

NCA Special Emphasis Self-Study Focus:

***Becoming Recognized for National Leadership
in Community Engagement and Experiential Learning***

Special Emphasis Self-Study Highlights:

- Supports new mission statement
- Focus on community engagement and experiential learning as hallmarks of institutional culture and student experience
- Assist institution toward being nationally recognized for community engagement and experiential learning
- Designed to answer question “How do we expand and deepen our commitment to community engagement and experiential learning?”
- Requested by institution, approved by Higher Learning Commission
- Formal agreement with Higher Learning Commission
- Optional forward-looking self-examination
- Conducted in conjunction with traditional accreditation activities
- Process will involve self-examination, plans for continuous improvement, monitoring and tracking
- Collaborative process between institution and Higher Learning Commission (partnership including subsequent consultant visits)
- Self-study report followed by multi-year implementation
- Engaged at all levels: institutional, division, college, department, faculty, staff, students
- Strategies and process will differ between faculty, departments and colleges

Special Emphasis Self-Study Questions and Answers:

What is a Special Emphasis Self-Study?

Short Answer: Is a formal process by which Indiana State University (ISU) hopes to answer the question “How can we expand and deepen our commitment to community engagement and experiential learning?”

Long Answer: A Special Emphasis Self-Study is a process that provides in-depth attention on a select group of issues critical to the institution’s pursuit of continuous improvement and educational excellence. It is a process that will

allow Indiana State University (ISU) to focus on community engagement and experiential learning as areas of strength to achieve excellence. Through a process of self-examination, the institution will engage in a forward looking exploration of areas such as mission, leadership, promotion, tenure, hiring, organization, structure, funding, student involvement, curriculum, faculty involvement, community involvement, external communications and fund raising within the context of community engagement and experiential learning with the intent of being recognized nationally.

Why does ISU want to engage in a Special Emphasis Self-Study?

Short Answer: Engaging in a special emphasis Self-Study will allow the institution (faculty, departments, colleges and major units) to examine ways in which we can more fully integrate community engagement and experiential learning into all aspects of student life and the ISU experience.

Long Answer: ISU has uniquely positioned itself as an institution that incorporates community engagement and experiential learning into the student experience. The success of those efforts is evidenced by the fact that the institution is one of only 62 that have received a special Carnegie designation recognizing this area of strength. While these efforts, activities and recognition have effectively served to inform many of the aspects of what we do, the institution intends to use the Special Emphasis Self-Study process to further integrate and positively shape the ISU educational experience such that ISU will occupy a national leadership role in community engagement and experiential learning.

Can all institutions engage in a Special Emphasis Self-Study and if not, why is ISU permitted to do this?

Short Answer: No – the Special Emphasis Self-Study is an option that is only available to institutions with a strong historical record of accreditation visits and that the Higher Learning Commission feels can benefit through a prospective examination of an area of unique focus to achieve excellence.

Long Answer: To be eligible to engage in a Special Emphasis Self-Study, an institution must be a mature accredited institution with a history of positive decennial reviews with no major interim monitoring. The institution must submit a Special Emphasis Self-Study proposal to the Higher Learning Commission, have the proposal accepted and enter into a formal agreement with the Commission to engage in the multi-year examination and planning process. In essence, the Special Emphasis Self-Study process is collaboration

between the institution and the Commission designed to achieve significant advancement and improvement in the achievement and realization of its mission and vision.

Is the Special Emphasis Self-Study the same thing as the general, and more traditional, comprehensive NCA evaluation?

Short Answer: No – the Special Emphasis Self-Study is an additional forward looking activity which will begin along with the traditional decennial evaluation but will continue beyond the completion of the formal Self-Study report and visitation to assist the institution with fully achieving its vision of being a national leader in community engagement and experiential learning.

Long Answer: The Special Emphasis Self-Study is not the same thing as the normal decennial comprehensive self-study. The Special Emphasis self-study process is initiated at the same time as the comprehensive evaluation but will continue on beyond the normal self-study report and campus visitation. Through this process, it is expected that community engagement and experiential learning will be the signature and defining characteristics that uniquely position ISU. The Special Emphasis Self-Study will result in a separate report that looks at continuous improvement and defines, prospectively, strategies that will result in significantly advancing the institutional mission and vision. In many respects, the process and report preparation that accompany the Special Emphasis Self-Study is the beginning of a multi-year process during which the institution will work collaboratively with the Commission (through a series of consultations and visits) to achieve the goals defined through the Special Emphasis process.

If they aren't the same, how does the Special Emphasis Self-Study relate to the general NCA Self-Study?

Short Answer: The Special Emphasis Self-Study and general NCA Self-Study are each part of the overall institutional accreditation process – the general NCA self-study is a historical look at the institution, the Special Emphasis is a forward looking process.

Long Answer: In the broadest sense, the Special Emphasis Self-Study and related report is part of the general overall accreditation process. Where the general accreditation process looks historically (past 10 years) for evidence that the institution has responded effectively to five accreditation criteria, the special emphasis process looks forward and assists the institution with realizing its overall institutional vision and goals.

How will the Special Emphasis Self-Study benefit the University?

Short Answer: The Special Emphasis Self-Study will help ensure that institutional policies and resources encourage, support and enhance institutional focus on community engagement and experiential learning.

Long Answer: The Special Emphasis Self-Study will allow the University to examine its policies, strategies, resource allocations, etc. to ensure that University activities are consistent with, and support, the defined institutional focus on community engagement and experiential learning. Organizational structures, internal and external involvement, fund raising, mission, policy (handbook), human resource practice and policy, tenure and promotion, processes, budgeting, etc. will be reviewed to help ensure alignment with institutional strategic goals, mission and vision. Moreover, the institution will examine strategies that will help ensure that ISU will be recognized nationally for its leadership in community engagement and experiential learning.

Who is involved in the Special Emphasis?

Short Answer: Every academic and administrative unit will be involved in the special emphasis. Divisions, colleges, and departments will participate in structured activities in order to create a plan specific to their unit. In addition, campus governance will be involved, as appropriate, in the review of relevant policies and practices and recommendations for future strategies.

Long Answer: The purpose of the special emphasis is to create a University-wide plan focused on community engagement and experiential learning. As a result, the entire campus will be involved in the planning process. Each unit will be involved in planning to identify priorities related to community engagement and experiential learning and implementation strategies for meeting those priorities. Campus governance will review University policies that may impact community engagement and experiential learning and make recommendations for needed policy changes.

How will the Special Emphasis Self-Study benefit my College or Department?

Short Answer: Colleges and departments will use the Special Emphasis Self-Study process to assess current and future opportunities to expand and enhance department and faculty involvement with, and integration of, community engagement and experiential learning.

Long Answer: Colleges will use the Special Emphasis Self-Study process to evaluate and ensure that college level policies, procedures, practices, programs

and resources are aligned with community engagement and experiential activities in ways that improve the academic experience. Departments will have the opportunity to examine various aspects such as promotion, tenure, hiring, organization, structure, program, and curriculum to further integrate community engagement and experiential learning. These efforts may lead to plans for program and curricular revisions, new programs, and enhanced engagement with internal and external constituencies.

How will my department and my college be involved?

Short Answer: Each faculty, department, and college will use the general self-study guidelines to define their own internal process that will work best to achieve the broad self-study goal of continuous improvement.

Long Answer: Individual faculty, departments and colleges will assist in the development of the overall Special Emphasis Self-Study process and will use the general guidelines developed as part of the process to define how each unit (department or college) will engage in the self-study and subsequently use information gained through the self examination to define appropriate strategies to enhance community engagement and experiential learning opportunities for their students.

How will the Special Emphasis Self-Study benefit me, as a faculty member?

Short Answer: Faculty members may use the Special Emphasis Self-Study process to assess and tailor community engagement and experiential learning opportunities in their teaching, research, and service.

Long Answer: The Special Emphasis Self-Study process will support faculty efforts to assess and tailor community engagement and experiential learning opportunities in their teaching, research, and service. The focus afforded by the self-study process may lead to greater faculty recognition of their contributions to the community engagement and experiential learning aspects of our mission and will support faculty in their efforts to assess and tailor their current integration of such activities in their various faculty roles.

Will the Special Emphasis activities be the same for every department and college?

Short Answer: No – because disciplines vary widely, each department and college will define how the Special Emphasis Self-Study process will best serve its unique and individual need.

Long Answer: No – the manner in which each faculty member, department, and college integrates community engagement and experiential learning will vary and is defined by factors such as discipline, culture, etc. Each department and college will conduct its own examination and will refine its future direction in ways that are appropriate to their individual circumstances. The integration of community engagement and experiential learning in one course, department or college may be very different than that found in another course, department or college. The use of community engagement and experiential learning will be highly contextual and as such the Special Emphasis Self-Study process will intentionally be flexible and inclusive.

How will administrative departments be involved?

Short Answer: Administrative departments will engage in planning activities similar to those of their academic counterparts. Each department will determine how community engagement and experiential learning can be enhanced through their activities, programs, or services.

Long Answer: The programs and services of non-academic departments are critical components of the student experience and have a significant impact on the community’s interaction with the University. As such, the special emphasis plan must address the important contributions staff members in these departments make to the institution’s community engagement and experiential learning efforts. Administrative departments will engage in planning activities similar to those of their academic counterparts. Each department will conduct its own examination and will refine its future direction in ways that are appropriate to their individual circumstances.

How will the Special Emphasis Self-Study tie to the Strategic Plan project that President Bradley has talked about?

Short Answer: The Special Emphasis Self-Study process will support and complement the broader strategic planning activities of the institution.

Long Answer: Because the Special Emphasis Self-Study process is prospective (forward looking), work associated with the special emphasis examination and planning will complement the broader strategic planning activities of the institution. Many of the activities and work associated with the Special Emphasis Self-Study will support and augment the institution’s strategic planning activities. More importantly, the underlying premise of the Special Emphasis Self-Study process is that the self-study focus, “community engagement and experiential learning” will assist the University with looking at “issues that are critical to

significant advancement and improvement in the achievement and realization of its mission and vision". Hence, by extension – the Special Emphasis Self-Study and institutional strategic planning share commonality through institutional mission and vision.

What is the timeline for the Special Emphasis Self-Study?

Short Answer: The self-study timeline is not defined at this time. The self-study process will begin on November 10, 2008 at a campus wide-retreat.

Long Answer: The Special Emphasis Self-Study process will be a multi-year process that will be defined by assessment and examination, reporting, consultation and visits, tracking and monitoring, further refinement. The Higher Learning Commission will assign a consultant team that will work with the University to develop strategies that will support a continuous improvement process that will allow individual faculty, departments and colleges to contribute to the realization of defined institutional goals. The exact timeline and dates will be developed as the self-study approach is "fleshed out".