The Design for Self-Study is a blueprint for the entire self-study process, including the final self-study report. It guides the efforts of the steering committee and working groups as they engage in discussions, inquiry and report preparation. It also guides the institution as a whole as various constituencies provide input and offer feedback throughout the multi-stage process of self-analysis.

Institutions should give thoughtful attention to the development of the Design. While a good Design cannot guarantee an effective self-study process or an excellent self-study report, a poorly developed Design will significantly reduce the possibility of producing a useful and meaningful final document. In as concise and clear a manner as possible, the Design should include all the elements described below. The Design should not exceed 30 pages in length (not including the Documentation Roadmap).

The Design is prepared after the institution’s representatives have attended the Self-Study Institute and it is submitted at least 2 weeks in advance of the on-campus self-study preparation visit by the Middle States staff liaison. The Design is the primary focus of the liaison’s discussions with the steering committee and other constituencies during that visit. After the visit, the steering committee will revise the Design and submit it to the liaison for formal approval.

Elements of the Self-Study Design

Institutional Overview – The Design should begin with a brief description of the institution, its mission, important recent developments, anticipated directions based on planning and assessment processes, and steps taken to date to prepare for self-study. This section creates a context for the shared understanding of the institutional needs and priorities to be addressed through self-study. Institutional priorities described in this section should also be reflected in the Charges to Working Groups section of the Design.

Model for Self-Study – Institutions in the Collaborative Implementation Project have agreed to use the comprehensive self-study model. The Design should address the following questions: How is this model useful to the institution, how does it align with institutional priorities, and how will it facilitate opportunities for continuous institutional improvement?
**Intended Outcomes of the Self-Study** – The intended outcomes of the self-study should be based on a clear understanding of what the institution plans to achieve through self-analysis. Stating a limited number of outcomes, in explicit and observable terms, will establish a clear direction for the self-study and will allow the institution to assess its own progress over time.

Outcomes, or goal statements, should focus on ways to integrate the self-study process with other institutional planning and renewal processes, thereby ensuring that the self-study will be as useful and meaningful as possible. Examples include:

- Demonstrate how the institution currently meets Middle States standards for accreditation with a focus on continuous improvement in the attainment of the institution’s vision, mission, and goals.
- Document current assessment practices to identify challenges and opportunities and to make recommendations for improvement in the use of institutional assessment results.
- Capitalize on the overlapping efforts of strategic planning and Middle States self-study to inform decision-making and to identify specific opportunities and challenges, including budgeting and enrollment.
- Provide a concise and accurate analysis of the institution that can guide institutional planning, growth, and renewal efforts.
- Engage in an inclusive and transparent self-appraisal process that actively and deliberately seeks to involve members from all areas of the institutional community.
- Develop forward-looking recommendations to help the institution attain its goals in undergraduate and graduate education, research, and service for the public good.
- Assess the quality and effectiveness of academic programs and administrative services, at all degree levels and in all departments, particularly in relation to the changing needs of our student body and the community we serve.
- Analyze the quality and effectiveness of the institution’s processes for planning and assessment in order to make necessary adjustments to methods and measurements and ensure that the use of assessment data will lead to meaningful programmatic and institutional renewal.
**Organizational Structure of the Steering Committee and Working Groups** – The Design should include a clear description of the structure of the steering committee and the working groups, how they relate to each other, and how they fit into the organization of the institution as a whole. Institutions in the Collaborative Implementation Project are being asked to develop a structure that includes seven working groups, assigning one Standard to each working group. To the extent possible, the names and titles of the members of the steering committee and working groups should be included in the Design.

Members of the steering committee and the working groups have a vital role to play throughout the self-study. Members may be appointed or elected, but they should represent the total campus community including faculty, administrators, staff, students and trustees. Members should possess expertise, credibility, availability, commitment and perspective; in addition, they must be given the time, resources and authority to carry out their self-study responsibilities.

**Charges to the Working Groups** – The Design should include a charge to each working group that defines the scope of its tasks and responsibilities, and provides guidance for its research activities and the preparation of reports. Within the framework of the Standards for Accreditation, each working group is expected to engage in a process of active and open inquiry, to identify institutional strengths and challenges, and to propose possible recommendations for ongoing improvement.

For each working group, this section of the Design should include:

- Standard for Accreditation to be addressed
- Names and titles of members, and the designation of working group chair(s)
- Key sources of relevant documentation to be gathered, reviewed, summarized and used to support conclusions of the self-study
- Relevant institutional processes and procedures to be reviewed, summarized and used to support conclusions of the self-study
- Linkages, where appropriate, between the assigned Standard for Accreditation and relevant institutional priorities, as identified in the Overview section of the Design
- Analysis of institutional strengths, challenges and opportunities for improvement (recommendations)
**Guidelines for Reporting** – To guide the efforts of the working groups, the Design should include:

- A list/description of all products to be completed (e.g., outlines, preliminary drafts, final reports)
- Deadlines for the submission of all working group products
- Template for the preparation of working group reports (See Template A)

**Organization of the Final Self-Study Report** – The Design should include an annotated outline of the organization and structure of the final self-study report. (See Template B)

**Editorial Style and Format** – The Design should include guidelines to facilitate consistency of style across all documents (i.e., working group drafts and reports, supporting documentation, the final self-study report). These guidelines should specify the word processing program to be used, fonts, margins, spacing, the use of institutional acronyms, and so forth. Writing and editing the self-study report should be understood as a multi-phase activity. Members of the working groups should clearly understand how final editorial changes will be made, and consistency of style throughout the process will allow interim reports to be more easily combined into a seamless final document. Institutions may assign final editorial responsibility to members of the steering committee or invite a designated editor to participate throughout the self-study process.

**Timetable for the Self-Study** – The Design should include a timeline for every major step in the process, beginning with the early stages of on-campus planning activities and culminating with the Commission’s action approximately two-and-one-half years later. Institutions in the Collaborative Implementation Project may use the overall project timeline as a starting point, and make appropriate modifications to match the needs of their own campus community.

**Profile of the Evaluation Team** – The Design should include the institution’s recommendations concerning the characteristics of the chairperson and team members who will visit the institution. Recommendations should take into consideration institutional type and size, constituencies served, and institutional priorities. This section should include a list of peer and aspirational peer institutions, preferably from the Middle States region, and should also indicate any institutions whose representatives might present a conflict-of-interest. Although the final decision about
team membership remains with the Commission and its staff, the institution’s expressed preferences will be given careful consideration.

**Documentation Roadmap** – The Design should include an annotated inventory of recent and current accreditation reports, assessment and planning data, enrollment and financial information, policies, procedures and other resources that the working groups will use as they conduct their inquiry and analysis. The institution should organize these resources using the format of the Documentation Roadmap. Because this inventory will change and develop throughout the self-study process, the Design should include an early version of the final range of documents, demonstrating that adequate information will be made available to the steering committee, the working groups, and the visiting evaluation team.

Each institution should review the Standards, including their component criteria, to ascertain the best way to provide relevant source material in support of the self-study. Because some Standards overlap, certain types of source material may be relevant to the inquiry of more than one working group. Some documentation is fairly straightforward and readily accessible (e.g., mission statements, financial audits, faculty and student handbooks); other documentation may require the description and analysis of complex, multi-layered institutional processes and procedures (e.g., how the budgeting process is linked to strategic planning, how assessment results are utilized to improve educational effectiveness). The institution should use existing documentation whenever possible. If necessary to address perceived gaps, the steering committee may decide to gather new documentation through a small number of limited research projects.

Resources included in the Documentation Roadmap will be used in several ways: as primary source material to support the inquiry of the working groups, as appendices to the final self-study report, and for review by the evaluation team (electronically and/or in a resource room during the team’s visit to campus).