

## Accreditation 2021

# QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Your guide to preparing for the Accreditation Site Visit

March 21 – 24, 2021

## Introduction

Accreditation is about examining the ways that we accomplish our mission and to take a good hard look at the practices, policies, and procedures that we use to get there. Accreditation is also a way to ensure that we are constantly challenging ourselves to improve, not just our students.

The Accreditation Site Visit is an opportunity for us to show our peers from other universities and colleges in our region what a great place Loyola University Maryland is.

Normally this would be a time on campus of great celebration with people running all around checking out the University, but this year the site visit will take place virtually. Even though this is a virtual visit, it is still a chance to get excited about showing off all that we do at Loyola.

## What is MSCHE Accreditation Anyway?

Accreditation is a self-evaluation process engaged in by colleges & universities in our region to assure institutional quality & encourage improvement.

Like other 4-year colleges & universities in our region, Loyola is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). MSCHE has established quality standards that are used to evaluate member institutions rigorously.

It is our job to demonstrate we meet those standards, which in turn, allows MSCHE to affirm for the federal government that we can maintain eligibility to award federal financial aid to students. Our students rely on Loyola's accreditation to receive financial aid.

## The Accreditation Process

### Internal Evaluation

The first step of the process is to evaluate yourself. Loyola's self-study was led by the Committee on Institutional Effectiveness. The committee formed seven work groups, one for each accreditation standard and pulled in a significant number of community members to help author reports on each standard.

Information from these reports was used by the committee to write the final Institutional Self-Study Report. This report outlines our own self-evaluation of our institution. Hundreds of hours of reflection, evidence-gathering, and writing went into creating it, and we are proud of it.

Want to read the full report? [Find the final self-study here](#)

### External Evaluation

The external evaluation is what you are preparing for now by reading this reference guide. From March 21-24, Loyola University will host the Peer Evaluation Team on our campus, or in this case as on our campus as they can be for a virtual visit.

The Peer Evaluation Team is a group of professional peers from a wide variety of roles at colleges & universities across the region. They volunteer their time to provide insight and support to us in achieving strong student outcomes as they review our report and conduct the site visit. The team is chaired by John Hurley, President of Canisius College.

The team is visiting us to make sure we are doing what we say we are doing in the Institutional Self-Study. They are visiting to follow up on any questions they may have; assure we meet MSCHE standards according to our own mission, vision, and values; and to identify any areas of improvement.

They will make a final recommendation to MSCHE that will inform and Commission when it deliberates and decides upon our continued accreditation status. While we are confident that we will ultimately have our accreditation reaffirmed, it is still important that we put in our best effort and demonstrate why we deserve to be re-accredited.

### Mission, Vision, and Values

Loyola's mission, vision, and values guide all that we do. Because of this, it will also guide the Peer Evaluation Team as they read our self-study and conduct the virtual site visit. They want to ensure that we are living up to our mission, vision, and values and inspiring students to 'learn, lead, and serve in a diverse and changing world. For a guide to our mission, vision and values please visit:

[www.loyola.edu/about/mission](http://www.loyola.edu/about/mission)

## Preparing for the Site Visit

We need everyone to be prepared to speak with the Peer Evaluation Team. The team decides who they would like to speak with and requests meetings. They can also request additional meetings during the site visit days.

### Meeting with the Peer Evaluation Team

When you meet with the team, remember that we want to put our best foot forward and show them the things that we do well. Team members will be well prepared, and their time on the site visit will be spent asking questions and getting more information about how Loyola meets the accreditation standards.

**Preparing yourself.** We do not know what the team members will ask – it is up to them. In addition to familiarizing yourself with the self-study consider:

- What is your area doing for students?
- How are you assessing it?
- What improvements or changes have you made or are you planning to make?
- BONUS: How have these improvements had a measured impact?

When answering questions be concise, be honest, and keep the focus on the question asked. If you cannot answer – say so and if appropriate, indicate that you will follow up with them.

**Additional Evidence.** If a team member requests additional evidence, please send these documents to Tracey Frey ([tdfrey@loyola.edu](mailto:tdfrey@loyola.edu)) and let her know which team member requested them. All additional documents will need to be uploaded to the self-study on the Middle States website.

**Be flexible.** If you meet with team members, they could get their question answered after 5 minutes and end the meeting early, or they may need additional time past the scheduled meeting time. They also could ask to meet with additional people or groups during the site visit.

### Getting Ready

To prepare yourself, please familiarize yourself with the Institutional Self-Study. You can do this either using the quick guide below, which highlights examples from each chapter related to the MSCHE standards OR by reading the self-study. We suggest reading the chapters that you are most closely associated with and using the guide below for other chapters if your time is limited. If your time to prepare is limited, the table below gives some general guidance for chapters related to various positions at Loyola.

Chapter/Standard	Best for
1. Mission & Goals	Mission Priority Examen Team, Senior Administrators, Strategic Plan Team, Loyola Conference, Trustees
2. Ethics & Integrity	Academic Senate, HR, Financial Aid, MarComm, Honor Council, Loyola Conference, Equity & Inclusion
3. Design & Delivery of the Student Learning Experience	Faculty, Students, Messina
4. Support of the Student Learning Experience	Faculty, Students, Student Development, Admissions, Messina
5. Educational Effectiveness Assessment	Faculty, Academic Affairs Division
6. Planning, Resources, & Institutional Improvement	Finance Division, Loyola Conference, Budget Committee
7. Governance, Leadership, & Administration	Cabinet, Trustees, Academic Senate, Loyola Conference

## Understanding the Institutional Self-Study

### Our Institutional Priorities

Following from both Loyola's current strategic plan [\*The Ignatian Compass: Guiding Loyola University Maryland to Ever Greater Excellence 2017–2022\*](#), along with the [\*Mission Priority Examen\*](#) completed in 2019, the self-study focuses on advancing the four priorities of the strategic plan and the three related priorities of the *Mission Priority Examen*.

The strategic plan's four priorities are **Ignatian Citizenship; Ignatian Educational Innovation; Ignatian Engagement; and Ignatian Institutional Vitality and Sustainability**. Meanwhile, the three priorities of the *Mission Priority Examen* are **Ignatian Formation; Equity and Inclusion; and Environmental Sustainability**.

### The Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standards

One of the most important parts of the self-study is our institutional analysis of how we are meeting the SEVEN MAIN STANDARDS that examine the difference parts of our institution. Below you will find the text of each standard and a selection of real-world examples from the self-study of how we embody and assess that standard at Loyola University Maryland. Also included are the identified opportunities for improvement from the self-study related to that standard.

For a more thorough explanation of each standard and the criteria used to assess the standard, please visit the MSCHE website at [www.msche.org/standards/](http://www.msche.org/standards/). To learn more about how we meet these standards please see the full self-study.

## Standard 1. Mission & Goals

*The institution's mission defines its purpose within the context of higher education, the students it serves, and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals are clearly linked to its mission and specify how the institution fulfills its mission.*

What's this about?	For Example:
Do our mission and goals guide and support our university community?	The development of the Ignatian Compass Strategic plan resulted in goals to fill the community's desire for deeper engagement with our mission, identity, and core values to strengthen the university.
Are our goals appropriate & achievable?	Though our timeline has been adjusted due to economics, Loyola has met strategic goals and allocated resources for the Fernandez Center and support of student learning as called for in the strategic plan.
How do we assess our institutional mission & goals?	The Mission Priority Examen required us to specifically reflect on how our goals are related to our mission and identity.
Was our response to the COVID-19 pandemic onset consistent with our mission?	Senior leadership prioritizes educational mission and operations during the pandemic, and Campus Ministry & the Jesuit community continues to provide virtual opportunities for spiritual formation & engagement.

### Opportunities for Improvement

- Continue to develop, as resources permit, current strategic initiatives, such as the Mission Driven Leadership program.
- Identify new opportunities to advance the priorities of equity and inclusion and environmental sustainability found in the Mission Priority Examen and rooted in The Ignatian Compass.
- Continue to monitor and assess progress towards completion of strategic initiatives identified in The Ignatian Compass and the Mission Priority Examen, as well as other institutional goals.

## Standard 2. Ethics & Integrity

*Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions. In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully.*

What's this about?	For Example:
Are we committed to academic freedom & integrity?	Loyola has clear statements and criteria of expectations for academic freedom for faculty and standards of integrity for undergraduate and graduate students.
Are our policies fair and transparent?	The University develops and approves through shared governance policies to address grievances, avoid conflicts of interest, promote fair and impartial practices related to employment, and ensure honest and open communications with all constituencies.
Do we have a climate that fosters respect among a diverse range of backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives?	Under the leadership of the University's new chief equity and inclusion officer, with the support of the campus community, Loyola pursues specific initiatives and fosters campus groups, such as those described in this section, to promote a climate of respect for diverse backgrounds and ideas.
Do we comply with applicable state and federal reporting policies and regulations?	Loyola demonstrates this compliance with periodic reports to the appropriate bodies, such as the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) and the federal department of education.

### Opportunities for Improvement

- Prioritize the proper resourcing of the office of equity and inclusion.
- Promote educational opportunities around diversity, equity, and inclusion amongst all Loyola constituencies.

### Standard 3. Design & Delivery of the Student Learning Experience

*An institution provides students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence at all program, certificate, and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences, regardless of modality, program pace/schedule, level, and setting are consistent with higher education expectations.*

What's this about?	For Example:
Do we have qualified faculty who are responsible for the design, deliver, and assessment of the student learning experience?	To be promoted at Loyola, a faculty member must demonstrate that he or she is “an able and dedicated teacher, one who is skilled in the craft and committed to its exercise and demonstrates established excellence” and continued “commitment to teaching and established excellence as a teacher.”
Does our curriculum offer sufficient scope to draw students into new areas of intellectual experience and preparing them to make well-reasoned judgments outside as well as within their academic field?	Loyola's core curriculum introduces students to subjects and topics in literature, history, writing, fine arts, mathematics, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. All students are required to demonstrate spoken and written proficiency in a foreign language and to engage in the fields of philosophy and theology in depth.
Are there sufficient opportunities, resources, and support for professional growth and innovation?	University initiatives designed to add to the quality of the student learning experience include efforts related to High-Impact Practices (HIPs), the establishment of new Faculty Fellows programs, teaching enhancement workshops, the emergence and growth of innovation and entrepreneurial activities, and student engagement through curricular and co-curricular activities.
Are the effectiveness of programs providing student learning experiences reviewed and assessed regularly?	Loyola College of Arts and Sciences uses targeted academic program reviews and/of disciplinary accreditation self-study. Items considered for review are carefully chosen, recognizing that some issues may be better investigated in a subsequent periodic review, or even in the ongoing review departments undertake for their annual reports. The School of Education engages in reviews of national professional standards, and the Sellinger School of Business engages in school-wide AACSB accreditation self-study.

#### Opportunities for Improvement

- Support the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee subcommittee on the Diversity Course Requirement in following through with Senate-approved motions to “establish clear criteria on what constitutes a diversity course” and to “conduct a review of a department's inventory of diversity courses.”
- Implement plans for the inaugural Equity and Inclusion Faculty Fellows cohort to review data and information from the Diversity Course Requirement Subcommittee and work with the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee to address student and faculty members' concerns about the Diversity designation.
- Enhance assessment of academic initiatives by looking deeper into intersections of race/ethnicity and gender to determine whether patterns of inequity exist in the academic engagement of students.
- Investigate the ways in which student persistence in major fields of study can be supported for inclusive academic excellence. Pay particular attention to the ways academic programs and support structures



might eliminate patterns of disparity in student success. The University has begun this work in 2020–21 with an initial focus on STEM majors.

- Continue to invest in digital teaching and learning so that HIPs may continue to be integrated in digital teaching platforms for the promotion of equity, inclusion, and inclusive academic excellence. The University has, when possible, attempted to make strategic procurements that assist remote instruction now, during COVID-19, and when campus reopens to a more innovative and digital future.
- Build on the early success of the Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship and foster an ecosystem of innovation at Loyola by providing greater access to opportunities for students to learn to prototype, learn new technologies, succeed and fail in their efforts, and work in teams.

## Standard 4. Support of the Student Experience

*Across all educational experiences, settings, levels, and instructional modalities, the institution recruits and admits students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals are congruent with its mission and educational offerings. The institution commits to student retention, persistence, completion, and success through a coherent and effective support system sustained by qualified professionals, which enhances the quality of the learning environment, contributes to the educational experience, and fosters student success.*

What's this about?	For Example:
Are our admissions and financial aid policies ethical and compatible with our mission?	In 2019–20, Loyola amended more than a dozen admission and aid policies to make it easier for all students to apply for admission and financial aid. These policy changes were designed to break down barriers inherent in the process for first-generation, low income, and students of color. This work resulted in the first application increase in more than 6 years, the most diverse class in history at 35%, and the most socioeconomically diverse class in recorded history.
How did we adapt our financial aid policies to assist students during the pandemic?	In response to COVID-19, Loyola enhanced its financial aid appeal process during summer 2020, allowing current students to document a specific COVID-19 financial hardship. Loyola provided special one-year grants to assist families impacted by the virus, and more than 250 families submitted appeals. Loyola allocated approx. \$900,000 in COVID-19 need-based grants to support current students.
Do we have programs in place to enhance retention and guide students throughout their educational experience?	The self-study provides examples from the Student Development division, such as the pre-fall Multicultural Awareness Program and the Ignatius Scholars Program, both of which serve traditionally under-represented students in their transition to college.
What changes have been made as a result of assessment of student support?	Student Development addressed evidence that the primary reason for students' voluntary departure from the University was social in nature by restructuring the office of student activities in 2016 to improve and increase late-night and weekend programming. More recently the academic division undertook a self-study of undergraduate academic advising, which resulted in the new <i>Advising as Teaching</i> initiative.

### Opportunities for Improvement

- Investigate further the retention and persistence of students of color. Use the findings to improve the student experience. The University recently engaged a higher education research corporation to assist in this process, and the Provost's Council will use the reports and analysis of Loyola's data for planning and improvement.
- Continue an emphasis on student support initiatives, such as the Multicultural Awareness Program, Ignatius Scholars Program, and the *Advising as Teaching* model, that increase a sense of belonging and that intentionally build a vision of diversity, equity, and inclusion as pillars of academic excellence.

## Standard 5. Education Effectiveness Assessment

*Assessment of student learning and achievement demonstrates that the institution's students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their program of study, degree level, the institution's mission, and appropriate expectations for institutions of higher education.*

What's this about?	For Example:
Have we defined meaningful curricular goals with defensible standards for evaluating whether students are achieving these goals?	Assessable Learning Outcomes were developed in 2018 by CASL. In spring 2019, the Academic Senate accepted the new undergraduate assessable outcomes as a bridge from the Undergraduate Learning Aims to language that indicates measurable and observable skills and knowledge attainment.
Do we consider and use assessment results for improving key indicators of student success?	In the program assessment reports, academic departments identify the ways in which they will use the findings of student learning assessments to improve the program, the student learning experience/achievement, or the assessment of the program. Typical examples are course-level interventions, curricular or pedagogical changes, or improved student support in areas such as major advising, internship experiences, or supplemental academic resources.
Are assessment results regularly communicated to stakeholders?	Course- and program-level assessments are reviewed at the academic program/department level, with annual reports to the relevant associate or assistant dean. Summary reports are shared with the university-level assessment committee, CASL, on an annual basis. CASL provides an annual institutional report to the Academic Senate, the provost, and the deans.
How have we made changes as a result of assessment?	The self-study provides examples of assessment-based changes from across the five academic divisions. One such example from Sellinger was the creation of a new course, Intermediate Accounting III, to improve student preparation in upper-level accounting and for the CPA exam.

### Opportunities for Improvement

- Continue implementation of the Three-Year University-Wide Assessment Plan.
- Develop the next university-wide plan for assessment with attention to an Institution-level Learning Outcome assessment cycle aligned with the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee's future goals for evaluating student learning in the new core curriculum.
- Continue the conversation of equitable and inclusive assessment practices in the Committee on the Assessment of Student Learning by reading the literature of the field and designing its next strategic plan with these principles in mind.
- Support the office of institutional research as it works to provide the University with timely access to data and a new data visualization platform.
- Encourage the university community to use existing data sources as much as possible to reduce survey fatigue among students. Consider how the standing committee status of the Committee on Institutional Effectiveness might be leveraged for this purpose after completion of the Middle States self-study and site visit.

## Standard 6. Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement

*The institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges.*

What's this about?	For Example:
Do we plan for deferred maintenance?	Fully funding this deferred maintenance will cost approximately \$100 million just in mitigation. Recognizing this issue, the University began budgeting for deferred maintenance in 2014 with a goal over time to reach an amount equal to Loyola's annual depreciation expense.
Are our institutional objectives linked to mission and goal achievement?	Recognizing the strategic importance of enhancing learning spaces, promoting collaborative learning, and investing in Loyola's future through innovation, Loyola is in the process of building the Fernandez Family Center for Innovation and Collaborative Learning. The design will allow the building to be LEED certified at the gold level, aligning with the University's <i>Climate Action Plan</i> .
Do we engage in an annual independent audit confirming financial viability with evidence of follow up?	Loyola works with its external auditor, to prepare for each year's annual financial statement audit. The University has a consistent track record of unmodified audit opinions, with no material audit adjustments, which provides the users of Loyola's financial statements, such as trustees, investors, rating agencies, and financial partners, with a high degree of confidence in the fiscal integrity of Loyola's operations.
Do we have well-defined decision-making processes and clear assignment of responsibility and accountability?	The university has a clear budget timeline led by the finance division involving leadership, university governance, and external auditing process.

### Opportunities for Improvement

- Continue to invest in digital learning as an innovative methodology that would distinguish Loyola from peer institutions and help promote sustainable business operations by allowing the University to deliver an education to a more diverse array of students.
- Revisit the Technology Services Roadmap to ensure that resources are invested appropriately to account for the rapid change of technology innovation in higher education.
- Remain cognizant of the importance of compensation equity and appropriately prioritize financial resources to salary increase pools, when available.
- Advance identified initiatives around environmental sustainability in pursuit of 100% carbon neutrality by 2050, consistent with the aspirations of *The Catholic Climate Covenant (St. Francis Pledge)* and goals identified in the University's *Climate Action Plan*.

## Standard 7. Governance, Leadership, and Administration

*The institution is governed and administered in a manner that allows it to realize its stated mission and goals in a way that effectively benefits the institution, its students, and the other constituencies it serves. Even when supported by or affiliated with governmental, corporate, religious, educational system, or other unaccredited organizations, the institution has education as its primary purpose, and it operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy.*

What's this about?	For Example:
Does the board of trustees evaluate University leadership annually?	The Executive Compensation Committee of the board of trustees receives the vice presidents' self-evaluations, the president's evaluation of the vice presidents, and the president's own self-evaluation. After receipt and time to review these submissions, the board chair, and a rotating selection of trustees, convenes in committee to conduct formal evaluations of the president and vice presidents.
Does the president have the assistance of qualified administrators, sufficient in number, that enables him to discharge his/her duties effectively?	University's day-to-day operations are distributed amongst six administrative areas. Five areas report directly to the president. Enrollment Management as well as the University's three academic schools report to the provost and vice president for academic affairs.
Do we have a clear and transparent governance structure with defined roles and responsibilities?	The Academic Senate maintains the University's academic excellence, approves curricular changes and new academic programs, and advances a general mission of improving the University's educational effectiveness.
Do we periodically assess effectiveness of governance, leadership, and administration?	The Budget Committee has assembled an ad hoc subcommittee to comprehensively review the Budget Committee's charter and charge. Chaired by the associate vice president for finance, the subcommittee will examine if changes would promote greater efficiency in the committee's discharge of its responsibilities.

### Opportunities for Improvement

- Conduct, when appropriate, the board of trustees' previously planned comprehensive assessment of its structure and function to ensure that it is well positioned to provide fiduciary oversight and support of the University's Jesuit, Catholic educational mission.
- Continue the ongoing review of the Budget Committee to determine if a revised structure would promote greater efficiencies as the committee discharges its responsibilities.