



Middle States Commission on Higher Education

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Guidelines

The Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO): Role and Responsibilities

Communication between MSCHE and Its Member Institutions

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) and its candidate and member institutions share a mutual responsibility for understanding and operating in accordance with current accreditation standards and requirements. Close communication and active engagement in accreditation-related issues are hallmarks of maintaining a successful relationship between MSCHE and its member institutions.

To facilitate this relationship, MSCHE assigns a vice president to serve as **Commission liaison** to each candidate or member institution. This Commission liaison maintains an overall familiarity with the institution, communicates about accreditation issues with leaders of the institution, consults with the institution during accreditation events, visits the institution on specified occasions, and answers questions and interprets MSCHE policies and procedures as requested.

The Commission considers the **president** (or chief executive officer) to be each institution's official representative. The president is the primary recipient of all official correspondence from the Commission regarding the institution's accreditation status. In addition, the president is invited to nominate and vote in the election of Commissioners, to offer comments and vote on standards and policies that require membership approval, and to represent the institution's position in relation to a variety of other Commission requests.

Each institution also appoints an **Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)** to serve as the primary contact with MSCHE staff and as a resource to the institution on MSCHE accreditation issues. Official correspondence between MSCHE and the institution's president is typically copied to the ALO. Other types of communication (emails, faxes, phone calls) may occur directly between the Commission staff and the ALO; in such instances, the ALO should ensure that the president is appropriately informed.

Selection of the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)

The effective ALO is carefully selected by the president and has the time, knowledge, and authority to engage in regular communication about accreditation-related issues with the institution's president, other offices and individuals on campus, and the Commission. The ALO should be in regular and direct communication with the president. In addition, the ALO should have adequate time and resources to focus on accreditation issues and should have appropriate status, visibility, authority, knowledge, access to data, and support from the senior administration to fulfill the responsibilities of this position.

The president should *not* assume the role of the ALO personally; he or she should delegate this important and time-consuming responsibility. Likewise, the ALO should *not* be a consultant who is hired to assist the institution with accreditation issues or reviews.

Responsibilities of the Institution's Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)

The institution's ALO is responsible for the following:

1. Maintaining familiarity with the Commission's standards, policies, procedures and resources by regularly reviewing the MSCHE website (www.msche.org), publications, and other resources.
2. Maintaining familiarity with the institution's accreditation history by reviewing the Statement of Accreditation Status posted on the MSCHE website, past accreditation reports, and correspondence with the Commission.
3. Serving as the primary (though not sole) contact person with MSCHE staff, which includes encouraging institutional staff to route appropriate inquiries about accreditation-related issues through the ALO; ensuring institutional compliance with all Commission requests in a timely manner; reading the Commission's newsletters and emails; and sharing relevant information with institutional colleagues.
4. Ensuring that compliance with the Commission's standards and policies is incorporated into the ongoing planning and evaluation processes of the institution.
5. Serving as a key resource person in the planning and preparation of accreditation-related documents including the decennial Self-Study Report, the Periodic Review Report, Substantive Change requests, progress reports, and monitoring reports.
6. Coordinating the preparation of the annual Institutional Profile.
7. Ensuring the accuracy of institutional data collected by the Commission and updating such information when changes occur at the institution. This includes reviewing the institution's Statement of Accreditation Status, as it appears on the MSCHE website, and contacting MSCHE to request changes when appropriate.
8. Notifying the Commission *in advance* of substantive changes and major institutional developments, in accord with the policies and procedures of the Commission, and coordinating all substantive change requests. The ALO should inform institutional colleagues that retroactive approval of substantive changes cannot be granted and that late submissions may result in negative consequences.
9. Maintaining and updating institutional files of accreditation materials such as reports related to accreditation and reaffirmation; accreditation manuals, standards and policies; schedules of all visits; and correspondence with the Commission.
10. Ensuring broad-based institutional understanding of and involvement in institutional compliance with Commission standards, policies, and procedures, and emerging and

evolving accreditation issues. This includes familiarizing faculty, staff, administrators, board members, students and other stakeholders with the Commission's policies and procedures, especially when such documents are newly adopted or revised, and providing training to keep the campus community up-to-date as accreditation issues change over time.

11. Serving as a resource person and helping to prepare for and coordinate the details of all accreditation-related visits by Commission staff and peer evaluators.
12. Maintaining regular contact with the MSCHE vice president who is assigned as the institution's liaison and responding promptly when contacted by the Commission.

Increasing the Effectiveness of the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)

The effectiveness of the ALO will increase through participation in Commission activities including the MSCHE annual conference and other training events, as appropriate, and active service as a volunteer peer evaluator. An Evaluator Data Form can be created or updated through the MSCHE website (www.msche.org).