



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

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MSCHE Members Approve Revised Standards

MSCHE member and candidate institutions have approved the Commission's revised Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation. The standards were developed by a Steering Committee of higher education administrators and faculty with input received from attendees at the Commission's 2013 and 2014 Town Hall meetings, 2013 Annual Conference, and via more than 400 written comments. The standards were also approved by the full Commission.

The seven revised standards are as follows:

- I Mission and Goals
- II Ethics and Integrity
- III Design & Delivery of the Student Learning Experience
- IV Support of the Student Experience
- V Educational Effectiveness Assessment
- VI Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement
- VII Governance, Leadership, and Administration

The Requirements of Affiliation continue to be published along with the standards. The Requirements, along with the request for more specific compliance information about institutional adherence to state and Federal regulations, reflect the ever-increasing demand for accountability in higher education.

As shown above, the number of standards has been reduced from 14 to seven. Although the number of standards has decreased, fewer standards in no way reflects a decision by the Commission to diminish its commitment to supporting institutional self-assessment and quality improvement. Instead, restructuring has eliminated redundancies, and the sometimes-lengthy contextual statements, fundamental elements, and optional analyses have been replaced with an increased emphasis on institutional self-reflection leading to meaningful improvements. The revised standards will be piloted by a group of 15 institutions via a unique Collaborative Implementation Project (see following article).

Commission Launches Collaborative Implementation Project for Revised Standards

Because the Commission places a premium on ensuring that its processes are well-developed and consistently implemented, the revised standards will be launched via a unique Collaborative Implementation Project involving a cohort of 15 institutions scheduled to submit self-studies and host evaluation teams during the 2016-2017 academic year.

The institutions invited to participate in the Collaborative Implementation Project were selected using several objective criteria, including the following: (1) has been accredited for at least ten years; (2) has a history of success in the peer review process; and (3) has had no significant follow-up requests from the Commission in the last five years. The institutions selected also needed to be representative of the members of the entire 2016-2017 self-study cohort.

Identifying potential participants was only the first step. To be included in the pilot, invited institutions were required to agree in writing to several stipulations:

- the evaluation visit must occur in the Spring of 2017 (a Fall visit was not an option);
- the comprehensive self-study model must be used;
- three individuals would be designated by the institution to serve as primary feedback resources and agree to regular remote meetings involving members of both the other pilot institutions and the Commission staff;
- the primary institutional contacts must be available to assist at various Commission training events designed to acclimate the membership to the revised standards; and
- the institution's self-study materials would be made available for training purposes.

The members of the 2016-2017 self-study cohort 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.

Watch future editions of the MSCHE Newsletter for further details on the revised accreditation standards and the Cooperative Implementation Project.

Update on Direct Assessment Programs

As noted in the MSCHE Summer 2014 Newsletter, earlier this year the U.S. Department of Education established guidelines through which institutions wishing to offer competency-based/direct assessment programs could obtain approval for participation in Title IV financial assistance for students enrolled in such programs.

These guidelines state that institutions wishing to offer direct assessment programs, for which 100 percent of all degree requirements are earned through methods other than credit or clock hours (34 CFR §668.10), must first obtain approval from the Commission before seeking approval from the U.S. Department of Education for each direct assessment program.

The Commission has developed a process for approval of direct assessment programs that involves submitting a complex substantive change. This approval process occurs in two stages. In the first stage, an institution completes an initial screening form that will be used to determine whether the program meets the criteria for a direct assessment program, and receives instructions about how to move forward in the approval process. Once the screening process is complete and approval to proceed is granted, directions for uploading information relating to the second stage are provided by the Commission to the institution. The new *Direct Assessment Programs Substantive Change Screening Form* can be accessed at www.msche.org/documents/DirectAssessmentPgmsScreeningForm080714.docx.

The second stage of the process requires the institution to submit information to the Commission to be reviewed and evaluated by the Commission's representative(s), followed by a visit to the institution to verify the information. The Commission's representative(s) will prepare a report and submit it to the Committee on Follow-up Activities and Candidate Institutions, which will make its recommendation to the full Commission. The *Complex Substantive Change Request Instructions for Approval of a Direct Assessment Program* can be accessed at www.msche.org/documents/DirectAssessmentTemplate080714.docx. The instructions include submission deadlines for all Complex Substantive Change requests, including approval of direct assessment programs.

On September 18, 2014, the Commission offered a webinar conducted by MSCHE Vice President Sean McKittrick, entitled *Direct Assessment Programs and Middle States: Toward Innovative Curriculum Delivery*. This webinar provided more detailed information on the steps involved to obtain approval of a direct assessment program. More than 80 individuals participated. During his presentation, Dr. McKittrick reviewed the definition of a direct assessment program, provided examples, walked the participants through the steps they would need to follow if applying for approval of a direct assessment program, and reviewed the expectations of both the U.S. Department of Education and MSCHE. Copies of Dr. McKittrick's Power Point slides can be viewed at www.msche.org/documents/DirectAssessmentandMiddleStates.pdf.

For additional information, contact your institution's MSCHE Vice President/liaison. The name of your liaison can be found by visiting http://www.msche.org/institutions_directory.asp, clicking on the name of your institution, and then clicking on "Detail View".

Registration Deadline Approaches for Annual Conference



The revised accreditation standards will be the primary topic in a special afternoon plenary session during the forthcoming MSCHE Annual Conference in Washington, DC. The conference will take place December 3-5 at the new Washington Marriott Marquis hotel.

The special afternoon session, scheduled for Thursday, December 4, from 4:00 – 5:00 pm, is ***The Revised MSCHE Accreditation Standards: What You Need to Know***. Presenting will be Dr. Elizabeth H. Sibolski, President of MSCHE, and Dr. Gary Wirt, Vice Chair of the Commission and President-elect of Goldey-Beacom College. They will discuss elements of the revised standards and will review the progress of the Collaborative Implementation Project.

The other plenary sessions will include *Issues and Trends in Global Higher Education: Implications for Accreditation*, featuring Francisco Marmolejo, Tertiary Education Coordinator and Lead Tertiary Education Specialist at World Bank; *Higher Education and Federal Policy: A Perspective from U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander* (invited presenter), the former U.S. Secretary of Education, former Governor of Tennessee, and former President of the University of Tennessee; and *A Higher Education Accreditation Forecast: Sunny with Periods of Thunder*, presented by Dr. Paul L. Gaston, III, Trustees Professor at Kent State University and author of *Higher Education Accreditation: How It's Changing, Why It Must*.

This year's conference will feature a total of 26 concurrent sessions. Of special interest should be a recently-added concurrent session on *Adult Degree Completion: The Role of Prior Learning Assessment and Competency-Based Education*. The presenter will be Dr. Pamela Tate, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). Dr. Tate will discuss the important contribution of adult students to the degree completion agenda; the practices in which colleges and universities need to be engaged to attract and retain adult students; the central role of both Prior Learning Assessment and Competency-Based Education in adult student persistence and graduation; and how these innovations are being taken to scale. Dr. Tate's session is scheduled for Thursday, December 4, from 3:00 to 3:45 pm.

The conference registration fee is \$535 per person for registrations received and paid on or before October 31, 2014. All registrations must be completed online using a credit card (Visa, MasterCard, or American Express only). Checks and purchase orders are not accepted. **After October 31, 2014, only on-site registration is available and the registration fee increases to \$695 per person.**

For registration information or details about hotel accommodations, visit <http://www.msche.org/?Nav1=EVENTS&Nav2=2014.01.01>.

Commissioners Elected to Terms Beginning January 1

Seven individuals were recently elected to terms on the Commission, effective January 1, 2015.

Dr. Alan D. Mathios, Dean of Cornell University's College of Human Ecology, and Mr. David E. Hollowell, Executive Vice President and Treasurer Emeritus at the University of Delaware, were elected to their first terms on the Commission. Earlier, both had been appointed to the Commission to complete unexpired terms.

Elected to their second terms as Commissioners were Dr. John Ettlting, President of SUNY College at Plattsburgh; Dr. Davie Jane Gilmour, President of Pennsylvania College of Technology; Dr. Bronte Jones, Vice President for Finance and Administration at Dickinson College; Dr. Gerald C. Kobylski, Colonel, U.S. Army, and Professor of Mathematical Sciences at the United States Military Academy at West Point; and Dr. Warren Olin-Ammentorp, Professor of English at Cazenovia College.

All of the terms run through December 31, 2017.

Recent Commission Actions

The Commission held its most recent meeting on June 26 and will meet again on November 20. To view recent Commission actions, visit the "Accreditation Actions" section of the MSCHE website at http://www.msche.org/institutions_recentactions.asp.