II.2 Self-Study overview

Accreditation by the ALA Committee on Accreditation (COA) emphasizes the process of continuous self-evaluation and assessment within the context of the Standards for Accreditation of Master’s Programs in Library and Information Studies (Standards); it also includes the preparation of a Self-Study (formerly called a Program Presentation) that summarizes the outcomes of this process. The self-evaluation and assessment process and the Self-Study are prerequisites for the COA to confer accreditation status on master’s program(s) of library and information studies. The purpose of these guidelines is to help programs to develop their self-study documents. The guidelines are based on the Standards in their entirety, including the Introduction and Afterword, and on procedures and policies adopted by the COA.

As stated in section I, the Standards identify the indispensable components of accredited library and information studies programs, foster excellence, and respect schools’ rights and obligations regarding initiative, experimentation, innovation, and individual program differences. Thus, these guidelines contain few absolute requirements. It should be noted, however, that the Standards state that there must be ongoing assessment not only of educational processes and resources, but also of the successful use of those processes and resources to achieve established objectives expressed as student learning outcomes. The Standards also require the use of the results of assessment evaluation for broad-based, continuous program planning, development, and improvement. Demonstration and documentation of this ongoing process of assessment, planning, and continuous improvement must be evident in every Self-Study.

The Self-Study includes information derived from ongoing self-analysis, evaluation, and assessment regarding faculty and student achievements as well as educational outcomes that demonstrate the program’s success in attaining its objectives and its continued compliance with the Standards. The document must describe the program at the present time and analyze challenges, strengths, and weaknesses of the program(s). It must explain the genesis of those challenges, strengths, and weaknesses and, most importantly, identify the program’s plans and goals for future development, self-evaluation, and assessment.