



**Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-2680**

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**Commission Achieves New Corporate Status**

As noted in the January 2013 MSCHE Newsletter, the Commission on Higher Education has been working for quite some time to take significant steps toward greater separation and independence from the Middle States Association. This goal was ultimately achieved on March 1, 2013, when the Commission became separately incorporated under Pennsylvania Commonwealth law as the Mid-Atlantic Region Commission on Higher Education. However, the Commission will continue to do business as (dba) the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

The Commission has taken title to the office condominium real estate at 3624 Market Street in Philadelphia. The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and the Middle States Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools will continue to reside in the condominium under a renewable three-year lease. The Commission on Higher Education has developed a formal services agreement with the Association covering certain business operations that MSA will continue to deliver on behalf of the Commission. These include payroll, insurance, employee benefits, and member billing. The Commission retains all of its assets and personnel.

Under the new corporate set-up, the officers of the Commission on Higher Education will also serve as officers of the corporation.

MSCHE's new status as an independent, not-for-profit corporation should have no impact on member institutions, with the important exception that the Commission can better protect its financial resources. The Commission will continue to operate as it has in the past, but now has the independence necessary to be able to improve and expand member services.

## **Accredited Status in Publications and on Websites**

With the Commission's new corporate status, some MSCHE institutions will need to adjust the wording in their publications or on their websites pertaining to Middle States accreditation. Some institutions still note that they are "accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools" or simply "accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools." If your institution uses such wording, it should be changed to "accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education."

Applicant and candidate institutions are reminded that the Commission's policy on *Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status*, notes that under federal regulations, the term "accreditation" is to be used only when accredited status is conferred by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (the Commission is recognized by both). No statement should be made about possible future accreditation status or qualification not yet conferred by the accrediting body. Statements such as the following are not permitted: "(Name of institution) has applied for candidacy with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education," or "The (name of program) is being evaluated by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and it is anticipated that accreditation will be granted in the near future."

The Accreditation Liaison Officers at MSCHE-member institutions should make certain that the individuals responsible for publications and website content at their institution are aware of this information.

## **Standards Review Begins**

The Commission has begun the process of reviewing and updating its accreditation standards. U.S. Department of Education regulations require accreditors to conduct such reviews at regular intervals. This review will be conducted throughout the remainder of this year and into early 2014. The goal is to publish the revised standards by mid-2014.

The review process will be conducted and supported by a 14-member Steering Committee, assisted by MSCHE staff. Dr. Steven Sweeny, President Emeritus of The College of New Rochelle, and a former Commissioner and member of the MSCHE Executive Committee, has agreed to chair the Steering Committee. The Committee will officially begin its work at its first meeting on April 29, though earlier activities gathered input from member institutions that will be used in the standards review. Among the earlier activities have been the recent efforts of the Commission's Assessment Task Force and PRR Working Group and the Commission's Spring Town Hall meetings.

Although the timeframe for review and approval of the revised standards is short in order to meet Department of Education requirements, the process has been designed to maximize input from members and other interested stakeholders. Information gathering activities are expected to include a survey of member institutions and experienced evaluators, the three Spring Town Hall meetings, and multiple opportunities for information gathering, comment, and feedback through written comments and the Commission's December 2013 Annual Conference.

In order to focus the review on required changes since the 2006 edition of *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*, and to ensure that the standards remain relevant into the future, the Commission endorsed a set of Guiding Principles. The Guiding Principles are serving not only to assist the Steering Committee, but they also provided a framework for discussion at the Spring Town Hall meetings.

The Steering Committee is composed of the Commission's relevant constituents, including diverse representation by institutional type and Carnegie classifications. It represents constituent groups who have a broad perspective—such as presidents, chief academic officers, or other senior administrators, and faculty—or those in other administrative positions who implement the standards within their institutions. Public representatives are also included.

Those who have agreed to serve on the Steering Committee are:

**Chair:**

Dr. Steven Sweeny, President Emeritus, The College of New Rochelle

**Members:**

Prof. Ibis Aponte-Avellanet, Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, University of Puerto Rico  
Central Administration

Dr. Robert Clark, Professor, STEM and Health Division, Cumberland County College

Dr. Dario Cortes, President, Berkeley College

Mr. David Hollowell, Consultant

Dr. Karen Kershenstein, President, KWK Enterprises

Colonel Gerald Kobylski, Academy and Associate Professor, United States Military Academy

Dr. Jodi Levine-Laufgraben, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Assessment, Temple University

Dr. Barbara Lyman, Provost and Senior Vice President for Student Affairs, Shippensburg University of  
Pennsylvania

Dr. David Rehm, Provost, Mount St. Mary's University

Dr. Charles Rice, President, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

Dr. James Sunser, President, Genesee Community College

Dr. James Trainer, Executive Director, Planning and Institutional Research, Villanova University

Dr. Gary Wirt, Vice President, Goldey-Beacom College

## **Town Hall Meetings**

The Commission has been holding a series of Town Hall meetings this Spring. The Town Halls have included a brief overview of the Commission's recent incorporation, a recap of recent federal initiatives related to accreditation, and an in-depth discussion of plans to review and revise the 14 accreditation standards. Input from member institutions is crucial. The Commission wants to know what is important to the institutions it serves.

The first town hall was held March 19 in Albany, NY, a second was held April 18 at The College of New Jersey in Ewing, NJ, and the final Town Hall of the Spring is scheduled for May 9 at the Renaissance Dupont Circle Hotel in Washington, DC. To reserve a seat, please contact [rsvp@msche.org](mailto:rsvp@msche.org) and provide your name, job title, institution, and e-mail address.

Questions can be addressed to Ms. Christina D'Argenio, Executive Assistant to the President, at (267) 284-5025, or via e-mail at [cdargenio@msche.org](mailto:cdargenio@msche.org).

## **Annual Conference Slated for December**



Mark your calendar! *MSCHE: Strengthening the Foundation*, the 2013 annual conference of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, will take place Sunday, December 8 through Tuesday, December 10 at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown Hotel in Philadelphia, PA. Sessions will focus on successfully implementing accreditation standards as well as the relationship between accreditation and emerging issues in higher education.

The Conference Program Committee is currently reviewing all of the proposals that were submitted by the April 15 deadline, and will reach out to the authors of the selected presentations during late May. The preliminary conference program will be available in late Summer. Watch your e-mail and the Commission website for details.

## **MSCHE Welcomes New Director for Training and Volunteer Services**

The Commission recently welcomed Erika G. Swain as its new Director for Training and Volunteer Services. Immediately prior to joining the MSCHE staff, she served as Registrar at North Country Community College in Saranac Lake, New York. Previously, she served as Director of the Peer Corps and in several other positions during a 10-year stint with the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the largest regional accreditor in the United States.

In her new role with MSCHE, Erika is responsible for recruiting and training new peer evaluators, developing online professional development opportunities for volunteers, and other related activities.

## **Analysis of Commission Follow-up Actions**

Members of the MSCHE staff are often asked by institutions, news reporters, and others about follow-up actions that are generated by the Commission's accreditation standards. A recent report by Amy Shew Moseder, the Commission's Senior Policy Analyst/Researcher, sheds some light on these questions. Ms. Moseder provides a report about Commission actions and member institutions at each meeting of the Commission.

The latest report, presented during the Commission's March 7 meeting, indicated that of the 55 institutions that submitted self-studies during calendar year 2012, 24 were required to submit monitoring reports, 15 were required to submit progress reports, and 16 had no follow-up. The most prevalent reasons for follow-up were Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning (23 institutions), Standard 7: Institutional Assessment (22 institutions), Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal (10 institutions), and Standards 3: Institutional Resources and 12: General Education (seven institutions each). The totals exceed 24 because many institutions were cited on multiple standards.

Of the 40 institutions that submitted Periodic Review Reports during calendar year 2012, 10 were required to submit monitoring reports, 11 were required to submit progress reports, and 19 had no follow-up. The most prevalent reasons for the follow-up were Standard 14 (15 institutions), Standard 7 (nine institutions), and Standard 2 (eight institutions).

## **PRR Workshop Review**

The Commission held its annual Periodic Review Report Workshop on April 4 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Philadelphia. Participating in the workshop were representatives of institutions whose PRRs are due in June 2015. Also in attendance were peer evaluators who agreed to serve as PRR readers for the Commission.

This year's PRR workshop began with welcoming remarks by MSCHE President Elizabeth H. Sibolski, who emphasized that the workshop was a good opportunity for participants to network with other institutions. "It is helpful to know what other institutions are doing. Connect with your colleagues today, because it can prove beneficial when questions arise as you are writing your PRR," she said.

Dr. Sibolski noted that it is the role of the PRR readers to review the PRR documents within the context of the Middle States accreditation standards, policies, and procedures, and within the context of each institution's mission. "The PRR is every bit as much of a major accreditation event as the self-study, though the documentation is not as extensive," she added. Just as it does following receipt of institutional self-studies and reports from evaluation teams, following the completion of the PRR the Commission takes action to either reaffirm accreditation or place an institution on warning or probation. The Commission can also require submission of monitoring or progress reports.

Following Dr. Sibolski's remarks, MSCHE Commissioner Dr. Robert Clark addressed *The Commission's Expectations for the Periodic Review Report*. He described the tone that institutions should use in writing the PRR, explained how the review process works, and reminded the attendees that "ultimately, it's all about institutional improvement."

Next was a presentation on *Understanding Federal Compliance Expectations for the Periodic Review Report*, presented by MSCHE Vice Presidents Dr. Ellie Fogarty and Dr. Debra Klinman along with Dr. Lisa Marie McCauley, the Commission's Senior Director for Accreditation Operations. Drs. Fogarty and Klinman addressed federal requirements regarding distance education/student identity verification, transfer of credit and credit hour policies, and reporting of Title IV Cohort Default Rates. Dr. McCauley reviewed the Commission's recently instituted compliance verification procedures.

The remainder of the morning was spent in small group sessions with the MSCHE Vice Presidents, discussing such topics as *Preparing for the PRR*, *Engaging the Campus*, *Addressing Recommendations*, and *Challenges and Opportunities*.

The afternoon began with a presentation on *The PRR: Linking Assessment, Planning, and Budgeting*, by Barbara Samuel Loftus, Vice President for Planning, Assessment, and Research at Misericordia University.

The day concluded with the participants again meeting in small group sessions with their assigned MSCHE Vice Presidents/liasons. In these sessions, the topics included *Writing and Submitting the PRR*, *Next Steps in the Review Process*, and a final question-and-answer period.

Throughout the day, Dr. Robert A. Schneider, MSCHE's Senior Vice President, met with the PRR readers and reviewed the topics, *Reading the PRR* and *Preparing the Review*.

The Power Point slides of the presenters are available by clicking here:

<https://www.msche.org/?Nav1=EVENTS&Nav2=2013.02.01&Nav3=PresentationMaterial>

The next full-day PRR workshop will be held in March 2014, and there will be valuable and informative PRR sessions during the December MSCHE Annual Conference.

## **An Update on State Authorization**

The U.S. Department of Education issued a "Dear Colleague" letter on January 23, 2013, reminding institutions that postsecondary institutions are required to have certain types of state oversight and approvals in order to participate in federal Title IV student aid programs. Enforcement of the regulations had been delayed to July 1, 2013.

According to the "Dear Colleague" letter, postsecondary institutions that are not compliant with the state authorization regulations under 34 CFR 600.9(a) and (b) after July 1, 2013, may lose their eligibility to participate in Title IV federal student aid programs.

The letter can be viewed at <http://www.msche.org/documents/DearColleagueStateAuthorization.pdf>.

In a related development, in mid-March a report was released by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) Cooperative for Education Technologies, the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA), and the Sloan Consortium, regarding state authorization. The report, *What Are Institutions Doing (or Not Doing) About State Authorization—Revisited*, highlighted some interesting findings. The full report can be viewed at [http://wcet.wiche.edu/wcet/docs/state-approval/UPCEA/2013UPCEA-WCET-SloanCStateAuthorizationReport\\_FULL.pdf](http://wcet.wiche.edu/wcet/docs/state-approval/UPCEA/2013UPCEA-WCET-SloanCStateAuthorizationReport_FULL.pdf).

## **Spring Professional Development Workshops**

The Commission has two professional development workshops scheduled for mid-May.

The first, *Assessing Our Assessment: How Are We Doing?* will be offered May 10 at the DoubleTree by Hilton Philadelphia Center City. Participants will discuss strategies for planning and conducting a review and how to use the information to sustain and enhance assessment. They'll identify strengths and weaknesses of current assessment efforts, understand uses of assessment audits, gain strategies for interpreting and using audit information, and examine examples of how institutions use evaluations of the overall assessment effort to improve assessment of student learning. The facilitator/presenter will be Dr. Jodi Levine Laufgraben, Vice Provost for Academic Programs, Temple University.

The final workshop in the Spring series will be *Closing the Loop Between Strategic Planning and Assessment*, May 13 at the Courtyard by Marriott Philadelphia Downtown. This session will provide a conceptual framework for organizing a campus for strategic planning, gathering institutional and external input for framing the plan, and measuring progress with respect to implementing the plan. Participants will become thoroughly familiar with MSCHE expectations for Standards 2 (Planning and Resource Allocation), 7 (Institutional Assessment), and 14 (Assessment of Student Learning), and how to "close the loop" between planning and assessment. They will also gain familiarity with key preparatory processes in

strategic planning, such as environmental scanning, SWOT analyses, and more. The facilitator/presenter will be Dr. Michael F. Middaugh, higher education consultant, former chair of MSCHE, and retired Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness, University of Delaware.

For additional details or to register, visit [www.msche.org](http://www.msche.org), click on Events, and scroll to the link for the relevant workshop.

### **Recent Commission Actions**

To view the Commission's actions from its March 7 meeting or any prior meeting, visit [www.msche.org](http://www.msche.org) and click on the *Accreditation Actions* button. The direct link is [https://www.msche.org/institutions\\_recentactions.asp](https://www.msche.org/institutions_recentactions.asp)