

The Road to Accreditation: Are We There Yet?

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According to the comical stereotype, though not too removed from reality, the most common question asked on a journey is "Are we there yet?" Somehow the answer to this question would seem to be self-evident—"When we stop the car and start to unload, we are there!" The question I would like to examine, and perhaps the more informative question, is "Where are we now?"

The journey to accreditation is basically composed of three stages—candidacy, self-study, and peer review/evaluation. In the larger context, CBTS has attained candidacy, we are in self-study, and with a peer evaluation team visit scheduled for spring 2009, we are on our way to accreditation. However, that is sort of like saying that we have been in the United States, we are now in Pennsylvania, and we are on our way to Gramma's house. Accurate, but not helpful!

The current stage of our journey, self-study, is composed of three phases. In the first phase, the self-study steering committee formulates a self-study design and establishes work groups (WGs) with guidelines for their work. To reflect the seminary's day-to-day practice in carrying out our mission, goals, and objectives, we structured our self-study around four WGs—boardroom, office, classroom, and campus. Each WG is chaired by a member of the self-study steering committee—Boardroom by Mr. Ron Clarke, Office by Dr. Jeff Tuttle, Classroom by Dr. Charles McLain, and Campus by Mr. Paul Gibbs. In order to gain as complete a perspective of seminary life as possible, each WG is staffed with representation from across our constituency -- including alumni, trustees, students, faculty, administration, and support staff.

The second phase, where we are now, involves the focused activity of the WGs. In this most intense and arduous portion of the journey, each WG is mandated (given the charge) to examine specific areas of the seminary. The Boardroom's mandate focuses on the seminary's planning and resources, the Office's on the day-to-day administration of the seminary, the Classroom's on the areas of faculty and curriculum, and the Campus's mandate is centered on students and student life issues. At the same time, each WG is mandated with some common issues which cross over all areas of seminary life—e.g., integrity.

The mandate of each WG is ultimately centered in assessment—the heart-beat of institutional improvement and renewal. The assessment process involves a four-step progression. Step #1 — the articulation of the seminary's mission, goals, purpose, aim. This step has been accomplished and is a matter of record. Step #2 — the accumulation of evidence. This step involves the gathering of data which provides evidence of our efforts to carry out our stated mission. This process is currently underway. Step #3 — the analysis of the evidence. In this step each WG will answer two questions: "What is it that we say we do?" and "Do we do what we say we do?" In documenting their responses to these questions, each WG will submit a report of their findings to the self-study steering committee. Step #4 — action. This step, which is not part of the WG's mandate, involves formulating and implementing a plan to correct, to strengthen, or to clarify weaknesses based on the self-study steering committee's report.

The third phase of self-study involves the steering committee taking the individual WG reports and formulating the final report to be submitted to the Middle States Committee on Higher Education (MSCHE). MSCHE has provided guidelines for the Self-Study. These guidelines take the form of fourteen "Standards" (or "Characteristics of Excellence") and their respective "Fundamental Elements." These Standards and Fundamental Elements provide the guidelines for the activity of each WG since every educational institution's function falls within the scope of one of these Standards and is explained and illustrated by the Fundamental Elements for each Standard.

The sign on the map says, "You are here" and there is an arrow showing you exactly where that is. The arrow at this point of the journey points to the second phase of the self-study process—WG activity, more specifically, to the phase of gathering evidence of our practice in preparation for analysis and reporting.