



Middle States Commission on Higher Education

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*Sam + Sandra + Vicki, Steady +
Cathy as an FYI
and return*

May 3, 2013

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Dr. Karen A. Stout
Office of the President
Montgomery County Community College
340 DeKalb Pike
Blue Bell, PA 19422

Dear President Stout:

I write to convey my sincere appreciation to everyone at Montgomery County Community College for organizing and participating in an excellent self-study preparation visit on May 2, 2013, and for graciously welcoming me to your institution. It was an informative and enjoyable visit, and I hope that the time I spent on your campus will prove useful to the institution. Please extend my thanks for their hospitality and conversation to everyone with whom I spoke: Self-Study Co-Chairs Steady Moono and Catherine Carsley; Michael J. D'Aniello, Board Chair; members of the Board of Trustees; members of the Steering Committee; Victoria Bastecki-Perez, Provost; and the many other members of the College community who participated in meetings throughout the day.

The draft self-study design that was submitted by Montgomery County Community College was one of the most thoughtful, well-organized, and well-written that I've ever had the pleasure to review. I was particularly impressed with the considerable time and effort that have already been invested in ensuring that the self-study process will be inclusive and transparent, thereby providing the College with meaningful and useful recommendations for continuous quality improvement.

After considerable and thoughtful discussion, the Self-Study Steering Committee has decided to consider a few revisions to the design, including the following:

- The design articulates a clear vision for what will be achieved through self analysis, and the intended outcomes of the process appropriately address the needs of two audiences: Montgomery County Community College, and the Middle States evaluation team that will visit in spring 2015. Given how carefully the College works to integrate self-study with other major endeavors, the Steering Committee plans to add an additional outcome about how the findings of the self-study will support the institution's next iteration of strategic planning (2016 – 2012).
- The organization of the self-study includes two co-chairs, a Steering Committee, and 10 Working Groups whose membership is appropriately inclusive of faculty, administration,

staff, Board, and students. This inclusiveness means that the Steering Committee is rather large, so we discussed mechanisms to facilitate communication including the possibility of designating certain members as a “core group,” empowered to take quick and decisive action should circumstances constrain the ability of the Steering Committee to act as a whole.

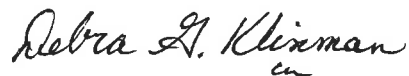
- The draft research questions are analytical and concise. The Steering Committee agreed to review them one more time to ensure that the questions align with the self-study’s intended outcomes, touch on the issues that matter most to the future of the College, and provide sufficient direction to guide the inquiry of the 10 Working Groups.
- While the documents inventory that has already been compiled is thorough and useful, it may be helpful to transition the inventory into the format of the MSCHE Accreditation Readiness Report (“document roadmap”). This would simultaneously serve to ensure that the College has gathered appropriate evidence of compliance with the fundamental elements, while allowing the Working Groups to devote proportionately greater attention to the research questions that are of particular interest to the institution.
- The self-study time table is comprehensive and specific. It may be helpful to note that the evaluation team chair will review the penultimate draft of the self-study prior to her/his visit in fall 2014. In addition, if all relevant self-study materials are completed and submitted to MSCHE by April 15th the Commission will be able to act on the College’s reaffirmation in June 2015; otherwise, the Commission will act in November.
- In describing the evaluation team profile, it would be helpful to expand the list of institutions from the Middle States region that are similar enough to the College to be considered peers without raising undue concern about potential conflicts-of-interest, noting the subset of institutions from which a team chairperson might be invited. It would also be helpful to highlight flagship academic programs. This will assist MSCHE in selecting peers with appropriate credentials and expertise to serve as members of the evaluation team.
- When the self-study is complete, the institution is reminded to submit the signed Certification Statement along with the necessary documentation attesting to compliance with federal regulations including (a) documented procedures for student identity verification in distance or correspondence education; (b) publicly available information about the criteria for evaluating transfer of credit and about any existing articulation agreements; (c) verification that the institution’s 3-year Title IV cohort default rate falls within acceptable federal limits; and (d) evidence that the institution’s assignment of credit hours is in conformity with commonly accepted practice in higher education, and that credit hour policies and procedures are consistently implemented across the institution’s full range of programs. As you know, given recent changes to the national accreditation climate, it’s important for all MSCHE-accredited institutions to address compliance issues alongside their efforts to achieve continuous quality improvement.

Each of these comments is offered in the spirit of collegiality, and I hope they will be considered and used in ways that are helpful to the College community.

In closing, I want to emphasize how impressed I was with the obvious enthusiasm, dedication and commitment of everyone I met at Montgomery County Community College. I also want to commend the College for preparing and submitting an absolutely first-rate design document. I came away from my visit feeling convinced that the institution is well positioned to undertake an exemplary self-study process, and host a successful evaluation team visit in 2014 - 2015.

I thank you again for your warm hospitality and for your own commitment to peer review, and I remain available to assist Montgomery County Community College as you move forward with your self-study process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debra G. Klinman". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Debra G. Klinman, Ph.D.
Vice President

DGK/clr