



Media Backgrounder-2017

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The Middle States Commission on Higher Education provides the following information for the convenience of members of the media and other interested individuals. Links to Commission online resources also are included.

Some Frequently Asked Questions

- ***What is accreditation?***
Accreditation is a means of self-regulation and peer review by the educational community. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education reviews each institution in its entirety, rather than limiting itself to evaluating individual programs. For greater detail, see below.

- ***How are institutions evaluated?***
The Commission utilizes 14 Standards of Accreditation and 10 Requirements of Affiliation, described in detail in the Commission publication, [Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education](#).

Beginning with institutions whose self-studies will be due in 2017-18, all MSCHE institutions will be required to follow the Commission's revised Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation. The seven Standards and 15 Requirements can be found in the new MSCHE booklet, [Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation](#).

- ***How many schools have been placed on warning or probationary status? How common is such action?***
The Commission on Higher Education meets three times per year. Following these meetings, a [Summary of Commission Actions](#) is posted on the [Commission website](#).
- ***How do I find out if a college or university is accredited?***
All institutions accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education are listed on the Commission website under the [Institutions button](#). Click on the letter corresponding to the first letter of the name of the institution about which you are inquiring. This will take you to an alphabetical directory of all schools whose names begin with that letter. If the institution is not listed, it is not currently accredited by the Commission.
- ***Does the Middle States Commission on Higher Education rank schools?***
No. There are many commercial directories available at libraries and bookstores. The Commission does not endorse any particular directory.

- ***Can I obtain a copy of an institution's self study or a report from a Middle States Commission visiting team?***

No. The Commission will not release the self study to a third party. The Commission considers the self study to be the property of the institution that submits it. All other correspondence between the institution and the Commission is considered confidential. While the Commission expects institutions to share their self study and team report with the various campus constituencies who provided input and helped prepare the self study, Commission policy does not require release of such documents to the media or other members of the public. Public release of accreditation documents is at the discretion of the institution.

What is Accreditation?

Accreditation is a means of self-regulation and peer review adopted by the educational community. Accreditation may be applied to an institution as a whole or to individual programs. However, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education reviews each institution in its entirety, rather than limiting itself to evaluating individual programs.

The accreditation process is a voluntary, self-regulatory, peer review process. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education and its evaluators use information provided by candidate and member institutions as a foundation for review of activities in conjunction with on-site interviews and data gathering in order to determine whether an institution meets the Commission's requirements of affiliation and standards for accreditation as expressed in [Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education](#). The Commission takes accreditation action after a review of such information. **Note: as mentioned above, effective in the 2017-18 academic year, all MSCHE institutions will be required to comply with the Commission's revised requirements of affiliation and standards for accreditation** as expressed in the new MSCHE booklet, [Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation](#).

The Commission monitors changes that occur between regularly scheduled periodic evaluations. Institutions must keep the Commission on Higher Education informed of plans for change and of actual changes in their status. [Substantive changes, as defined by Commission policy, require prior approval.](#)

The Commission has long maintained a 10-year cycle of review, beginning with a self-study and on-site evaluation visit, and followed by a Periodic Review Report five years later. ***The Commission is currently transitioning to an eight-year accreditation cycle. A Mid-Point Peer Review will replace the Periodic Review Report. The 2016-17 academic year is the final year for submission of Periodic Review Reports.*** In addition, institutions 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.

The Commission may conduct an accreditation review at any time if it has evidence that the institution may no longer meet requirements of affiliation or accreditation standards. If the institution proposes developments and changes or conducts activities that 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.

At the time of initial accreditation, reaffirmation, or follow-up, the Commission indicates the nature and timing of the institution's next report. The Commission may thereafter grant extensions of reporting dates or shorten the deadlines for reporting for good cause.

For a brief history of accreditation in the Middle States region, read [Highlights from the Commission's First 90 Years](#), prepared for the Commission's 90th anniversary in 2009.

What are the standards by which institutions are evaluated?

The Commission utilizes 14 Standards of Accreditation and 10 Requirements of Affiliation, described in detail in the Commission publication, [Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education](#). All accredited institutions are expected to be in compliance with these standards and requirements. Effective in the 2017-18 academic year, all MSCHE institutions will be expected to comply with revised standards and requirements. The revised standards and requirements can be viewed in the new MSCHE publication, [Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation](#).

What is the Middle States Commission on Higher Education?

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education is responsible for more than 525 accredited and candidate institutions, located in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and other locations abroad.

The Commission accredits only degree-granting institutions, including colleges, universities, military academies, and religious seminaries.

Members of the Commission include active executives, administrators, and faculty of member institutions as well as representatives of the public who have no affiliation with a member institution in accordance with the Federal definition of "Public Representative." Members are nominated and elected by the Commission's member institutions. The committees of the Commission are comprised of either Commissioners or both Commissioners and peer reviewers. Peer reviewers are usually administrators and faculty of higher education institutions, and they are nominated by member institutions.

For additional information about the Commission on Higher Education and accreditation, please [click here](#).

The Commission is one of seven independent regional accrediting organizations that have been established to accredit degree-granting institutions of higher education. Each of these regional accrediting organizations has been recognized by the United States Secretary of Education. For information about other regional and national accreditors and higher education organizations, [click here](#).

Who Are The Commissioners?

[Click here](#) to see the current listing of the members of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

How Often Does the Commission Meet?

The full Commission meets in-person three times per year, in March, June, and November. The Executive Committee meets via conference call on a monthly basis.

What are the Mid-Atlantic Region Commission on Higher Education and the Middle States Association?

From its origins in 1919 through February 2013, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education functioned as a unit of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. On March 1, 2013, the Commission became separately incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as the Mid-Atlantic Region Commission on Higher Education (MARCHE). Through an ongoing contractual relationship with the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, MARCHE is able to continue to *do business as* the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

The Middle States Association provides certain business services for the Commission,, but is not directly involved in any accreditation decisions or related matters.

The Association's website is located at www.middlestates.org.

The two Commissions that remain part of the Middle States Association are the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (www.msa-cess.org)

Public Information on Accreditation

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education makes available to the public information on its accreditation activities involving candidate and accredited member institutions, including the formal actions that the Commission takes on each institution. This information is online at http://www.msche.org/institutions_directory.asp and includes each institution's Statement of Accreditation Status and a directory of all members (candidate and accredited institutions). Institutions that have been placed on Warning, Probation, or Show Cause status also have a Public Disclosure Statement (PDS) accompanying their online listing. This PDS describes the institution's recent accreditation history, the reasons for its current status, and the Commission's expectations for next steps.

For specific information not provided by the Commission, members of the media and the public should contact the institution directly.

The Statement of Accreditation Status

For each candidate or accredited institution in its membership, the Commission maintains a Statement of Accreditation Status (SAS), which is an official statement of each institution's current status and recent accreditation history. To find a specific institution's SAS on the MSCHE web site (www.msche.org), click on Institutions, and then click on the first letter of the institution's name in the alphabet at the top of the screen. Then, scroll down until you find the institution. The Commission bases this document on formal actions that the Commission takes regarding an institution and on information that the institution provides through annual reporting. These actions may result from an evaluation visit, a periodic review report (PRR), a required follow-up, or an unanticipated development in an institution's affairs.

When the Commission takes any action, the SAS will note the date of the action and the exact language used to explain the nature of any next steps that the Commission requires the institution to take. After the institution receives official notice of the Commission's accreditation action, the Commission shares the SAS with the general public to provide more detailed background about an institution than can be gleaned from the profile in the Directory of Members.

Elements of the SAS. The SAS consists of two sections: a profile of basic information and a description of the institution's relationship with the Commission.

The **first section of the SAS** contains information, based on self-reported data provided annually by the institution on its Institutional Profile, such as:

- **Contact information** for chief administrators.
- **The type of institution and degree levels.** Changes such as expansion or change of degree programs or establishing degrees through distance education may have been included by the institution in its annual Institutional Profile, but if they have not been approved in advance by the Commission as required by [“Substantive Change.”](#) the institutional changes are not included within the scope of the institution's accreditation and may affect its accreditation.
- **Distance Education.** An indication of whether the institution delivers courses or programs by distance education. If more than two programs have been approved, and approval of additional programs is not required, the SAS will simply say “Yes” for distance education delivery.
- **National and specialized accreditation.**
- **Branches, Additional Locations & Other Instructional Sites.** A list of branch campuses, additional locations offering at least 50% of a degree program, and other instructional sites.

The **second section of the SAS** presents a brief history of the institution's relationship with the Commission and indicates the ways in which the Commission may monitor the institution in the future, including:

- **Accreditation Status.** The institution's current accreditation status (Candidate for Accreditation or Member), the date when the current status was first granted, and the date of the most recent reaffirmation of that status.
- **Recent Commission Actions.** The date and nature of the most recent accreditation action, including a description of any required follow-up activities and the specific areas in which follow-up is required.
- **Evaluation History.** The date of the last comprehensive evaluation and a description of accreditation activities and actions since that evaluation.
- **Next Review.** The academic year in which the next regularly scheduled on-site evaluation following self-study is expected, unless changed by the Commission. (A self-study is currently required every 10 years.)
- **The date the SAS is prepared.**
- **Other Information.** Any other information appropriate under Commission policies or applicable laws or regulations.

The SAS is available on the Commission's website at http://www.msche.org/institutions_directory.asp. To see and print an SAS, select a specific institution and click the option for SAS.

The Public Disclosure Statement

A Public Disclosure Statement (PDS) is prepared when a Commission action involves Warning, Probation, or Show Cause, and for Candidate institutions undergoing a Candidate Status Review. The Commission also may develop a PDS when the action involves anything that may be perceived as negative. The PDS provides a further description of the Commission's activities, including definitions of actions or accreditation protocol, as appropriate.

A PDS responds to public inquiries for further information, consistent with the Commission's policy "[Public Communication in the Accrediting Process.](#)" and it should be read in conjunction with the Statement of Accreditation Status. When a PDS is developed, it is available along with the SAS on the Commission's website under the [directory of institutions](#).

Commission Review and Action on Accreditation

Commission staff and/or an appropriate committee of the Commission review(s) the reports that each institution and each evaluator/reviewer submits. The accreditation review committees that make recommendations to the Commission for formal action include:

- Committee on Evaluation Reports
- Committee on Follow-Up Reports and Candidate Institutions
- Committee on Periodic Review Reports.

The Commission's Substantive Change Committee and the Executive Committee both have authority to take accreditation action on behalf of the Commission.

The Commission may take the following types of actions:

Affirming Actions. In the event that an institution meets the Commission's standards for accreditation and there is no question or concern regarding the institution's continued compliance, the Commission may act to reaffirm accreditation.

Monitoring Actions. A monitoring action indicates that the Commission has identified one or more standards with which an institution may not be in compliance if the institution fails to give due attention and continue to make progress. Monitoring actions include a request for a monitoring report after reaffirmation of accreditation, granting of initial accreditation, or inclusion of a substantive change within an institution's scope of accreditation.

Procedural Actions. The Commission takes a procedural action when it requires further information in order to make a decision regarding accreditation. Postponement allows the Commission to consider additional information in order to determine whether the institution complies with the standards for accreditation. The institution reports back to the Commission with a Supplemental Information Report. Show Cause is considered to be a procedural action in order to allow the institution to inform the Commission why the institution's accreditation should not be withdrawn. For Show Cause, the Commission may require a substantive report and/or an on-site evaluation.

Non-Compliance Actions. A non-compliance action indicates that the Commission has identified one or more areas in which the institution does not meet the Commission's

standards for accreditation. These areas are identified as requirements in a team, reviewer's, or other report, and they are specifically stated in the Commission's action. Both Warning and Probation are non-compliance actions.

Adverse Actions. In an adverse action, the Commission withdraws an institution's Candidate for Accreditation status or its Accredited status. If the Commission determines that the institution no longer meets requirements of affiliation or accreditation standards, or if the institution's ability to meet the requirements of affiliation or standards is sufficiently in question, the Commission may require a Candidate institution to undergo a Candidate Status Review, or it may require a Show Cause for a Candidate or Accredited member institution.

If an institution appeals an adverse Commission action, the SAS will note the date of any request for reconsideration, the first step in the appeals process, and the date of an appeal and its status or outcome. This information also is included in the Public Disclosure Notice, which is developed for an institution that is subject to an adverse action.

For a complete list of Commission actions and time frames for reporting, see the policy statements, [Accreditation Actions](#) and [Standardized Language for Commission Actions on Accreditation](#).

Follow-Up Reporting and Visits

The Commission may require some level of follow-up to ensure continued compliance with accreditation standards, to provide more information in order to make a decision regarding accreditation, or simply to keep the Commission informed of institutional progress. Levels of follow-up include reports and visits.

It is not uncommon for an institution to be in follow-up. The majority of institutions are required to submit a follow-up report or host a follow-up visit in order to assure the Commission that standards are being met. Occasionally, an institution is asked to submit to follow-up to demonstrate that areas of non-compliance have been addressed.

Commission actions of Postponement, Warning, or Probation, none of which the Commission considers to be an adverse action, automatically result in further Commission review of the institution's status prior to the expiration of the maximum time period allowed for such action. Such review will either result in the lifting of the non-adverse action, the imposition of a subsequent non-adverse action, or the imposition of an adverse action. **The Commission is not bound by a particular sequence of accreditation action.**

The Commission's review of required follow-up, whether or not accompanied by a visit, is a review of an institution's accreditation and is the basis for a Commission 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.

Time frames for follow-up are within the requirements established in Federal regulations and provided in the Commission's policy, [Accreditation Actions](#). Time limits are based upon the date of Commission action, not the date of the team visit. The Commission may at its discretion require an institution to report on progress sooner than the maximum time allowed, and may for good cause extend the time for demonstrating compliance.

The Commission monitors institutions through the following means of follow-up.

Self-Study The Commission may direct an institution to describe its progress relative to recommendations made by the team or reviewer in the institution’s next Self-Study or Periodic Review Report. The Commission also may require the institution to address activities that were being planned or implemented at the time of the on-site evaluation to enhance institutional effectiveness.

Progress Report. The Commission may direct an institution to describe in a Progress Report its progress relative to recommendations made by the team or reviewer. The Commission also may require the institution to address activities that were being planned or implemented at the time of the on-site evaluation to enhance institutional effectiveness.

Supplemental Information Report. The Commission will request a Supplemental Information Report when it determines that there is insufficient information to substantiate institutional compliance with one or more accreditation standards. A Supplemental Information Report is intended only to allow the institution to provide further information, not to give the institution time to formulate plans or to initiate remedial actions.

Monitoring Report. The Commission requests a monitoring report when it is concerned about the potential for future non-compliance with one or more requirements of affiliation or standards of accreditation, when issues are more complex or more numerous, or when the issues require a more substantive, detailed response.

Letters and reports submitted for Follow-up, Candidacy, or PRR may be accepted, acknowledged, or rejected. The Commission “**Accepts**” a letter or report when its quality, thoroughness, and clarity are sufficient to respond to all of the Commission’s concerns, without requiring additional information in order to assess the institution’s status. The Commission “**Acknowledges**” a letter or report when it addresses the Commission’s concerns only partially because of incomplete content or insufficient quality. The Commission may or may not require additional information in order to assess the institution’s status. A letter or report is “**Rejected**” when its quality or substance are insufficient to respond appropriately to the Commission’s concerns. The Commission requires the institution to resubmit the report and may at its discretion request a visit. Note that the Commission either will “Acknowledge Receipt of” or “Reject” a Substantive Change request. The Commission cannot “Accept” a Substantive Change request.

Follow-Up Visits

In its accreditation action, the Commission 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.

Visits are most often in conjunction with a request for a monitoring report or supplemental information report. A visit is required if verification of institutional status and/or progress requires an on-site review, in addition to a paper review. Visits may be conducted by a staff or individual evaluator, by a small team, or by a full team, depending on the nature and number of the Commission’s concerns. A visit always is required with a Show Cause action.

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 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.

Appeals

An institution that is subject to an Adverse Action may appeal the Commission's decision by requesting reconsideration of the Commission's action. The Commission's current policy on Appeals from Adverse Actions can be viewed by [clicking here](#).

A Note About Commission Documents

The Commission considers all reports and documents received from institutions or sent by the Commission to institutions to be confidential documents. Institutional self-studies, periodic review reports, monitoring reports, progress reports, substantive change requests, and other documents will not be released by the Commission to third parties. While the Commission expects institutional leadership to share self-studies and Commission actions with the campus community, there is no requirement by the Commission for an institution to share such documents with members of the general public or the media. **Release of such documents beyond the campus community is at the sole discretion of the institution.** Some institutions choose to post such documents on the institutional website, but there is no MSCHE requirement regarding web posting.

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