

Preparation for Accreditation

A guide to the years before the
self-study

Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications

UNIT ADMINISTRATORS

Information Gathering and Record Keeping

Typically programs conduct the self-study in the year before the ACEJMC site-team visit. Programs should inform themselves of the information and tables the self-study template requires as evidence in support of their description and analysis for each standard. To ensure they meet the requirements for tables and statistics, programs should begin gathering information and keeping records at least two or three years before preparing the self-study -- or longer. The self-study requires some information for the six years preceding the visit.

The university, rather than the school or department, may gather and maintain records of some of the information ACEJMC requires. It can take time to get this information from the central administration and to extract from it information specific to the program seeking accreditation.

Consider taking these actions well before conducting the self-study:

Written Plans: prepare, adopt and date – or update -- the three written plans ACEJMC requires – strategic or long-range plan, diversity and inclusiveness plan, and assessment plan – at least three or four years before preparing the self-study. Site teams are skeptical about plans apparently adopted in the year of the self-study. Because effective plans should include measurable objectives and actions, showing annual progress and achievement over three or four years strengthens the case for compliance.

Enrollment Statistics: Part One of the self-study requires overall enrollment figures at the university and program level and also within each sequence for the year preceding the visit, updated with the latest information for the team on arrival. Record these statistics annually. Showing patterns of change in enrollment over three or four years before the visit can strengthen analysis required in the self-study.

Syllabi: at least one or two years before preparing the self-study, review syllabi, especially in core, required courses, to be sure they define learning objectives that include, as appropriate, the 12 professional values and competencies ACEJMC defines.

Demographics: the Diversity and Inclusiveness standard requires tables on the demographics of the total population in the university's service area and also of the university's and the program's faculty and student body in the year of the self-study. Record these statistics annually; showing patterns of change can strengthen analysis. an accounting of the demographics for each faculty search during the six years before a visit.

Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty Credentials: offer faculty members a template for the content and organization of a curriculum vitae and require them to update their cv's annually. These must be current at the time of the visit. The program will need updated cv's to compile the tables on faculty credentials and on faculty productivity in scholarship for the six years preceding the visit. Encourage faculty members to consider a cv that balances comprehensiveness and conciseness. The site team is not reviewing faculty members for employment or for tenure and promotion.

Retention and Graduation: gather and record this information annually. Showing change in rates of retention and graduation can support other evidence of effective advising and concern for student graduation and academic success. (Often the central administration of a university gathers and keeps this information. If the university cannot break out the retention and graduation information for the unit seeking accreditation, the unit should consider gathering and recording this information itself.)

A Detailed Budget: the self-study requires a table on the annual budget for the three years preceding a visit and has a template for the construction of this table. Gather and record this information annually

in accord with the template. Note that ACEJMC expects the unit to show how its annual budget is related to its long-range, strategic plan. ***Assessment of Learning Outcomes***: the information and statistics from the direct and indirect measures from which the program has drawn its conclusions and taken action to improve curriculum and instruction give credibility to the program's account of its assessment program. Tabulate and include this information in the self-study.

Relationships with Campus Administrators

The site team will meet with the university administrator (provost) or college administrator (dean) to whom the unit reports. In the years before the self-study, make sure these administrators understand ACEJMC's standards, requirements and expectations and are thoroughly familiar with your challenges and efforts to meet them. Preparing these administrators for the visit is especially important if they are new to their responsibilities, either as full-time or interim appointees.

Reputation and Presence on Campus

The site team will have a meeting (often a lunch) with representatives of other units on campus, academic and administrative, with which the program interacts. In this meeting, the site team will seek to find out how highly they regard the unit's leadership, faculty and students and how visible and effective they consider the program to be within its discipline and outside in its university citizenship.

Consider cultivating in the years before the self-study the people you are likely to invite to this meeting. Consider making them aware closer to the visit of the kinds of questions and concerns the site team is likely to ask.

UNIT FACULTY MEMBERS

Engagement

It is not unusual for the university administration and the program's administrators to care more about accreditation than faculty members do. Nevertheless, the site team will talk individually with each full-time faculty member during the visit about the program and issues the self-study raises.

A team will be concerned if faculty members seem not to know what ACEJMC standards require or what the self-study says.

Faculty members should become thoroughly familiar with ACEJMC's requirements for each standard at least one or two years before conducting the self-study. Consider holding a retreat or one or two faculty meetings to review ACEJMC's standards and requirements.

ACEJMC recommends the appointment of a coordinator to lead the work of conducting the self-study and encourages the participation of the faculty in the process. Even if one person is responsible for directing, compiling and editing the final version of the self-study, all faculty members should read the document and know what it contains.

STUDENTS

Student Meetings

The site team will conduct two meetings with students during the visit: one for all students, the other for students in each sequence or concentration. Consider holding meetings like those the site team will conduct for at least one or two years before the self-study. The purpose of these meetings should be to listen to students' concerns, not to argue with them when they make incorrect or misinformed statements. If students are incorrect or misinformed, ask yourselves why. Ideally, a neutral person (perhaps an alum), not an administrator, faculty or staff member, should conduct these meetings. Then the program should address legitimate concerns and report back to students on decisions and actions.

Some programs have student advisory committees that serve a similar purpose to the process just described. These are worthy, valuable bodies but often the most engaged and committed students serve on them. They may not be as representative of the concerns and issues students attending the site-visit meetings express. A purpose of the meetings suggested is to prevent surprise and alarm at student responses to the site team's questions. Typically a site team asks questions like these:

How effectively has the curriculum prepared you to enter the profession of your choice confident in your knowledge and competency?

From your internships and other professional experiences, do you consider the curriculum and methods of instruction to be up-to-date and to reflect current practice?

Is the use of guest speakers in classes effective in keeping faculty and students alike informed about current professional and business practice?

Is the teaching and learning you've experienced demanding and effective?

Is the technology and equipment up-to-date, functional, sufficient and available outside class time for you to do the work assigned you and to master the technologies of current professional practice?

Is the full-time and part-time faculty academically and professionally well prepared to enable you to learn the knowledge, values and skills necessary for success in your chosen field?

Are faculty members accessible, informed and helpful in advising you about your academic and career interests and requirements?

Is the formal advising system effective in guiding you to make sound academic choices, meet your obligations and graduate in a timely way?

Does the program provide effective help for knowing about and securing internships and full-time employment?

Is the program's system of communication effective in informing you of important requirements, deadlines, activities and opportunities?

What opportunities do you have through campus media, student organizations and other outlets to practice what you are learning in the classroom, to present your work to audiences and to build a portfolio and resume for employment?

Do you feel well prepared in professional values and ethics? Where and how in the curriculum does the program engage values and ethics?

What do "diversity and inclusiveness" mean to you and how do the curriculum and program of instruction prepare you to understand the significance of these values and principles in professional practice?

What is the program's reputation on campus among students in other disciplines and majors? Do they consider the program prestigious and demanding?