One of the myths about the accreditation review process is that it puts professional development on hold for years while a school reflects upon its practice. In reality, a school’s multi-year self-reflection opens professional development leadership opportunities to school librarians who carefully integrate 21st-century learning into the process for all participants. Librarians’ training equips them to organize and plan efficient self-study accreditation reviews, and their expertise empowers them to embed skills instruction and application opportunities for faculty. Regardless of whether they are assigned leadership responsibilities at the outset of the evaluation, librarians can use the process to demonstrate leadership within and beyond their school. The following description offers one example of how this process played out in one school, but the experience is replicable across educational environments and circumstances—at least partially, if not in its entirety.

In the Beginning
When New Canaan High School began planning its 2013 New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) decennial review, the steering committee, which was cochaired by a school librarian, chose to administer the self-study via Google Apps™ and thus transformed a laborious look backward into a glorious leap forward. For context, the back-story follows.

Even the resisters could not help marveling at the collaborative potential when 120 faculty members cowrote a document from thirty remote locations. The paper “lab schedule sign up” was migrated to Google Calendar™. Google Forms™ was used to collect data; faculty and students were given Gmail™ e-mail addresses; students were taught how to create and collaborate using Google Sites™ and Presentations. Google Apps provided the transformative shift the school needed to become
RATHER THAN RELINQUISH THE SCHOOL’S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TIME TO THE SELF-STUDY, ICT SPECIALISTS INSTEAD PLANNED A SELF-STUDY THAT EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

Win-Win: Professional Development and Self-Study Decisions

When the two-year NEASC self-study process was launched in the fall of 2011, the ICT team recognized that our work would provide an opportunity to further integrate our use of Google Apps—to “inDOCtrinate” the holdouts. The steering committee was committed to “DOCumenting” the self-study process with as much transparency as possible within the district, and beyond, where possible and advisable. (Experts advised against making our self-study report accessible to the public.) Rather than relinquish the school’s professional development time to the self-study, ICT specialists instead planned a self-study that embedded professional development.

Librarian’s Vital Role

As steering committee cochair, the school librarian created a Google Sites Web portal to warehouse the school’s self-study materials, including the substantive self-study report, which was drafted on Google Drive™. Using Blogger™, she launched a collaborative blog where faculty could report their progress. She set up a Google Calendar to manage the committees’ meeting schedules and deadlines. She embedded spreadsheets to organize committees and to prioritize the school’s overarching strengths and needs. She taught faculty how to create distribution lists and inbox filters in Gmail. She facilitated NEASC meetings using Google Presentations and SlideRocket, a multimedia presentation tool that is available via Google Marketplace, free of charge, to Google Apps domain holders.

Google Apps empowers authors to manage access permissions at five levels: 1) private (shared only with individuals using their e-mail addresses); 2) domain members with link; 3) all domain members; 4) anyone with link; 5) accessible to the public on the Web. Therefore, all faculty members were taught how to modify access and editing rights to parts of their work. The Web portal remained open to the public, but its components’ accessibility shifted as appropriate.

Professional Development Objectives

The ICT team established several professional development objectives:

A) Create more consistency among teachers’ use of Google Apps at New Canaan High School.

B) Encourage early adopters of Google Apps to coach their peers.

C) Expand the faculty’s use of Google Apps beyond Gmail and Drive.

D) Demonstrate that synchronous face-to-face meeting time is not a prerequisite for collaboration.

E) Ensure that the NEASC self-study provided teachers with practical professional learning that would immediately and positively impact their instruction.

School’s Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Objectives

To develop the school’s core values, beliefs, and learning expectations, standards committees used Google Docs™ to brainstorm their vision of an ideal New Canaan High School (NCHS) graduate. The ICT team provided a “character map” template that included a Docs-drawn stick figure and instructed committees to “CRiS” the document: copy, rename it, and share. “CRiS” is an acronym many NCHS teachers used with their students in class, but this project provided all teachers an opportunity to learn and practice CRiS, empowering those who could to guide those who needed assistance. Each committee populated its “character map” of the ideal NCHS graduate (see figure 1) and made the document accessible to the NCPS.
community through the Share settings. Using Google Forms, the ICT team compiled, in a single spreadsheet, hyperlinks to each committee’s document, so that the steering committee could aggregate the committees’ work, and prepare for the next stage.

Each committee was asked to contribute the language from its “character map” textboxes to a collaborative Google Doc shared by the entire faculty. Thus, a faculty-generated list of the qualities, skills, characteristics, and habits of mind that epitomized the ideal New Canaan High School graduate was aggregated. Since the list contained an abundance of overlap and redundancy, it was converted into a word cloud <Wordle.net> (see figure 2). Using the Google Doc Word Count feature (under the Language tab), the steering committee leadership team used the most often repeated words to draft the school’s Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations document (see <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B5EY_6wgXBGXKnVObkE2ZFJSNC05N0oyNGQxZnFkZw/edit?usp=sharing>).

Thus, on the very first morning of a review process that had threatened to consume virtually two years of professional development time, the ICT team laid the groundwork for an ambitious skill-building program that would impact teaching and learning throughout the school.

Shared Online Community Space

Within a few weeks, the NCHS NEASC website (see <http://nchsnecs13.info>) was unveiled. It provided a link to the collaborative nchsnecs13 blog (see <http://bit.ly/nchsnecs13blog>). Each NEASC standard had its own page featuring an embedded blank Google Doc, a space where committee members would later collaborate to populate their assigned self-study report. By tweaking the HTML code and “sophistifying” the site’s appearance, the team collaborated to circumvent some of the constraints in Google Sites software and to demonstrate the software’s potential as a publication tool.

By creating a template for committees to populate with their criteria for assessment, the ICT team facilitated the creation of school-wide rubrics designed to measure aspects of 21st-century learning. The
finished rubrics can be viewed at the webpages identified below.


Because the rubric documents, like the standards reports, were embedded in the website, the website updates in real time. The team taught teachers to post comments about their experience with the rubric on the nchsneasc13.info website. The steering committee cochairs worked with the network manager to add the expectations (as learning standards) to the gradebook in the student information system (PowerSchool); this addition enabled teachers to use the standards to measure 21st-century learning within any given assignment.

With support and guidance from the ICT team, the faculty learned how to edit tables in Google Docs, post comments to Google Sites, embed a live document in Google Sites, and use the standards feature in PowerSchool during the rubric-development phase of the NCHS self-study.

Collection and Organization of Evidence

The team struggled to find an efficient strategy to digitize evidence collection. Through trial and error, an effective system was developed, but only after seven hundred documents had already been submitted, and there was no feasible way to digitize them. The self-study process calls for extensive evidence collection. These materials, which include student work as well as administrative and programmatic documentation, are provided to the visiting accreditation team of sixteen to nineteen educators from the New England region during their four-day site visit.

The steering committee organized a “flash mob” evidence collection event—not really a flash mob at all—rather, just a narrow time window when all teachers were asked to submit graded student work, accompanied by the teacher’s assignment, and the school-wide rubric used to assess the work. The tactic (see figure 5) was more of a marketing ploy than a professional development strategy, but it fueled constructive conversation among faculty about the criteria that made for quality submissions.

Initially, the ICT team recommended using Google Forms for evidence collection; it soon became apparent that a better solution was needed. For one thing, viewing responses in the spreadsheet was unwieldy,

![Figure 4. Sample rubric used in accreditation review at New Canaan High School.](image1)

![Figure 5. Example of posted instructions for teachers.](image2)
and concerns were expressed about how that awkwardness would play out during the site visit. Moreover, teachers often forgot to change sharing settings and make documents accessible to viewers, resulting in a great teachable moment for faculty, but adding another management layer for the steering committee’s cochairs. Teachers were unsure how to include graded student work, and thus omitted it altogether. Hard-copy submissions were problematic as well. Much of the collected evidence supported more than one of the NEASC standards’ fifty-five indicators. An effective solution would align evidence with all applicable indicators without having to replicate document(s). This last piece, digitally collecting, archiving, storing, and accessing materials, called for a librarian’s skill and expertise.

The librarian’s solution involved some creative thinking. The solution included the use of Adobe Acrobat in conjunction with a photocopy center, library barcodes, Gmail, and Google Drive. The district maintains a copy center where copiers have the capacity to digitize print resources and deliver them via e-mail. Before submitting evidence packets to the center for digitization, the steering committee paginated items, crossed out all student identification references and attached a barcode. The copy center then digitized each packet and included the document barcode number in the e-mail subject line. At <www.labnol.org/internet/send-gmail-to-google-drive/21236>, the librarian found a useful open-source script created by Amit Agarwal, author of the blog Digital Inspiration: Tech à la Carte <www.labnol.org>; the script automatically adds e-mailed digitized evidence to a shared Google Drive folder. The URL to the PDF evidence packet, which was configured for access by anyone who has its link, was added to an evidence-collection cover sheet. The librarian created this document as an online PDF form in Adobe Acrobat, which was synchronized to a My Adobe account. When the form was submitted, each field populated a database. The form included fields for the document barcode, the URL to the PDF file on Google Drive, and check boxes for each of NEASC standards’ fifty-five indicators, among other items. This process generated a sortable spreadsheet that could be reorganized according to users’ needs—by standard, indicator, barcode number, discipline, teacher’s name, grade level, course name, keyword, or any other criterion. Hard copies of the evidence packets were filed according to barcode number so that visiting team members could locate evidence regardless of its assigned indicators (see figure 6).

Because this solution was arrived at through trial and error and fairly late in the process, it was used to index only 28 percent of the collected evidence. Had it been introduced earlier in the process, the librarian could have introduced this new array of tools, their uses and skills to the faculty. It was a missed opportunity.

One incentive for sharing it here is so others can adopt/adapt it and use it to index their school/district’s best instructional practices in the library’s Online Public Access Catalog.

Pay-Off

On the final day of the site visit, in front of the assembled school faculty and the NEASC visiting committee, the visiting team’s chair acknowledged the library program’s role in promoting 21st-century learning for all New Canaan High School learners. It was one of the chair’s seven allotted commendations, one for each standard. Clearly, participating in the NEASC self-study promoted dialogue and reflection about educational goals, philosophy, and professional practice. Introducing Google Apps as the vehicle for the process transformed that work into a hands-on eighteen-month, skill-building program. In a school that identified problem solving, reflection, communication, healthy living, collaboration, respect, and contribution as 21st-century learning expectations, the ICT team empowered the faculty members to dedicate NEASC self-study time to practicing what they value.

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