



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

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Commission Endorses Revised Accreditation Standards

The Commission voted unanimously at its June 26, 2014 meeting to endorse the latest proposed revisions to the Commission's accreditation standards.

As noted during a plenary session at the 2013 MSCHE Annual Conference and subsequently in a series of Town Hall meetings, newsletters, and other correspondence, the Steering Committee working on the revised standards has reduced the current 14 standards to a proposed seven. Accompanying the new standards will be a separate document covering compliance with accreditation-related federal regulations.

While the new standards are fewer in number, certain core principles remain in place. The Commission felt it important that the mission-centric standards acknowledge the diversity of MSCHE institutions. In response to comments from many institutions, higher education experts, and federal officials, the Commission also wanted the standards to continue to focus on the student learning experience. Consistent with the current standards, the revised standards emphasize institutional assessment and assessment of student learning. And, in response to suggestions from institutions and lawmakers alike, the new standards support innovation as an essential part of continuous institutional improvement.

As will be noted in the introductory statement to the standards, the new standards affirm that the individual mission and goals of each institution remain the context within which the new standards will be applied. The standards emphasize functions, rather than specific structures, recognizing that there are many different models for educational and operational excellence.

Unlike the current standards, which include a brief description of the standard, followed by a contextual statement, fundamental elements, and optional analysis and evidence, the new standards are each expressed in one or two sentences and then followed by criteria. The criteria specify characteristics or qualities that encompass the standard. Institutions and evaluators will use these criteria together with the standards, within the context of the institutional mission, to demonstrate or determine compliance. It is felt that this new approach will provide institutions with flexibility to demonstrate how they meet the standards.

Some modifications have been made from earlier drafts, following extensive input from member institutions, both in writing and during the Commission's 2013 and 2014 Town Hall sessions.

Dr. Stephen Sweeny, President-Emeritus of The College of New Rochelle, and Chair of the Steering Committee that worked on the revisions, noted, “I believe that we have developed proposed standards that truly reflect the voice of our region’s institutions.”

In early September, the chief executive officers of MSCHE institutions will be sent an electronic copy of the latest revisions along with a ballot. Each institution will be asked to vote on adoption of the standards. The voting representative for each institution is the chief executive officer.

While preparing for the approval of the new standards, the Commission has taken steps to plan a Collaborative Implementation Project. The Commission invited a small cohort of institutions scheduled for self-study visits during 2016-17 to voluntarily participate in the project. The size of the cohort is necessarily limited and its membership must reflect the range of institutions with evaluations during 2016-17. Each invited institution was selected based on a combination of factors, including: (1) has been accredited for at least 10 years; (2) has a history of success in the peer review process; and (3) has had no significant follow-up request from the Commission in the last five years. These institutions will work closely with the Commission in developing their self-studies using the new standards, helping to prepare for full implementation by all member institutions. A second cohort of institutions, with PRRs due in June 2017, will be identified in the near future.

Watch for details.

Direct Assessment Approval Process Established

The U.S. Department of Education has recently established guidelines through which institutions wishing to offer competency-based/direct assessment programs can 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 Department of Education has also announced in the July 31, 2014, Federal Register that it is inviting institutions to apply for participation in an Experimental Sites Initiative in which the Department of Education will permit an institution to provide Title IV aid to students who are enrolled in direct assessment programs even if the entire program does not use direct assessment. Commission staff have confirmed that institutions desiring to apply for approval from the Department of Education for participation in the direct assessment Experimental Sites Initiative are not required to obtain final approval from the Commission prior to submitting their application to the Department.

The Commission has developed a process for approval of direct assessment programs, be it for approval of a program for which the 100 percent of students’ academic program is through this modality or for approval for a program proposed to be part of the Department of Education’s Experimental Sites Initiative. Institutions interested in learning more about direct assessment programs and the Commission’s process for approval of such programs are invited to participate in a webinar to be held on September 18, 2014, from 2:00-3:00 pm, facilitated by Sean A. McKittrick, Vice President with the Commission. Interested institutions are asked to visit <http://www.msche.org/?Nav1=EVENTS&Nav2=2014.08.05> to reserve a spot for the webinar.

Institutions interested in submitting a request should contact their MSCHE liaison for further information. An initial screening form and template for submitting a substantive change request for approval of a direct assessment program can be found on the Commission's website at <http://www.msche.org/?Nav1=POLICIES&Nav2=INDEX>.

Annual Conference Takes Shape



Planning continues for MSCHE's 2014 Annual Conference, scheduled for Wednesday, December 3 through Friday, December 5 at the new Washington Marriott Marquis Hotel in Washington, DC. The facility is located adjacent to the Walter Washington Convention Center and is just minutes from Union Station, the National Mall, and all major DC attractions.

Scheduled to serve as plenary session speakers are Dr. Paul L. Gaston, author of *Higher Education Accreditation: How It's Changing, Why It Must*; United States Senator Lamar Alexander (tentative), former President of the University of Tennessee, former Governor of Tennessee, and former U.S. Secretary of Education; and Francisco Marmolejo, Tertiary Education Coordinator and Lead Tertiary Education Specialist, World Bank. The 2014 Annual Conference will include, for the first time, a fourth plenary session. Scheduled for Thursday afternoon, this plenary will feature Commission leaders discussing the new accreditation standards.



Gaston Alexander Marmolejo

The program also includes more than two dozen concurrent sessions on wide-ranging topics, including assessment; strategic planning; academic program review; accreditation and the public communication process; linking budgeting, planning, and resource allocation; predictors of transfer student success; and much more.

The Commission will again offer a series of pre-conference workshops, an opening night welcome reception, and a large exhibit hall. The pre-conference workshops will include three full-day and two half-day workshops. The full day workshops include *Closing the Loop Between Strategic Planning and Assessment*, presented by Michael F. Middaugh, higher education consultant, former Chair of MSCHE, and retired Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness at the University of Delaware; *Understanding and Using Student Learning Assessment Results*, presented by Jodi Levine Laufgraben, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Assessment at Temple University; and *Assessment and General Education: Practical Approaches, Meaningful Impact*, presented by Sean A. McKittrick, MSCHE Vice President.

The half-day workshops include *The Dos and Don'ts of Using Accreditation to Promote Your Institution*, presented by Richard J. Pokrass, MSCHE Director for Communications and former President of the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations; and *Self-Study: Writing the Report and Preparing the Team*, presented by Robert A. Schneider, MSCHE Senior Vice President; John A. DiNardo, Professor of Physics and Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs at Drexel University; and Tom F. Gregory, Associate Vice President for Instruction at Pennsylvania College of Technology.

Registration is now open. The complete conference program can be viewed at <http://www.msche.org/?Nav1=EVENTS&Nav2=2014.01.01>.

Policy Revised to Reflect New Common Language

As noted in the Spring 2014 MSCHE Newsletter, the seven regional accrediting organizations in the United States recently adopted a common language framework so that terms used by each of the accreditors have the same definitions. This necessitated some minor changes for Middle States. As part of the change process, the Commission needed to modify its policy on *Range of Commission Actions*. The policy modifications were approved during the Commission's June 26, 2014 meeting.

The policy now reflects the revised definitions of Warning, Probation, and Show Cause. "Removal" of Accreditation has been changed to "Withdrawal" of accreditation, and the action to "Suspend" accreditation was eliminated because it was not consistent with federal requirements and other Commission policy.

The revised policy can be viewed at www.msche.org/documents/RangeofCommissionActions062614.pdf.

MSCHE Welcomes New Commissioners

MSCHE recently welcomed two new Commissioners who were appointed to fill unexpired terms.



Mathios

Rehm

Dr. Alan Mathios was appointed to fill an unexpired term through December 31, 2014. Dr. Mathios is the Rebecca Q. and James C. Morgan Dean of Cornell University's College of Human Ecology. Prior to being named Dean he served as Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Education for the College of Human Ecology. On behalf of MSCHE, Dr. Mathios has served as a plenary speaker and workshop facilitator for the 2011 and 2012 Self-Study Institutes, and also served as an evaluation team member.

Dr. David Rehm, Provost of Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Maryland, was appointed to fill an unexpired term through December 31, 2016. Dr. Rehm has served for the past year as a member of MSCHE's Steering Committee for the Revision of *Characteristics of*

Excellence. In addition he has served as chair of multiple MSCHE evaluation teams, as an evaluation team member, and as a PRR reviewer.

For profiles of all current MSCHE Commissioners, visit http://www.msche.org/about_commissioners.asp.

Free Webinars to Assist MSCHE Institutions

Members of the Commission's Accreditation and Volunteer Services staff continue to offer a series of free webinars for peer reviewers and for those who want to learn more about the Commission's process for submitting electronic documents.

For details on Summer and Fall webinars, visit http://www.msche.org/events_calendar.asp.

Recent Commission Actions

The Commission held its most recent meeting on June 26 in Philadelphia. During this meeting, the Commission reaffirmed the accreditation of 34 institutions via self-study, removed the warnings and reaffirmed accreditation for five institutions, issued warnings to 10 institutions, and placed three institutions on probation. In addition, the Commission granted accreditation to The Commonwealth Medical College in Scranton, PA.

For a complete description of the Commission's June 26 actions, visit http://www.msche.org/institutions_recentactions_view.asp?dteStart=4/29/2014&dteEnd=6/26/2014&idCommitteeType=0&txtMeeting=Commission.