



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

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New Compliance Review Procedure

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 requires accrediting agencies to verify institutional compliance with several federal regulations. Although the requirement for verification of the Title IV cohort default rate has long been in effect, other areas are newer. Areas that became effective on July 1, 2011 are institutional verification of student identity in distance education and correspondence education programs, policies related to transfer of credits, and verification of institutional credit hour policies.

The Commission and its peer evaluators will initiate a new procedure to verify institutional compliance with the accreditation-relevant provisions of the HEOA. Institutional representatives currently verify compliance by signing the Certification Statement that is submitted with the Self-Study Report and the Periodic Review Report. This new process is more substantive than the Certification Statement.

The procedure requires a pre-verification of the required four components to be completed by an independent team of peer evaluators prior to a Self-Study team visit or completion of the PRR reader review. The evaluators will be comprised of institutional research and compliance personnel from peer institutions. Institutions undergoing review for initial accreditation and reaffirmation of accreditation will be directed to submit required data along with their Self-Study and Periodic Review Reports.

The compliance verification will concentrate on the following four areas: Student Identity Verification in Distance and Correspondence Education courses, Transfer of Credit, Assignment of Credit Hours, and Title IV Cohort Default Rates.

Once the relevant documentation has been reviewed by the designated compliance evaluators, a report will be submitted to the chair of the visiting evaluation team or the readers of the institution's PRR. The compliance evaluation will be incorporated as an appendix to the regular team report before it is submitted to the institution for comments.

This process will become effective with institutions undergoing team visits during Spring 2013 and beyond. For institutions submitting PRRs, this new review will become effective with PRRs that are due to the Commission on or after June 1, 2013.

The Commission will review the initial implementation of the Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations and may modify or refine the procedure in the future. To view the procedures the Commission will follow in the first round of compliance review, visit <https://www.msche.org/publications/ComplianceReviewBookletDec2012.pdf>.

If you have questions about this new evaluation process, contact Lisa Marie McCauley, the Commission's Senior Director for Accreditation Operations, at lmccauley@msche.org.

New Credit Hour Policy

In late August the Commission adopted a new Credit Hour policy to comply with federal regulatory requirements. The Commission must determine that candidate and accredited institutions' assignment of credit hours conform to commonly accepted practice in higher education. The MSCHE policy stipulates that institutions must provide the Commission's evaluators with key information at appropriate points of accreditation review so that peer evaluators can verify compliance with the credit hour regulations. As noted above, the Commission is in the process of implementing a new process for compliance review. As part of this review, institutions will be required to provide the following documentation:

1. Written policies and procedures for credit hour assignment covering all types of courses, disciplines, programs, degree levels, formats, and modalities of instruction;
2. Evidence that the institution's credit hour policies and procedures are applied consistently across the full range of institutional offerings. If the state in which the institution is licensed has credit hour regulations that are consistent with the federal credit hour definition, documentation of compliance with those state regulations may be sufficient evidence of compliance with the federal requirements. Other evidence could include documentation from recent academic program reviews; new course or program approvals; documentation from registration and catalog software or systems; calendars, schedules, and course matrices; course syllabi; documentation of adherence to credit hour requirements, consistent with federal regulations, from a system, or a disciplinary organization, etc.;
3. A description and evidence of the processes used by the institution to review periodically the application of its policies and procedures for credit hour assignment; and
4. A list of the courses and programs that do not adhere to the federal definition of "credit hour" or its equivalent as specified in the MSCHE Credit Hour policy (for example, online or hybrid, laboratory, studio, clinical, internship, independent study, and accelerated format), and

evidence that such variations in credit hour assignment conform to commonly accepted practice in higher education.

The new MSCHE Credit Hour policy can be viewed at <http://www.msche.org/documents/CreditHourPolicyRev112012.pdf>

Commission Nears Separate Incorporation

In the past few months, the Commission on Higher Education has been working with the Middle States Association to take significant new steps toward greater separation and independence. A formal letter of intent for a division of the current corporation has been executed by the Association and its three Commissions (Elementary, Secondary, and Higher Education). Under this agreement, CHE will separately incorporate; take title to and responsibility for the office condominium real estate at 3624 Market Street in Philadelphia; retain its Commission assets including previously segregated bank accounts; and will include all accreditation-related activities and staff within the scope of the newly formed corporation. As a separate entity, CHE will execute a formal services agreement with MSA covering business operations that the Association office will continue to deliver on behalf of the Commission on Higher Education.

It is expected that this transition will be largely transparent to member institutions. However, the Commission leadership will continue to keep the membership informed about related developments in the coming months.

Commission Undergoes Review by NACIQI

In mid-2012 the Commission submitted to the U.S. Department of Education its petition for continued recognition by the U.S. Secretary of Education. Each accrediting agency that is recognized by the Secretary is required to submit a detailed petition every five years. The petition is then analyzed by the Department and the agency appears before the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), which reviews the Department's recommendations and makes recommendations to the Assistant Secretary of Education.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education appeared before NACIQI on December 11. Following its review of the Department's recommendations, NACIQI asked the Commission to provide a report in one year on the following four items:

- (1) The status of the Commission's separation from the Middle States Association, including an update on the financial impact, if any, on the Commission's operations;
- (2) Evidence that the Commission has undertaken a comprehensive review of its 14 accreditation standards;
- (3) Evidence that the Commission has implemented its recently revised policy on *Complaints Involving Member and Candidate Institutions*, specifically showing that the Commission has reduced the time it takes to complete its review of complaints; and
- (4) Evidence that the Commission has fully implemented its new procedures for ensuring institutional compliance with federal regulations pertaining to credit hours, transfer of credit,

student identity verification in distance education and correspondence education, and Title IV student cohort default rates.

Town Hall Meetings Planned for March, April, and May

The Commission has scheduled three Town Hall meetings for the coming months to discuss the review of the accreditation standards, the impact of the Commission's separate incorporation, and other issues. The dates and general locations are March 19 (Albany, NY), April 18 (Ewing, NJ), and May 9 (Baltimore-Washington area). Specific locations and registration details will become available in the coming weeks.

Institutions Respond to PRR Proposals

During its November 2011 meeting, the Commission established the Periodic Review Report Working Group to review the current PRR process and make recommendations for improvement. The Commission's intent in establishing the Working Group was to modify the PRR process to make it more useful and effective and to ensure that both the Commission and its member institutions remain in compliance with federal regulatory requirements. The Commission's Call for Comment regarding the Working Group's recommendations generated largely supportive and wide-ranging responses that will be carefully reviewed by the Commission before any changes are made to the PRR. The Commission will not rush ahead in the review process, nor will it make hurried decisions about change.

The Commission appreciates the thoughtful reflections that it has received and assures member institutions that their questions and concerns will be given every consideration as the Commission and its staff continue to work toward improvements in the PRR process.

MSCHE Welcomes New Commissioners

The Commission recently completed its annual elections, but this time there was something new as the Commission conducted the entire election with an online ballot. Four current Commissioners were elected to new terms and four others were elected to their first terms.

The returning Commissioners include Dr. John Cavanaugh, Chancellor of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education; Dr. Karen Kershenstein (Public Representative), President of KWK Enterprises; Dr. Linda Scatton, Retired Director of the Policy and Evaluation Center for ETS; and Dr. John Johannes, Professor of Political Science at Villanova University. Dr. Kershenstein and Dr. Johannes had been serving unexpired terms on the Commission.

Newly elected were Dr. Dario Cortes, President of Berkeley College; Mr. Joseph Connolly, US Commissioner for the Bilateral UK-US Fulbright Commission and Distinguished Professor of Finance and Management, The Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chausees; Dr. Meg Benke, Acting President, SUNY Empire State College; and Dr. Nancy W. Malkiel, Professor of History, Princeton University. All of these Commissioners began their new terms on January 1, 2013.

Recently appointed to fill unexpired terms on the Commission were Dr. George Pruitt, President of Thomas A. Edison State College; Dr. John Ettling, President of SUNY College at Plattsburgh; and Dr. Denise V. Rodgers, MD, Interim President of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.



Cavanaugh Connolly Cortes Benke Malkiel Pruitt Johannes



Kershenstein Scatton Ettling Rodgers

Assessment Task Force Issues Recommendations

During the last academic year, the Commission directed that an Assessment Task Force be organized to address three specific charges: (1) Consider modifications in order to clarify the Commission's expectations in Standard 7: Institutional Assessment and Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning, including changes in the context or fundamental elements;(2) Recommend changes in accreditation processes regarding both assessment standards; and (3) Suggest ways that the Commission might enhance programming and training to support its member institutions in their efforts to enhance their overall compliance with the assessment standards and overall institutional effectiveness.

The 14-member Task Force represented institutions of various sizes, sectors, institutional type and control, and included currently serving presidents, faculty, assessment and institutional research staff, and administrators at MSCHE institutions. Two MSCHE staff, Dr. Sean McKittrick, a Vice President with the Commission, and Amy Shew Moseder, Senior Policy Analyst and Researcher, were assigned to lend assessment and analytical support to task force members.

During Summer 2012, the Commission engaged in several research activities to support the Task Force's work. Electronic surveys were sent to campus presidents, assessment and institutional research staff, faculty, general campus staff, and chief academic officers to help Task Force members understand more about preferences regarding the standards' wording, programming, and processes used to evaluate compliance with the standards. Additional research studies were conducted, which included a review of Commission accreditation actions that involve follow-up on one or both of the assessment standards, an analysis of the U.S. Department of Education's expectations of institutions and accrediting agencies regarding assessment, and a qualitative study of member institutions' preferences about ways the Commission might effectively address the above three charges. The results of these analyses were supplied to Task Force members for their review prior to their meeting during Fall 2012.

Led by Mary Ann Swain, Professor and Director of Doctoral Programs at SUNY-Binghamton, Task Force members met for two days in Philadelphia. Discussions were well-focused and referenced member institutions' needs as well as the Commission's need to ensure that assessment expectations clearly align with public and professional expectations relating to institutional effectiveness.

At the meeting, Task Force members discussed specific ways to streamline the wording of the fundamental elements of both standards in order to make the Commission's expectations clearer to institutions. They also discussed accreditation process improvements and ways the Commission might train staff and faculty to help them understand the assessment standards, and how streamlined wording, processes, and programming might assist institutions in demonstrating compliance with MSCHE and U.S. Department of Education standards.

The Task Force's efforts resulted in a report that was discussed by the Commission at its November meeting. The document will be sent to all member institutions for comment. After the member comment period has been completed, comments will be analyzed, and the recommendations will be further reviewed by the Commission. The current plan is for the recommendations to also be shared with the Committee that will work on revamping the 14 accreditation standards

The Commission thanks the Task Force members for work well done and looks forward to the member comment period. Watch for further details via e-mail updates from the Commission.

Commission Hosts Fall Chairs and Evaluators Workshop

The Commission held its annual Chairs and Evaluators Workshop, October 1 and 2 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Center City Philadelphia.

On Monday evening, team chairs participated in a working dinner session. MSCHE Senior Vice President Robert A. Schneider delivered welcoming remarks, followed by a presentation by MSCHE Vice Presidents Ellie A. Fogarty and Debra G. Klinman on *Tips, Strategies, and Best Practices for Team Chairs*. In this presentation, they reminded team chairs to analyze each self-study within the context of the host institution's mission. They also encouraged the team chairs to refer to Commission publications, such as *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education* and *Team Visits: Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Visit*. Of special significance, the presenters reminded team chairs to be collegial, organized, and prepared during their team visit. Throughout their presentation, Drs. Fogarty and Klinman provided helpful guidance on what to do before, during, and after an evaluation team visit. Also on Monday evening, Commission Vice Chair Gary Wirt discussed *Chairing a Successful Team Visit*, based on his extensive experience as a team chair and his service as a Commissioner.

Tuesday began with welcoming remarks by MSCHE President Elizabeth H. Sibolski, who briefly addressed federal initiatives pertaining to accreditation and described her participation, at the invitation of the U.S. Department of Education, in the previous day's higher education summit in Washington, DC.

Drs. Fogarty and Klinman then spoke on *Expectations and Accountability in Regional Accreditation*. They reviewed the Commission's expectations of teams and chairs. These include respect for the mission of the host institution; collegiality and integrity; expertise and preparation; team reports that are based firmly on the Commission's accreditation standards; decisions that are based on evidence; and professional judgment. They emphasized to the audience that team reports are read carefully by the institution and by the Commission, and help the Commission in the next levels of review—the Committee on Evaluation Reports and the full Commission. They noted that both the Committee and the Commission work diligently to ensure the consistent application of the standards across institutions of all types, sizes, and missions.

The presenters proceeded to review the process by which institutions certify their compliance with the Commission's Requirements of Affiliation and accreditation-relevant federal requirements. The accreditation-relevant federal requirements include student identity verification in distance and correspondence education courses; the recently enacted federal definition of the credit hour; transfer of credit policies; and the Title IV Cohort Default Rate. At the conclusion of their session, Drs. Fogarty and Klinman provided a list of additional resources that are available online for teams and chairs. As noted earlier in this newsletter, the Commission has initiated a new compliance review procedure to address these issues.

Following the Fogarty/Klinman presentation, MSCHE Commissioner Karen Stout addressed the audience on *How to Interpret and Apply the Characteristics of Excellence: A Framework for Determining Compliance*. Dr. Stout, who has served as President of Montgomery County Community College (PA) for the past 11 years, has chaired numerous MSCHE evaluation teams and currently chairs the Commission's Committee on Follow-up Reports. Dr. Stout explained that the Commission's fundamental elements should be viewed by the team in the context of the institution's mission and its Self-Study, should be used to help frame the team's questions, and should not be used as a simple checklist. When determining compliance, she noted, the team should examine what the institution is trying to accomplish, how well those aims are being achieved, and how the institution is improving itself. She reminded the attendees that the accreditation standards should be applied to the institution using professional judgment and common sense.

Dr. Stout also reviewed ways in which teams can determine an institution's compliance, and how to look for evidence. She emphasized that teams must depend on systematic evidence, not assertions, anecdotes, or future plans. Such evidence should demonstrate current and sustainable compliance. She also reviewed types of findings and follow-up and explained the Commission's definitions of Suggestions, Recommendations, and Requirements.



Dr. Robert A. Schneider, MSCHE Senior Vice President, responds to questions during a small group exercise as part of the 2012 Chairs and Evaluators Workshop.

The remainder of the day was spent in small group sessions facilitated by the Middle States Vice Presidents. These sessions included *The Evaluation Team Process: Getting Off to a Good Start; Applying the Standards: Significant Accomplishments, Suggestions, Recommendations, and Requirements; and Reaching Consensus About an Accreditation Action and What Happens After the Evaluation Visit*.

Copies of the Power Point presentations by Dr. Fogarty, Dr. Klinman, and Dr. Stout are available by clicking on <https://www.msche.org/?Nav1=EVENTS&Nav2=2012.03.01&Nav3=PresentationMaterial> or by logging on to www.msche.org, clicking on Events, then clicking on Presentation Materials, and finally, clicking on 2012 Chairs and Evaluators Workshop.

New Senior Director for Accreditation Operations

Dr. Lisa Marie McCauley recently joined the MSCHE staff as the Commission's new Senior Director for Accreditation Operations. In this role she is responsible for managing the design and implementation of a system for monitoring compliance with accreditation-related federal, state, and other pertinent regulations. She also coordinates review of documents and appropriate review of compliance issues during all formal interactions with member institutions. In addition, Dr. McCauley is responsible for supervision of the Commission's six-person Accreditation Services unit.



Lisa Marie McCauley

Dr. McCauley brings extensive experience to MSCHE. For the past decade she has participated in numerous activities as a peer evaluator, participating in team visits to domestic and international sites and also analyzing Periodic Review Reports and Monitoring Reports, and serving as a finance reviewer. Before joining the MSCHE staff, she served for eight years as Vice President for Business Affairs at King's College in Wilkes-Barre, PA, and for six years as Vice President for Finance and Operations at Northampton Community College in Bethlehem, PA. Previously she served as Controller at Middlesex County College in Edison, NJ, and as a manager with Deloitte & Touche in New York City, where she was responsible for domestic and international financial institution client engagement services.

Dr. McCauley earned her Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership from Widener University, her MBA in Accounting and Finance from the University of Scranton, and her BS in Accounting from King's College. She is also a Certified Public Accountant.

New Self-Study Handbook Now Available

In August 2012, the Commission published the latest edition of *Self Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report*. This new version contains minor editorial changes that better reflect the Commission's current practices in reviewing institutional self-studies. The booklet is available for free download at <https://www.msche.org/publications/SelfStudy2012FINAL.pdf>, or printed versions can be purchased. The print versions are available at \$11 each for 1-50 copies, \$9 each for 51-99 copies, or \$7 each for 100 or more copies. The online order form is available at <https://www.msche.org/myche/public/publications/publicationorderform.aspx>.

Modifications to Team Visits Handbook

In October 2012, the Commission made minor revisions to the handbook, *Team Visits: Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Visit*. The changes were made to address student identity verification practices in

distance education and correspondence education courses. Previously, the handbook addressed distance education, but not correspondence education. The changes include minor wording on pages 26 and 29 as well as replacement of Appendix 10 (pages 80-82). An updated version of the publication is available for free download at <https://www.msche.org/publications/TeamVisitsRevOct2012.pdf>.

Commission Enhances Website to Improve Access to Recent Actions

The Commission has enhanced the www.msche.org website to provide more transparent access to recent Commission actions. This was a change that was requested as part of the recent review of the Commission by the U.S. Department of Education.

When visiting the Commission website, users will now see a new button, *Accreditation Actions*, on the left side of the screen. Clicking on this button will bring up a sub-menu, with options for Recent Commission Actions and Non-Compliance Disclosure Statements. The Recent Commission Actions screen, modified from its previous version, now includes specific links, by year, to the actions of the full Commission, the Executive Committee of the Commission, and the Committee on Substantive Change. The Non-Compliance Disclosure Statements screen includes links to the Public Disclosure Statements for all institutions for which the Commission has recently taken non-compliance actions, such as Warning, Probation, or Show Cause.

To visit the new *Accreditation Actions* screen, [click here](#).

2012 Annual Conference is A Success; Planning Begins for 2013

More than 1200 representatives of MSCHE member and candidate institutions participated in *Accreditation in a Changing Environment*, the Commission's 2012 Annual Conference, December 5-7 in Philadelphia. The attendees benefitted from outstanding plenary and concurrent sessions, interaction with nearly 40 vendors in the Exhibit Hall, and many opportunities to network with their colleagues. The Power Point presentations of most of the speakers are available on the Commission website by clicking on <https://www.msche.org/?Nav1=EVENTS&Nav2=2012.01.01&Nav3=PresentationMaterial>. Please note that because the pre-conference workshops were separately ticketed events for an additional fee, those Power Point programs are not available on the website.

Planning will soon begin for the 2013 conference, scheduled for December 8-10 at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown Hotel. The conference Call for Proposals will be distributed this Spring. Watch your e-mail for details.

Upcoming Professional Development Opportunities

Several new professional development opportunities are being offered by the Commission in the coming months.

Assessment A-Z: From Assessment Basics to Zeroing in on Using Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning, is a two-day workshop series, March 4 and 5, that can be taken separately or together. It is scheduled for the Sheraton Old San Juan Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and is ideal for faculty and

administrators who want to refresh their knowledge of the basic principles of assessing student learning while discussing and practicing strategies for promoting assessment across campus, understanding and using results, and evaluating assessment progress.

The March 4 workshop serves as a refresher course on the principles of assessment, including assessment cycles and audiences, learning outcomes statements, and sources of student achievement. Examples will be presented of how to facilitate the assessment conversation on campus, including strategies for engaging faculty. *This workshop is primarily for those who are new to assessment or who want to refresh their knowledge of basic assessment principles. It is designed for a beginning to intermediate audience.*

The March 5 workshop focuses on understanding and using assessment results, including strategies for interpreting results, sharing information in clear and useful ways, and using results to improve teaching and learning and inform future assessment planning. Small hands-on group exercises will help participants practice what they learn in the workshop. *This workshop is primarily for those who work with assessment on a regular basis and is offered at a more advanced level.*

The facilitator for both will be Dr. Jodi Levine Laufgraben, Vice Provost for Academic Programs, Assessment, and Institutional Research at Temple University. Registration is open to chief academic officers, assessment coordinators, institutional research coordinators, faculty, and others with a keen interest in student learning assessment. While it is possible to attend both workshops in this series, it is important to note that the audience level is different for each workshop.

Also scheduled in the coming months are the following:

- *A Systems Perspective: Integrating the Self-Study Process with Strategic Planning*, April 19 at The Courtyard by Marriott, Philadelphia Downtown.
- *Assessing Our Assessment: How Are We Doing?*, May 10 at The DoubleTree by Hilton, Philadelphia Center City.
- *Closing the Loop Between Strategic Planning and Assessment*, May 13 at The Courtyard by Marriott, Philadelphia Downtown.

For additional information, or to register for any of these workshops, visit www.msche.org and click on *Events*.

Updated ALO Orientation ePacket

The Commission has updated its online ALO Orientation ePacket. First produced during 2009, this document contains valuable reference material and hyperlinks for new Accreditation Liaison Officers and experienced ALOs who want to stay current on MSCHE policies and federal regulations. The 2013 edition includes links to new and updated Commission policies, revised editions of Commission publications, and other important information. It can be viewed by clicking on <https://www.msche.org/publications/ALORientationePacketJanuary2013.pdf> or by visiting www.msche.org and clicking on Publications.

