

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

In This Issue...

- **Annual Conference Addresses Key Higher Education Issues**
- **Collaborative Implementation Project Underway**
- **Commission Begins Process Review; Suggestions Welcome**
- **MSCHE Reviews Members' Consumer Information Websites**
- **Self-Study Institute Guides Institutions Through MSCHE Expectations**
- **Long-time Staff Member Retires**
- **Town Hall Meetings Planned for March and April**
- **Upcoming Professional Development Opportunities**
- **Webinars for PRR Reviewers, Compliance Reviewers, and Institutions**
- **Recent Commission Actions**

Annual Conference Addresses Key Higher Education Issues

A near-record number of attendees visited the new Washington Marriott Marquis Hotel in Washington, DC, for MSCHE's 2014 Annual Conference, December 3-5. The conference included three outstanding plenary sessions and 26 concurrent sessions on a broad range of accreditation-related topics.

The conference began Wednesday evening with a plenary presentation by Francisco Marmolejo, Lead Tertiary Education Specialist for The World Bank. He discussed the changing demographics of the world's population and the implications for higher education, and predicted dramatic diversification of modalities and providers of education by the year 2025. Of particular note, he stressed the role of technology, multinational universities, and the portability of credentials, while indicating that creative funding models will be vital.



Francisco Marmolejo delivers the opening plenary address.

Marmolejo highlighted the "Top 10 Do's in Higher Education." These included (1) diversifying options, but leveling the playing field; (2) assuring good quality institutions; (3) making post-compulsory education and training equitable and affordable; (4) targeting public resources toward programs that yield high social returns; (5) using innovative approaches to retain students and ensure employable graduates; (6) improving secondary education; (7) increasing the autonomy and cost-efficiency of institutions; (8) arming students with information so they make smart choices; (9) embracing competition, both national and global; and (10) fostering openness and an evidence-based culture in tertiary (higher) education.

The second day of the conference included a plenary session on key elements of the revised accreditation standards as well as numerous concurrent sessions and networking opportunities.



Substantive Change session

Exhibit Hall

Competency-based Education session

On Friday morning, the closing plenary session was led by Paul Gaston, Trustees Professor at Kent State University and author of the recent book, **Higher Education Accreditation: How It's Changing and Why It Must**. His session topic was *A Higher Education Accreditation Forecast: Sunny with Periods of Thunder*. In his remarks, Gaston said that accreditation has responded well to a changing political environment, stressing different kinds of institutions, new technologies, new approaches to academic credit, and new budgeting methods. He also noted that accreditation has responded well to an expanding mandate to assure the transferability of credits, define what is a college, promote institutional and programmatic strengthening, promote greater accountability and transparency, and focus on outputs.



Paul Gaston discusses the changing role of accreditors during the closing plenary session.

Gaston also addressed some of the voices that have been critical of accreditors and said that he believes accreditors have responded appropriately. He cited accreditors' emphasis on quality documented by "accountability loops," the reforming of processes to offer greater efficiency and flexibility, and the creation of additional platforms to encourage and share innovation. He emphasized the importance of U.S. higher education accreditation remaining independent of federal control and said that "Peer review offers an economical, collegial, relatively efficient, and knowledgeable approach to institutional and programmatic evaluation." He added, "By taking the initiative in managing the higher education climate, accreditation can ensure its continued relevance to its members and to the nation, while discouraging the creation of expensive, inefficient, overreaching alternatives, and achieve its many important missions more fully."

Gaston also took a few minutes to praise MSCHE's recently revised accreditation standards, saying they are a model for other accreditors to emulate.

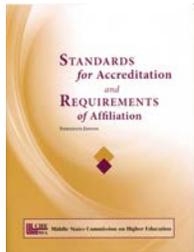
The presentation materials from all of the plenary speakers and the majority of the concurrent session speakers can be accessed on the Commission website at <http://www.msche.org/?Nav1=EVENTS&Nav2=2014.01.01&Nav3=PresentationMaterial>

The 2015 MSCHE Annual Conference is scheduled for December 2-4 at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park Hotel on Connecticut Avenue in the Woodley Park section of Washington, DC. The Call for Proposals will be available in early 2015. Watch www.msche.org for details.

Collaborative Implementation Project Underway

The Commission officially launched the Collaborative Implementation Project (CIP) on October 7 with an information session for representatives of the 15 participating institutions. Commissioners and members of the MSCHE staff explained the purposes of the CIP, reviewed the revised standards for accreditation and requirements of affiliation, and explained how the participating institutions will have frequent contact with each other and with the Commission staff via regularly scheduled remote meetings (webinars) and other communication vehicles.

Each CIP institution then sent three representatives to a special self-study training event on November 12 in Philadelphia. The day was spent preparing the institutions for self-studies guided by the revised standards. Topics included a review of the standards, discussions about self-study design, and an explanation of the technology the institutions will use in the planned remote meetings.



As the 15 institutions move through the self-study process over the next two years, they will share their experiences with other MSCHE institutions via presentations at future Self-Study Institutes and Annual Conferences.

The institutions participating in the Collaborative Implementation Project are Bard College, Bryant & Stratton College, Dominican College of Blauvelt, Genesee Community College, LIM College, Montclair State University, Niagara University, Queens College of the City University of New York, Rochester Institute of Technology, School of Visual Arts, St. Thomas Aquinas College, Union County College, University of Maryland College Park, University of the Virgin Islands, and Widener University.

Commission Begins Process Review; Suggestions Welcome

In the wake of member institutions' approval of the revised accreditation standards and the launch of the Collaborative Implementation Project, the Commission has committed itself to a review of all accreditation processes. A committee of MSCHE staff has held several meetings to discuss preliminary ideas regarding the self-study and periodic review processes. The committee has begun reviewing various ideas for modifying the Commission's periodic review of institutions. The PRR in its current form was introduced in 1973, largely in response to a need for more frequent and consistent monitoring of institutions in a period of rapid change to the higher education environment. Ideas currently under consideration include an enhanced annual Institutional Profile that would be more than a data report but less than a "mini self-study," and perhaps a change to the accreditation cycle.

Currently, all MSCHE accredited institutions are required to submit a self-study at 10-year intervals and a Periodic Review Report at the mid-point between decennial reviews. Discussions have begun on whether this cycle could be modified to include a six or seven-year cycle, as some other regional accreditors have done, with some form of mid-point periodic review.

After the committee has developed some concrete proposals, a panel representing MSCHE institutions will be asked to review and comment on them. To be adopted, the proposals would require several reviews by the full Commission and later review and approval by MSCHE member institutions.

Concurrent with the discussions of accreditation processes, the Commission is also working to update its strategic plan. Staff are working to identify the three or four most important initiatives that should be addressed by the Commission.

The Commission welcomes comments from member institutions regarding the review of accreditation processes and the updating of the strategic plan. Any questions or comments can be directed to policy@msche.org.

MSCHE Reviews Members' Consumer Information Websites

In accordance with U.S. Department of Education regulations, during early 2014 the Commission revised its annual Institutional Profile process to require each member institution to submit the URL for its federally mandated consumer information web page(s). The data gathering process occurred between February 10, 2014 and May 7, 2014. Upon completion of the 2014 IP submissions, the MSCHE staff systematically reviewed the information submitted by each institution. To verify that a web page displayed the required student consumer and achievement information and otherwise met the Commission's expectations, the provided URL needed to meet the following criteria:

- The link was active, accessible to the public, and did not require a password;
- The page originated from the institution's own website;
- The page was easy to locate and clearly labeled as consumer information, student right to know, HEOA, student outcomes, or by some other name that clearly indicated what it was;
- Student outcomes data (graduation, retention, employment rates, etc., as applicable to the mission of the institution) were posted, timely, and as up-to-date as possible.

The results of this new element of the Institutional Profile reporting process were mixed. Four hundred and five of the 533 institutions required no follow-up, but 128 of the institutions did require follow-up. In late July 2014, the Commission sent letters to the Accreditation Liaison Officer and IP Key User at each of the 128 institutions, explaining the federal regulation and Commission requirement, and requesting a plan of corrective action. As of September 25, 115 of the institutions responded with an updated URL, three other institutions had recently closed or merged, and 10 required additional work to better understand the requirement.

The Commission will continue this same process each year upon completion of the Institutional Profile. In addition, consumer information will be verified in even more detail during the expanded Compliance Review process for each institution undergoing self-study.

Should your institution have any questions, please contact your MSCHE vice president/liaison.

Self-Study Institute Guides Institutions Through MSCHE Expectations

The Commission held its annual Self-Study Institute (SSI) November 10 and 11 in Philadelphia for institutions that will submit their self-studies and host MSCHE evaluation team visits during the 2016-17 academic year. MSCHE Senior Vice President Robert A. Schneider opened the SSI by stressing to the attendees that a primary purpose of the self-study is institutional improvement. He also noted that the self-study is the key document that will assist the peer reviewers who visit each institution. “The evaluators are not forensic investigators,” he said, adding that the team members rely heavily on the self-study document to guide them in their questioning.

Opening plenary remarks were provided by N. John DiNardo, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Professor of Physics at Drexel University, and Brad Hollingshead, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, at Florida Southern College. They said the self-study should be meaningful and useful to the institution and result in a report that substantiates the institution’s compliance with the MSCHE accreditation standards. They added that the self-study should consider institutional mission and context, create institution-wide awareness and ownership, ensure broad and inclusive participation, and focus on the institution’s strategic priorities. Dr. DiNardo urged the attendees to ensure their self-study process is data-driven and reflective.



N. John DiNardo (left) and Brad Hollingshead discuss the focus of the self-study during the Commission’s 2014 Self-Study Institute

Dr. Hollingshead reminded the SSI participants that the evaluators are “colleagues coming in to help us, not outsiders coming in to audit the institution.”

The attendees spent the remainder of the first morning of the SSI in breakout sessions on Planning and Organizing for Self-Study. Leading the breakout sessions were MSCHE vice presidents and representatives from several MSCHE institutions.

Following lunch, MSCHE Vice President Sean McKittrick presented on the topic, *Understanding Middle States Expectations for Assessment*. He explained that assessment is not just a presentation of statistics or mathematical formulae, but should be helpful to those who read assessment results to enhance institutional performance. “Assessment is not just about the collection of data, but also about the use of the data. Assessment should be organized and sustained,” he said. Dr. McKittrick described the assessment process as “evidence-based management of institutional effectiveness.”

Following additional breakout sessions, the attendees gathered for a plenary session on *Aligning Planning, Assessing, and Budgeting in Your Self-Study*, presented by Claudine Keenan, Dean of the School of Education and Professor of Instructional Technology at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. She discussed the setting of goals and objectives: pursuing long range (strategic) and operational (annual) planning and goals; the concept of intergrated planning; assessing by organizational structure, by population, and by design; and described both direct and

indirect measures. Ms. Keenan concluded her presentation with a thoughtful discussion of how the standards guide the process of assigning resources to support the achievement of goals.

On the second day of the SSI, plenary sessions were presented by Dr. Lisa Marie McCauley, MSCHE's Senior Director for Accreditation Operations, who discussed *Federal Compliance and the Self-Study Process*, and Dr. Robert Clark, a member of the MSCHE Executive Committee and a Professor in the STEM and Allied Health Division at Cumberland County College. Dr. Clark provided *A Commissioner's Perspective on Self-Study*.

Dr. McCauley discussed the four current compliance areas that the Commission reviews plus four new areas that will be added to the compliance review for 2016. The current areas include student identity verification in distance and correspondence education; transfer of credit policies and articulation agreements; Title IV program responsibilities; and assignment of credit hours. In 2016, new federal regulations will require a review of the institutional record of student complaints; required consumer information for students and members of the public; institutional standing with its state of licensure and other accrediting agencies; and contractual relationships.

Dr. Clark explained the three-tier process of peer review, involving the site visit team and chair, the Committee on Evaluation Reports, and the full Commission. He stressed that all three levels of review are conducted by peers, and noted that the Commission strives to make decisions that are unassailable. Dr. Clark described the current era of review as one of "compassionate rigor."

The Power Point presentations of all of the SSI plenary speakers are available online at <http://www.msche.org/?Nav1=EVENTS&Nav2=2014.04.01&Nav3=PresentationMaterial>.

Long-time Staff Member Retires

A long-time member of the MSCHE staff has announced her retirement, effective at the end of December 2014. Christina Ryan, Assistant Director for Volunteer Services, has been a member of the staff for more than 30 years. Her primary role at the Commission has consisted of assembling the decennial evaluation teams that visit MSCHE institutions. She has worked closely with the Commission's many peer evaluators and with other members of the Commission staff. In addition, Chris was a familiar face to attendees at the MSCHE Annual Conference, as she played a prominent role at the conference registration booth each year. Chris and her husband plan to reside in Cape May, New Jersey. The Commission and all of her staff colleagues wish her the best in her retirement.

Town Hall Meetings Scheduled for March and April

The Commission will again host a series of Town Hall meetings this Spring to brief member institutions on accreditation-related issues. The meetings are scheduled for March 17 in San Juan, Puerto Rico; March 27 in Pittsburgh, PA; April 2 in Albany, NY; and April 10 in Philadelphia, PA. Registration information will be sent to member institutions during January. Watch for details.

Upcoming Professional Development Activities

The Commission has scheduled professional development workshops for March, April, and May at the Courtyard by Marriott Philadelphia Downtown.

Assessing Our Assessment: How Are We Doing? will be offered March 20, 2015. Participants will discuss strategies for planning and conducting a review and how to use the information to sustain and enhance assessment. Among the topics to be reviewed will be identifying strengths and

weaknesses of current assessment efforts; understanding uses of assessment audits; gaining strategies for interpreting and using audit information; and examining examples of how institutions use evaluations of the overall assessment effort to improve assessment of student learning. Registration will be open to assessment coordinators, chief academic officers, research and planning officers, and other administrators and faculty who are interested in assessment. Participants should possess some understanding of assessment, as the workshop is intended for an intermediate to advanced level of practitioner.

Institutional Follow-up Reports and Visits will be offered April 24, 2015. This workshop is for institutions that have required follow-up reports or visits stemming from their most recent Self-Study or Periodic Review Report. Institutional representatives will have the opportunity to hear sessions on best practices, MSCHE expectations, and other topics. This workshop is ideal for institutional representatives charged with completing the required MSCHE follow-up report and others who are involved with the institution's accreditation.

Creating and Selecting Assessment Tools will be offered May 1, 2015. It complements earlier MSCHE workshops on *Becoming an Assessment Facilitator* and *Understanding and Using Assessment Results* by specifically focusing on how to select an assessment approach that is aligned with learning goals and opportunities. The presenter will discuss direct and indirect measures of student learning; explain how to align assessment tools with learning goals; focus on rubrics as direct measures of student learning; and review the importance of evaluating and revising assessment tools as part of the continuous improvement process. Presentations will be interspersed with small group hands-on exercises that will enable participants to think about and practice what they are learning.

Registration information for each workshop is available at http://www.msche.org/events_calendar.asp.

Webinars for PRR Reviewers, Compliance Reviewers, and Institutions

The Commission has scheduled two series of webinars for current MSCHE peer evaluators who have been selected as Periodic Review Report reviewers or financial reviewers or who are interested in serving in such a role.

PRR Reviewer Training webinars are scheduled for the following dates:

January 14, 2015 at 10 am
January 29, 2015 at 10 am
February 10, 2015 at 10 am
February 25, 2015 at 2 pm
March 12, 2015 at 2 pm
March 25, 2015 at Noon
April 13, 2015 at 1 pm
April 23, 2015 at 10 am
May 5, 2015 at 10 am
May 7, 2015 at 2 pm
May 19, 2015 at 2 pm
May 20, 2015 at 10 am
June 11, 2015 at 1 pm
August 6, 2015 at 10 am
September 16, 2015 at 2 pm
October 15, 2015 at 2 pm

All of the PRR Reviewer Training webinars are scheduled for 90 minutes. To register for one of the above dates, visit <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/rt/2330120588050611970>

PRR Financial Reviewer Training webinars are scheduled for the following dates (note: these webinars are only for reviewers who possess financial backgrounds):

January 16, 2015 at 2 pm
February 18, 2015 at 2 pm
February 19, 2015 at 10 am
March 3, 2015 at 9 am
March 4, 2015 at 3 pm
April 14, 2015 at 10 am
April 15, 2015 at 2 pm
May 13, 2015 at 10 am
May 14, 2015 at 10 am
May 27, 2015 at 3 pm
May 28, 2015 at 3 pm

All of the PRR Financial Reviewer webinars are scheduled for one hour. To register for one of the above dates, visit <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/rt/5508417277812439298>

The Commission has also scheduled a series of webinars on compliance review for current MSCHE peer reviewers who have been selected as compliance reviewers or who are interested in serving in such a role.

Compliance Reviewer Training webinars are scheduled for the following dates:

January 7, 2015 at 10 am
January 8, 2015 at 1 pm
January 16, 2015 at 10 am
January 20, 2015 at 10 am
January 22, 2015 at 1 pm
February 2, 2015 at 1 pm
February 10, 2015 at 1 pm
February 20, 2015 at 10 am
March 18, 2015 at 10 am
March 26, 2015 at 3 pm
April 8, 2015 at 9 am
April 16, 2015 at 10 am
April 21, 2015 at 2 pm
April 22, 2015 at 2 pm
May 13, 2015 at 2 pm
May 14, 2015 at 2 pm
May 27, 2015 at 1 pm
May 28, 2015 at 1 pm
June 9, 2015 at 1 pm
August 4, 2015 at 1 pm
August 6, 2015 at 1 pm
September 10, 2015 at 10 am

All of the Compliance Reviewer Training webinars have been scheduled for one hour. To register for one of the above dates, visit <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/rt/5242160641538373889>

The Commission has also scheduled a series of webinars for institutions, focusing on Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations. In these webinars, members of the Commission staff will highlight the requirements of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 that each institution must address in addition to preparing its self-study report.

Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations webinars are scheduled for the following dates:

January 13, 2015 at 10 am
January 15, 2015 at 2 pm
January 28, 2015 at 2 pm
January 30, 2015 at 10 am
February 9, 2015 at 10 am
March 17, 2015 at 10 am
April 8, 2015 at 2 pm
April 9, 2015 at 2 pm
June 9, 2015 at 10 am
August 4, 2015 at 10 am
September 10, 2015 at 1 pm
October 7, 2015 at 1 pm
October 14, 2015 at 10 am

All of the Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations webinars are scheduled for 90 minutes. To register for one of the above dates, visit <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/rt/9044366408390991618>.

Recent Commission Actions

The Commission's most recent meeting was held November 20 in Philadelphia. During that meeting, the Commission granted one institution Candidate for Accreditation status, reaffirmed the accreditation of three institutions via self-study, reaffirmed the accreditation of 46 institutions via periodic review, removed probation and reaffirmed the accreditation of two institutions, removed warning and reaffirmed the accreditation of three institutions, continued probation for one institution, issued warnings to three institutions, withdrew accreditation pending appeal from one institution, and required additional follow-up from 64 institutions.

For a complete description of the actions taken by the Commission, visit http://www.msche.org/institutions_recentactions_view.asp?dteStart=11/20/2014&dteEnd=11/20/2014&idCommitteeType=0&txtMeeting=Commission.