HLC-NCA's five criteria. The self-study report communicates the findings, evaluations, and recommendations for areas of improvement to internal and external constituents – students, faculty, staff, WATC Board members, HLC-NCA, and the general public. WATC will use this document in the future as it continues to grow.

