



Policy Statement

Cycle and Timing of Accreditation Review

(Effective Date: July 1, 2016)

Accreditation is viewed as a continuing status which, once conferred, is not removed except for cause, and then only with due process. To guide candidate and member institutions as they strive for excellence, and to ensure that they continue to meet the criteria for eligibility and membership in the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the Commission conducts periodic evaluation of all institutions.

All institutions are reviewed through the application, candidacy, initial accreditation, reaccreditation, periodic review report, substantive change, and the follow-up processes including those described below, and through annual reporting. The Commission takes action on any of these reporting activities or visits (including information letters, etc.). Failure to submit the documents or to receive the Commission's visitors/evaluators indicates an institution's unwillingness to maintain its membership in good faith and is considered to be a voluntary lapse of accreditation, which is a basis for Commission action.

The Commission maintains a 10-year cycle of review alternating between self-study and on-site evaluation and a Periodic Review Report. Institutions granted initial accreditation following self-study and on-site evaluation conduct a second self-study for on-site evaluation in the fifth year following the grant of accreditation. From that point forward, institutions reflect on progress and changes in a Periodic Review Report five years later. In addition to these set reviews, institutions also may be reviewed in conjunction with follow-up reporting or substantive institutional change, or at the initiation of the Commission, based on developments within the institution.

Although the Commission follows an evaluation schedule at established intervals, the timing of such reviews may vary in accordance with the circumstances of a given institution and within the Commission's judgment as to how it can best serve the institution's needs while simultaneously meeting its broader accountabilities. However, an institution will not usually be permitted to go longer than five years without submitting a substantive report to the Commission, or longer than ten years without an evaluation visit.

Ideally, institutional self-study should be an integral and ongoing activity on every campus, only incidentally related to calendars and accreditation, but constantly keyed to the natural relationship among self-study, assessment, and educational planning.

In the fifth year following reaffirmation of accreditation, all institutions submit a Periodic Review Report (PRR). (Note: Five years following initial accreditation, institutions prepare a full self-study rather than the PRR. See *Becoming Accredited*.) Complete information on the PRR

Note: This policy will be superseded by an updated policy when the Commission implements the 8-year cycle approved in December 2015 by MSCHE member institutions.

can be found in the Handbook for Periodic Review Reports. At the time of initial accreditation, reaffirmation, or follow-up, the Commission indicates in its accreditation action the nature and timing of the institution's next report. The Commission may thereafter grant reasonable extensions of reporting dates for good cause. It also may determine the type of evaluation visit which will follow the report; or it may await receipt of the report before deciding on the necessity or nature of a visit. The Commission's review of a required letter or report, whether or not accompanied by a visit, constitutes review of an institution's accreditation and is the basis for an accreditation action. The Commission's accreditation action also may indicate specific areas to be addressed in the PRR or the next self-study in lieu of a follow-up report. (See "Range of Commission Actions on Accreditation.")

The Commission monitors change that occurs between regularly scheduled periodic evaluations. Institutions must keep the Commission on Higher Education apprised of plans for change and of actual changes in their status. Substantive changes, as defined by the Commission's policy statement, "Substantive Change," require prior approval. The Commission must be current in its information about each institution in order to sustain and satisfy its accountability as an accrediting agency.

The Commission monitors institutions and maintains current information in several ways. All institutions submit annually for Commission and staff review an Institutional Profile which includes information about enrollment, finances, new initiatives being developed, and programs offered off-campus, out-of-state, or outside of the country in which the institution is based.

The Commission also monitors the actions of other accrediting agencies and federal and state compliance reviews (including financial audits, program review, requests for the inclusion of new activities/offers within the scope of Title IV or other eligibility, etc.) If the Commission determines that an action or review taken by another agency raises concern regarding the institution's ability to meet the Commission's accreditation requirements, including its Requirements of Affiliation, staff or the Commission may request additional information for review and action by the Commission.

Institutions also may be required to submit reports on a particular area of an institution, either as a stipulation of the accrediting action following periodic evaluation or upon Commission or staff determination of the need for such information.

The Commission may require an evaluation visit focused on specific developments or concerns within an institution. These visits may be mandated by the Commission's most recent action or initiated by the Commission or staff because of circumstances existing at an institution. If an institution undergoes substantive change or proposes developments and changes that may affect the educational effectiveness of the institution or its ability to meet accreditation standards, the Commission reserves the right to review that institution's accredited or candidate status, without regard to any previously indicated schedule, through self-study or other type of report and/or visit. (For a definition of substantive change and a description of the review procedures, see the Commission document, "Substantive Change.")

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

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