

2016 UMBC Self-Study for reaccreditation with Middle States

What is Middle States?

The [Middle States Commission on Higher Education](#) is a voluntary, non-governmental, membership association that assures students and the public of the educational quality of higher education. The Commission's accreditation process ensures institutional accountability, self-appraisal, improvement, and innovation through peer review and the rigorous application of standards within the context of institutional mission. Reaccreditation happens on a 10-year cycle (but will be moving to an eight-year cycle going forward), and UMBC was last re-accredited in 2006. UMBC completed a Progress Report in 2008 and Periodic Review Report in 2011 documenting a process of assessment of institutional/program level goals, direct evidence of student learning outcomes and utilization of assessment results to close the loop to improve programs, planning, and resource allocation.

UMBC's Self-Study

In constructing our 2016 selected topics Self-Study, we have focused on our institutional assessment and effectiveness processes, assessment of student learning outcomes, and the student experience through a select group of [Middle States standards](#):

- Standard 1: Mission and Goals
- Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal
- Standard 3: Institutional Resources
- Standard 7: Institutional Assessment
- Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

[Study Groups](#), made up of faculty and staff, researched and wrote chapters of the Self-Study, and were led by a Vice-President/Dean with relevant knowledge and experience of the topic studied. The Study Groups gathered evidence from the campus to inform their assessment of how well UMBC meets Middle States Characteristics of Excellence and served as the basis for a set of evidence-based recommendations to move UMBC forward and to support the goals of our new strategic plan. In addition to the formal [Steering](#) and [Operating](#) committee members, community members including, students, faculty, staff, alumni, and others external stakeholders have provided insights and feedback on the Self-Study during all phases of its development.

UMBC's Overall Self-Study Recommendations

The work of the study groups that constructed the core of this Self-Study has made clear that UMBC is actively engaged in assessment activities throughout the entire enterprise and most especially the assessment of learning. Our efforts have been sustained, and we have changed the way that we operate, teach, and learn based on our assessment activities.

But there is still more to be done. We must invest in, and improve upon, our ability to analyze and assess the impact of our activities and our decisions. This assessment must be formal and capture the attention of decision makers, it must be periodic rather than ad hoc, and it must be tied to planning and budgeting decisions. It must be used as the foundation for discussions about how the University allocates its resources.

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Chapter recommendations:

Mission and goals

- Commit to a culture of continuous improvement, and periodically review progress towards success through data galleries at annual retreats.
- Build UMBC's analytics and assessment capabilities to allow University leaders to use analytics proactively, across divisions and offices to make evidence-based decisions that advance our strategic plan's goals.

Planning, budgeting, and institutional resources

- Formalize, document and share a process to monitor and assess the impact of resource allocations made to priority initiatives.
- Require clear and specific metrics for all new funding requested through the multiyear priority process, as well as a process to review results and take appropriate action.
- Create a "rainy day" fund or central pooled funds to address renovations, equipment and furniture replacement, and other periodic or unanticipated expenditures.
- Identify and implement next steps in achieving more efficient space use, including class scheduling, recapturing unused space, and long-term plans for renovating spaces for better alignment with standards.

Institutional assessment

- Integrate divisions and units' assessment plans with the implementation plan and metrics articulated by the strategic plan
- Develop a formal communication plan for how assessment results are shared to document best practice across the university and better identify longer term trends.
- Create a college/campus-wide process that compiles the results of the APR action plans across units and centers, with higher level synthesis to help with planning, budgeting, and accountability.
- More fully utilize the data from the REX data warehouse to identify problems, possible solutions, and improve decision making

Assessment of student learning

- Cultivate and conduct meaningful assessment of student learning across all departments and programs.
- Establish a method for systemized data collection across all units of the University to collect student learning outcome data in more standardized forms for comparison across the programs, units, and institution.
- Systematically examine trends in aggregated data that reveal learning challenges for particular groups and identify continuing improvements for our students who are not succeeding, allowing us to design even more targeted and effective interventions for supporting these students.
- Consider expanding our institutional learning outcomes beyond the cognitive. We often seek to cultivate students' emotional and cultural maturity in recognition of the complexity of today's society.