



Questions & Answers that should help you prepare for your Accreditation site visit

By Dr. Charles A. Taylor

Most of the questions below came from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) workshop for Consultant/Evaluators to help them gather information during their site visits. Others came from my personal experience in preparing for site visits at three different universities. They may or may not ask your campus the exact questions but you can expect some pretty close to these. Give careful thought to how you would answer each of these questions. Answer truthfully and candidly. I've provided answers that proved acceptable during site visits that I was involved in, but I encourage you to compile answers that address your institution's specific needs.

Self-Study

Q: Have you seen your institutional self-study?

A: Yes, but it's OK if you haven't read the whole thing. It's also important to let them know that you know where to find it. It is available on the server; each department has a copy and a copy can be checked out from the Resource Room.

Q: Did you know a team was coming?

A: The answer should be yes. Information was sent by email. It was announced at staff meetings. It was mentioned at several all-campus meetings. All employees, and selected alumni and the public through our newspaper announcement have been notified that a NCA team is coming.

Q: Do you believe that the self-study accurately represents your college?

A: Yes, because the way it was compiled involved every department on campus. Every employee had a chance for input and the final draft is reflective of the work we do here.

Q: What, if anything, would you add?

A: Generic answers would be the ones to provide here, not specific cases that would be dealt with through existing policy and procedure.

Q: What, if anything, would you change?

A: Think generic, but speak freely.

Mission and Purpose

Q: What do you understand the mission of your institution to be?

A: Everyone should have a copy of the mission statement. Feel free to let the team know that the mission is posted in every office.



Q: What should the mission be? Do a lot of people feel this way?

A: We think it accurately reflects our purposes, because it is a consensus document. It is reviewed annually by the board and employees can recommend changes to it.

Q: Do you feel that faculty, administration, and support personnel are all working toward accomplishing the institution's mission and purposes?

A: Yes, our degree programs, our strategic plans and our day-to-day commitment all reflect a genuine desire to accomplish the goals implicit in our mission statement.

Q: Do you believe your Board has the same perception?

A: Yes, through the policies it sets and through the budget it allocates, the Board demonstrates its support for our mission statement. Additionally the board formally reviews it annually.

Q: How is your institution accomplishing its mission and purposes?

A: You should be able to cite a number of activities and programs you offer. There are many possible responses here.

Q: How is it not accomplishing its mission and purposes?

A: One can always say, "I can't think of a way." Or "I can't think of a way, but if there is a way, we will do something about it. If you have examples in which you feel you are not accomplishing your mission, please mention that even in those examples, you can take your concerns to the administration and there will be follow-up

Q: What are the institution's strengths?

A: Clearly, this is an open-ended question. There are many strengths ranging from the quality of people who work here, to the supportive culture we offer students. One person commented, "We have an excellent ratio of students to instructors." Use your own judgment here.

Q: What are its problem areas?

A: Be honest but be sure to mention there is a process for addressing these problems.

Q: What concerns do you have?

A: Use your own judgment here but know the team takes your statements seriously.

Governance

Q: How does the Board help or hinder the institution's accomplishment of the mission?



A: They provide needed resources reasonably well. They represent a broad spectrum of vested people. They concentrate on policy and they leave the implementation of policy to the faculty and staff.

Q: When the seats on the Board are up for election, is there community interest in running? (Or, interest in the appointment process, if that's the style?)

A: There is an independent nominating committee that nominates all board members. Board members are appointed to staggered terms. Faculty or staff could nominate a board member.

Q: What is the mechanism for communication with the Board?

A: You could probably write them a letter, but the existing hierarchy structure is probably the best way to communicate with the board. Our president, or board representative, would deliver issues to board meetings.

Faculty

Q: How is a new course developed?

A: New courses are developed through research, departmental review and input. Any faculty member can propose a course idea and do groundwork for its implementation. We have a formal process that goes through the Dean's Council, faculty assembly and ends with the Board of Trustees depending on whether a new degree is being proposed.

Q: How does a faculty member get equipment and supplies?

A: Supplies are kept in file cabinets in the Chair's office. Faculties simply sign for them. They can also request equipment and supplies from the Administrative Assistant or get permission for special needs through the Dean. Supplies can also be requisitioned through the annual budget cycle.

Q: How do faculty members participate in decision-making?

A: Through the Faculty Assembly (monthly meeting), departmental meetings, and committees, such as Assessment, and Professional Development. The dean or other administrators often solicit input by e-mail communication, face-to-face meetings or through their open door policy. There are numerous ways for faculty to have input into decisions in the college.

Q: What are the means by which faculty members communicate with the administration?

A: Our administrators have an open-door policy. Faculty can communicate with them in person, by letter, in hallways, through committee and departmental chairs, or by e-mail.

Q: How do faculty members get placed on institutional committees?



A: Most volunteer. There have been a few appointments/designations or requests to members to extend their participation under special circumstances when their expertise is needed.

Q: How are part-time faculty members resourced and oriented to their assignments?

A: We have a thorough orientation involving a number of staff people to help them get adjusted. The orientation involves answering their questions, reviewing policies, and getting them started in using the equipment and procedures. We hold two workshops annually especially geared for part-time faculty. The Dean meets with each individually and assigns a Mentor to all faculty. Program Chairs also contact part-time faculty and assist them as needed.

Q: How well do "senior" or experienced faculty members work with "junior" or new faculty members? Full-time with part-time?

A: Each new faculty member (full and part-time) is assigned a mentor. Full-time lead instructors meet with part-time faculty and review their syllabi for consistency with the program and possible improvement and guidance for the part-timer or junior.

Q: With each other?

A: On committees and in departmental meetings—very well. Much gets accomplished.

Q: How do faculty members promote the college mission in courses, assignments, committee work, etc.?

A: The learning objectives that faculty write fully support the mission. Faculty emphasize plenty of hands on training that complements the academic assignments. It is the faculty that give life to the mission.

Library and Student Services

Q: Is the library an integral part of the higher education offered at this institution?

A: Yes! Feel free to mention how you use library resources in your class and also point out the web site, which students can access directly from their homes. And mention the Inter-library loan program.

Q: Is the library properly funded? Equipped? Staffed? Used a lot? Up to date?

A: Yes, We have adequate resources. Computers in library, an electronic catalog search station, carrels, a large table, and a variety of items available to students, such as calculators and tape recorders. The library is adequately staffed, used extensively and its materials are current.

Q: How does the institution use the Internet? Other technology?



A: E-mail, and in classes. We have lots of modern technology, including computer stations for the instructor in every classroom, overhead projectors, TV-VCR. Classroom independent networks for security and other specialized classes. Printers in many rooms, in the library, and in the Residence halls. Students have access to photo copy machines and make extensive use of social media.

Q: Is access to the Internet and other technology provided to faculty? Administration? Students? Others?

A: Yes to all these questions.

Q: Is the quality of service consistent across campuses (if multi-campus)? Across departments or offices?

A: Yes, we're all on the same servers and our IT department ensures that we all receive quality service.

Assessment

Q: Is the spirit of your mission/purposes/values reflected in what is done around here?

A: Yes. We are serious about assessment and many faculty members are involved in it directly through the Assessment Committee or indirectly through campus-wide assessment activities. Also, some administrative and departmental decisions are made based on assessment data.

Q: Are policies and procedures consistent with the mission?

A: Yes.

Q: What do you think about the assessment program? How was it developed? Is it well known throughout the institution?

A: It has tremendous potential to help us improve both teaching and learning. It is well known throughout the institution.

Q: To what extent has assessment been implemented across the institution?

A: We have assessment plans developed for most of our degree programs in all of our schools and/or colleges. The Assessment Committee collects annual progress reports on a regular basis.

Q: How are faculty involved in assessment?

A: Assessment is faculty driven on this campus. The assessment committee has faculty representation from each department. The committee reports monthly to the faculty assembly, and posts its minutes.

Q: What improvements seem to have resulted from assessment?

A: Mention your improvements here. We expect to see even more improvements in both teaching and learning through the feedback of the assessment cycles as we become more experienced.



Q: How do results of the assessments affect your budget process and your planning process?

A: Needs identified by the Assessment data are submitted with the annual budget.

Q: How are planning and budget tied together?

A: By developing careful and thoughtful assessment criteria in planning stages directly from outcome goals and establishing what we will budget to achieve them. We link assessment plans to the budget on an institutional level.

Planning and Development

Q: In what ways can your institution be expected to continue to accomplish its mission?

A: The campus creates an annual strategic plan that provides a road map explaining how it plans to accomplish its mission.

Q: Do you have any concerns for the future?

A: You can answer this individually.

Q: What is the campus climate?

A: Friendly, helpful, spirited, personal, accepting and nurturing to students-at least that's our goal?

Q: Is the morale of the faculty and staff positive? Are they participating in the life of the college and in the planning for the future?

A: Yes, to both of these and feel free to provide examples.

Q: Is enrollment rising/falling/stabilized? What are the reasons for this?

A: It has stabilized. We are looking at enrollment all the time, gathering data, seeking solutions. Growth and retention are still an issue here. We add programs and acknowledge a need to diversify what we offer, and to continue to appeal to diverse groups.

Q: What kinds of changes are taking place?

A: We are phasing out some programs and adding others. Mention programs here. Diversifying, and aiming to increase enrollment among women and students of color. Among staff and faculty? Working to improve teaching skills and deepen our proficiency at student-centered learning. With the curriculum?

Q: Do you see these changes as positive or negative? How will these changes affect the institution?

A: Very positive. We think these changes will help us grow our campus and become better known in the community.

Q: What is the most significant change since you have been here?

A: This can be an individual answer.



Institutional Integrity

Q: Do the students get what the catalog and other publications promise?

A: Yes. Explain further if you like.

Q: Are the institution's goals the ones that are actually funded and supported? How is this apparent?

A: Yes, we make sure the strategic planning goals are linked to the budget. You can see the results in the faculty, in the courses offered, in the student-instructor ratio, in the modern equipment, in the concern for ethics, general education, communication skills, and professional practices, as well as the active advisory boards and openness of the organization and administration to diversity, faculty participation, and improvement.

Q: Can students get the courses they need in order to complete a degree in timely fashion?

A: Yes, courses are made available to all continuing students so they can graduate in a timely manner.

Q: Do you believe that your daily reality matches all the documentation the team was sent?

A: For the most part yes, but keep in mind some of the material represents future goals that we hope to achieve.

Q: Does the view book describe or show images that do not accurately reflect the reality of the institution? For instance, does it show only buildings, not students? Sunshine, not snow? Old programs, not current? Ask why.

A: No, we are very concerned about our institution's integrity and are committed to representing it accurately.

Public Information

Q: When a policy, process or program is being examined or proposed, is it publicized to the appropriate constituencies?

A: Yes, both faculty and staff are notified and we also have an Advisory Board review comprised of community and business representatives.

Q: Do you know where to get a catalog, a schedule, and a financial report?

A: Yes, catalogs can be obtained by contacting departmental administrative assistants; course schedules can be obtained from the Registrar's office and a financial report can be obtained from the VP of Finance.

Q: Is this common knowledge?

A: We'd like to think so.

Other questions that may provide helpful insight



Q: If someone gave the institution \$1 million and you could decide what to do with it, what would you want to do?

A: This should be a personal answer.

Q: If you were to select a picture for the yearbook, or the next catalog, what would it be?

A: This should be a personal answer.

Q: Do you know what NCA is?

A: North Central Association of Colleges and Universities. It is a regional certifying and governing board for participants in post-secondary education. It sets standards and provides a vehicle for joint decision-making and enrichment. Each region in the U.S. has a corresponding association.

Q: Is it important to have NCA accreditation?

A: Yes. NCA accreditation will help in recruiting students, add to the prestige of the college, recognize its growth and evolution as a well-rounded institution; improve the transferability and value of student credits, give us greater flexibility in how we deliver instruction and improve our competitiveness in our market place.

Q: What can you say that would help the team to make a fair evaluation of this institution?

A: That we are deserving to maintain our full accreditation and that our institution fulfills its mission and fully meets the criteria.

Tips for NCA visit

1. Review any talking point documents that your campus might prepare for the visit, but of course don't read the answers.
2. The messages you need to get across (if it's true) is that your campus is committed to assessment; that you are personally involved in assessment and assessment practices have become institutionalized.
3. Don't volunteer any information-provide only what is asked for.
4. Be on standby for the entire visit because the visiting team controls the schedule. They may want additional information or they may decide to call you out of the blue.
5. Know where assessment information is located on the server and in the "Evidence Room."
6. Mention that you are aware of Gen Ed assessment that is taking place on campus (if it's true) but don't try to answer any questions that you are unfamiliar with.
7. If a team member interviews you as a group be supportive of your colleagues' answers. For example you can say something like, "Just to add to what Sarah said, "we also..."



8. Let the team know that that you are an involved faculty. They need to hear that repeatedly.

Overview of self-study

- The Self-Study is the document that the visiting team will use to guide its focused visit so please read it if you haven't already done so.
- It contains most of the information you need to answer any questions the team might ask. Your campus' Assessment Committee may identify other areas that you can include to prepare for the visit.
- This visit should be limited to the areas addressed in the self-study so don't volunteer any additional information if not directly asked.
- Finally the Self-Study includes information on how your campus has or proposes to close the assessment loop. This is something that accreditors like to see evidence of. Closing the loop are examples of how you used assessment data and studies to improve teaching and learning. This is an opportunity for you to highlight all of the great assessment work your campus has been involved in. If that is the case then "let your light shine!"

This article can be found in the book: The College Assessment Handbook by Dr. Charles A. Taylor. [You can get your copy here.](#)

Dr. Taylor is the author of over a dozen books and publications. He is a consultant to college campuses throughout the U.S. in the areas of diversity and inclusion. Please check out his website at: www.drcharlestaylor.com
