



Accreditation Review Cycle and Monitoring

(To be phased in beginning spring 2018)

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I. Purpose

This policy describes the accreditation cycle and the components of accreditation review for institutions accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (the Commission).

II. Statement of Policy

Accreditation and Candidate status are continuing statuses which, once granted, are monitored and periodically reviewed according to a cycle established by the Commission. All aspects of an institution are subject to review.

The Commission's cycle of scheduled reviews is intended to assist institutions in setting appropriate goals and measuring their success at regular intervals. The Commission evaluates institutions according to the requirements set forth in the Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation.

The Commission's eight-year cycle of review of accredited institutions begins with an in-depth institutional self-study that is reviewed by peer evaluators during an on-site evaluation visit. The self-study and on-site review are used to assess the institution's compliance with Commission standards and requirements of affiliation, verify compliance with accreditation-relevant federal regulations, and identify areas needing improvement. The review process results in an accreditation decision in accordance with the Commission policy *Accreditation Actions*.

Institutions submit annually an update of institutional data and other information requested by the Commission. In the fourth year following the self-study visit, the Commission conducts an off-site mid-point peer review based on the cumulative information provided by the institution. Institutions are provided a report on the institution's performance with respect to student achievement and financial sustainability.

While the Commission sets a regular schedule of review, the Commission reserves the right to review a member institution's accredited or candidate status at any time. Except during the period of transition to an eight-year cycle, institutions will not usually be permitted to exceed eight years before an evaluation visit and accreditation action. The Commission, however, reserves the right to require an institution to undertake earlier self-study based on substantive changes or other circumstances at the institution.

Newly accredited institutions will conduct a self-study and undergo an evaluation visit four years after the initial grant of accreditation. In accordance with federal regulation, institutions seeking accreditation may not hold candidate for accreditation status for longer than 5 years.

III. Components of the Process

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education makes accreditation decisions on the basis of a three-tiered accreditation decision-making process conducted by volunteer evaluators from peer institutions, committees of the Commission, and the Commission, which is supported by staff members:

- At the first tier of the decision-making process, volunteer evaluators from peer institutions and working in a team use written reports, evidence, visits, or a combination of these to review an institution and propose a Commission action. A visit is required as part of the self-study re-affirmation process.
 - Following the self-study team visit, the team develops a detailed written report that summarizes the team's findings regarding institution's compliance with the Commission's standards for accreditation and requirements of affiliation, and accreditation-relevant federal regulations, including any deficiencies in compliance and areas needing improvement.
 - The institution is expected to respond in writing to the peer evaluator(s)'s report following any accreditation activity.
- At the second tier of the decision-making process, the appropriate committee conducts its own analysis of the self-study and all supporting documentation submitted along with the self-study, the team's report, the institutional response to the peer evaluators' team report and makes its own proposal for accreditation action to the Commission.
- At the third tier of the decision-making process, the information is provided to the Commission which then determines the appropriate accreditation action regarding the institution.

As stated in Requirement of Affiliation #14, institutions must provide accurate, fair, and complete information in the accreditation process. The Commission may independently obtain information from external sources to confirm information submitted by the institution. The Commission may obtain and utilize any other appropriate information from other sources to determine whether the institution complies with the Commission's standards for accreditation and requirements of affiliation.

The multi-layered process ensures that the Commission's standards are interpreted and applied consistently and that the Commission's actions are fair, equitable, and appropriate. The team's findings and proposed action may be altered by one or more of the levels of review.

IV. Systematic Monitoring and Off-Cycle Review

In addition to the scheduled eight-year self-study and evaluation cycle, the Commission maintains systematic and ongoing processes to monitor institutional stability and assess whether the institution continues to meet standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, and accreditation-relevant federal regulations. The Commission also conducts off-cycle or *ad hoc* reviews as necessary.

A. Systematic monitoring

The Commission conducts systematic monitoring at specific points throughout the eight-year accreditation cycle.

1. *Annual monitoring:* Institutions submit an Annual Institutional Update that provides the Commission information on which to assess the institution's current health and sustainability, including student achievement and financial sustainability.
2. *Mid-Point Peer Review* is an off-site peer review based on cumulative data collected in the Annual Institutional Update occurring in the fourth year of the eight-year cycle.
3. *Follow-up Reports and Visits:* As a result of the Self-Study Review, Annual Monitoring, or Mid-Point Peer Review, the Commission may request follow-up through a written report and/or visit.

B. Off-cycle or *ad hoc* monitoring

The Commission regularly receives information about accredited and candidate institutions from credible external sources. If the Commission determines that institutional activity or circumstances raise concern regarding the institution's ability to meet standards for accreditation and requirements of affiliation, staff or the Commission may request additional information for review and action by the Commission.

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Related Documents: *Accreditation Actions, Becoming Accredited; Substantive Change Policy, Substantive Change Procedures, Calculation of Next Accreditation Action*

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