

CONFERENCE *for* MERCY HIGHER EDUCATION

CMHE Mission Self-study and Peer Review Cycle Two

--a process designed in light of the institution's Mercy Catholic identity, its sponsorship by the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, its membership in the Conference for Mercy Higher Education, and its Covenant of sacred trust, a Covenant shared by all Mercy colleges and universities, to be about the vital ministry of higher education in the Mercy spirit.

Introduction and Rationale for the Self-study and Peer Review Process

In 2012, the Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) initiated a Mission Self-study and Peer Review process for all institutions sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

CMHE identified a two-fold purpose for this cyclic review:

1. To assure the religious sponsors of Mercy colleges and universities—the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas—that Mercy institutions are embracing the purpose for which they were founded: to offer higher education in the spirit and ethos of Mercy, and
2. To examine, assess, celebrate, and support each college/university's embrace of Mission as a Mercy Catholic ministry of higher education—in the present moment and into the future.

In addition, the process is timed to take place *before* an institutional accreditation self-study in order to add fullness and depth to the mission standard of the accreditation. This process has been recognized by various accrediting bodies.

It is expected that the process for each self-study be inclusive, allowing for all members of the college or university have the opportunity for significant engagement and input. It is suggested that institutions use a method similar to their regional accreditation design in developing the self-study and in preparing for the peer team review.

Features of the design might include: a steering committee chaired by the Mission Officer and including the writer(s) of the Self-study; opportunities for widespread campus dialogue and input, as well as feedback prior to the completion and submission of the final report; and small teams to research and report on each topic/question. The design and the composition of the committees are to be submitted to CMHE six to twelve months before the scheduled peer review team visit. CMHE reserves the right to offer additional recommendations for an effective, inclusive process. The final self-study document is due in electronic format to CMHE no later than one month prior to the scheduled peer review team visit.

CMHE encourages discussion, analysis and answers on the part of the institution to five key questions in the development of the Self-study. Additional questions are offered herein in an appendix and are intended to provide a framework for deep reflection and dialogue on Catholic identity and Mercy heritage, charism and mission. These topics/questions may begin as personal reflections and move to ever larger circles of reflection and dialogue, as in departments, clubs, schools, committees, as a board . . . and as an institution.

CMHE encourages responses to the five key questions that provide evidence of *what* is being done regarding a certain topic/question and *how* particular measures are being carried out, as well as critical reflection on the *impact* this has had on the institution's educational mission.

Key Questions

Key Question One:

What does the Covenant mean for your institution?

This section is intended particularly for Trustees, the President, and senior leadership.

- A. The Preamble to the Covenant explicates the understanding of the Sisters of Mercy relative to the mission and identity of their sponsored colleges and universities. How does this understanding inform and form the culture and the lived experience of the Catholic/Mercy mission and identity of the institution?
- B. How does the institution experience their relationship with the Sisters of Mercy and the CMHE? In what ways does this support, sustain and enhance the mission?

Key Question Two:

What does the Mercy Catholic Mission mean for your institution?

- A. What does Mercy Catholic mean for the institution's academic mission?
- B. What does Mercy Catholic mean when it is embraced personally and collectively as an institution of higher education?
- C. Name the gifts and challenges to an active Mission-focus that guide the institution?
- D. Give examples of where mission and identity are experienced and engaged at all levels of the community. Where would the community desire to see greater attention given to these?

Key Question Three:

How does the institution focus and apply Mission within each of the *Mission Integration Core Areas*?

CMHE has adopted a framework for mission integration that posits Catholic identity, Mercy heritage, charism and mission as its foundational elements. It has identified eight specific core areas where mission integration serves to inspire, animate and further develop the mission of the sponsored institution. (Refer to *Mission Integration Core Areas*.)

The Self-Study should include evidence of what and how the institution is integrating aspects of Mission for each of the Core Areas. After reflection on the Mercy Way and Mission assessment criteria documents, consider each of the areas of integration.

- A. How does the C/U utilize the supporting documents and other resources provided by the CMHE to inform and shape its policies, practices and programs? Give evidence and reflect on the impact on the institution.
- B. How effective is ongoing assessment of mission in further integrating the Mission Integration Core Areas in the work of the institution?

Key Question Four:

What does the collected evidence demonstrate and tell about the vitality and effectiveness of Mission at this institution?

- A. Based on data, provide analysis and reflection on how effective Mission integration has proven to be in terms of inspiration and animation relative to mission, its foundational elements, common characteristics of the Mercy Way and mission assessment guidelines.
- B. How does the institution integrate mission and identity into the strategic planning process?
- C. Based on analysis of data and appropriate material, and experience, provide reflection regarding some of the challenges and opportunities that are manifested presently and maybe on the horizon in terms of Mission.

Key Question Five:

In terms of Mission, what is the “take away” from this Self-Study?

Reflecting on the various aspects of *Ex Corde*, the *Mercy Way* and the Mission Integration Core Areas as a whole,

- A. What do you as an institution need to raise up, cherish and celebrate?
- B. What in this Self-Study can you replicate, enhance or carry into other areas?
- C. What in this Self-Study would be best described as surprises?
- D. What are areas that need attention, changes, or support?
- E. What are plans for going forward?

Appendices

Appendix One: Key References

Institute Leadership Conference Statement on Catholic Identity and Mercy Charism for CMHE Colleges and Universities:

The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas recognizes that higher education is integral to the mission of the Church and is an effective expression of our Mercy mission. The ministry expresses our commitment to the pursuit of truth and knowledge and to the furtherance of the social, political, economic, and spiritual well-being of the human community. We encourage collaboration among Mercy institutions, regional communities and sisters in ministry.

--Institute Leadership Conference, Statement on Mercy Higher Education, 1993

CMHE Statement: Our Catholic Identity and Mercy Charism

A Mercy institution of higher education stands within the lineage of the Catholic intellectual tradition in its pursuit of truth and integration of knowledge for the common good. It participates in the Church's mission under the sponsorship of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas through the ministry of education, giving tangible evidence to its mission through ongoing teaching, scholarship and service. It demonstrates the values of mercy, justice and compassion as communicated through the traditions of the Sisters of Mercy. These common characteristics are uniquely given expression within each campus community.

Graduates of Mercy institutions are informed and shaped intellectually, socially and spiritually through a faith-inspired education. The academic study of the liberal arts and sciences and mastery of the professional disciplines enable Mercy graduates to be responsible leaders in their communities and professions. They appreciate and are informed by a Christian commitment to mercy and justice in the world. The living tradition of a Mercy college or university is sustained by a strong collegial community, with hospitality to new ideas and energies, and through collaboration within the Conference of Mercy Higher Education.

--Statement approved by the CMHE Board April 20, 2010

Guidelines from *Ex corde Ecclesiae* for Catholic Colleges and Universities:

1. A Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such;
2. A continuing reflection in light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research;

3. Fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church;
4. An institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life.

Appendix Two (attached): *Mission Integration Core Areas (revised 2021)*

Appendix Three (attached): *Covenant of Mercy Higher Education*