



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

In This Issue:

- [**Accreditors Respond to Spellings Commission**](#)
 - The seven regional accrediting organizations responded to the preliminary report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education.
- [**Deputy Director John Erickson Leaves Commission in December**](#)
 - Dr. John Erickson leaves the Commission after 18 years of service to accredited and candidate institutions and staff leadership on a broad range of issues.
- [**2006 Coming Events**](#)
 - Seven events will complete the Commission's 2006 schedule of workshops and conferences. All events this year are estimated to reach over 2,800 people, double the number the Commission reached in 2002.
- [**Commissioners**](#)
 - Dr. Elaine Ryan, MSCHE Commissioner, retired as President of The College of Southern Maryland as of June 30. Dr. Stephen J. Sweeny, President, The College of New Rochelle, was appointed to complete Dr. Ryan's term on the Commission. Former Commission Chair Frank Piskor (1967-1970) died in March.
- [**Annual Conference to feature Bok, Kirwan, Lapovsky & Nunley**](#)
 - Dr. Charlene Nunley, Montgomery College, will open the annual conference this December, speaking about the U.S. Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education; a luncheon panel will include Dr. William Kirwan, University System of Maryland and Dr. Lucy Lapovsky, Mercy College, discussing cost, quality, and access; and Mr. Derek Bok, Harvard University, will close the conference, speaking about improving the quality of undergraduate education.
- [**Clarification: When Is Accreditation Not Reaffirmed?**](#)
 - The Commission is not able to reaffirm an institution's accreditation when the Commission's actions include warning, probation, or show cause.
- [**New Institutes Focus on Assessment and Planning**](#)
 - Three residential institutes on student learning assessment and a new institute on integrated planning and assessment became successful landmark events in 2006.
- [**Improved Commission Website Now Includes Statement of Accreditation Status and Other Features**](#)
 - Each institution's Statement of Accreditation Status (SAS) is now available in the Institution Directory. Templates for team reports are available under

Evaluators/Templates & Samples. Commission actions are reported under Institutions/Recent Commission Actions.

- [New Institutional Profile Entirely On-line](#)
 - The 2005-06 Institutional Profile was redesigned so that it could be completed entirely on the web. A summary of the data collected is available on the Commission's website under Institutions/Institutional Profile.

Accreditors Respond to Spellings Commission

The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC), an organization of the seven regional accrediting commissions, has released its response to the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, which was created by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings.

The Commission's recent preliminary report was highly critical of several aspects of American higher Education. C-RAC has indicated that regional accrediting associations are continuing to work with the Commission as it explores the role of regional accreditation in quality assurance in higher education. C-RAC explains that regional accreditation is useful, effective, meets national needs, and clearly is not obsolete because:

- Regional accreditors have provided national leadership on the assessment of student learning
- Accreditation standards used by regional commissions are highly consistent
- Regional accreditation does not place too much attention on inputs and capacity issues
- Regional commissions have a remarkable record of accepting innovation
- Regional accreditation does much more than measure institutions against "minimum standards"
- Regional accreditation contributes to institutional accountability
- Peer review should remain fundamental to higher education quality assurance
- Regional accrediting agencies effectively involve representatives of the public

For the full text of the C-RAC response, click on the link below or paste it into your browser:
<http://www.msche.org/documents/C-RACletter062106.pdf>.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) also has disseminated a message from Executive Director Jean Avnet Morse entitled "Accreditation and the Federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education."

MSCHE noted that constructive change is welcome, but that support for change should be considered within the context of acknowledging that higher education has already recognized the need for, and is making progress toward, many of the steps that the Futures Commission suggested.

For the full text of the MSCHE response, click on the link below or paste it into your browser:
<http://www.msche.org/?Nav1=NEWS&Nav2=OTHER&Nav3=USED>.

One of the items in the federal Commission's report includes support for the use of published tests to promote accountability in higher education. MSCHE disseminated to its members an article by Linda Suskie, MSCHE Executive Associate Director, on "Published Tests and Assessments in Higher Education."

The article points out some of the merits of published tests but cautions against treating them as a panacea, because no single test can be appropriate for every college and every program in a national system of diverse institutions with unique needs and goals.

For the full text of the Suskie article, click on the link below or paste it into your browser:
<http://www.msche.org/?Nav1=NEWS&Nav2=OTHER&Nav3=PUBLISHEDTESTS>.

Deputy Director John Erickson Leaves Commission in December

Dr. John Erickson leaves the Commission in December 2006 after 18 years of dedicated service to the Middle States region.

Erickson joined the staff as an executive associate director in 1989 and became deputy executive director of the Commission in 1999. He previously served as chair of the English Department at Erie Community College.

In addition to being the staff liaison assigned to more than 120 institutions during his tenure on the Commission, he focused on such issues as public and governmental outreach; oversight of the Commission's daily operations; the evaluation of curriculum and support services; outcomes assessment; collective bargaining; governance; and national issues in higher education.

His special assignments included staff leadership for the multi-year review that resulted in the 2002 edition of *Characteristics of Excellence*, the Commission's statement of accreditation standards; planning retreats for the eight U.S. regional accrediting commissions to discuss common concerns and strategies; and facilitating training workshops for institutions involved in self-study processes and workshops for team evaluators and chairs. He helped to launch the current substantive change process and developed a major revision and expansion of the policy on substantive change.

Dr. Elizabeth Sibolski, currently the Senior Executive Associate Director, will become Deputy Director on January 1st.

2006 Coming Events

The Commission is expected to reach over 2,800 people with its scheduled workshops, institutes, and conferences in 2006.

Approximately one-half of these will have attended workshops on preparing the Periodic Review Report, training chairs and evaluators, orientation for institutions preparing for the self-study process, and the annual conference. In addition, over 1,400 people will have participated in workshops, residential institutes, and a conference on various aspects of assessment.

The 2006 conference outreach effectively doubles the number of people the Commission reached in 2002.

The five remaining events for 2006 include:

- October 4: **Workshop for New Chairs & Evaluators** (*assigned to teams for fall 2006 & Spring 2007*), DoubleTree Hotel, Philadelphia, PA
- October 23: **Assessing Student Learning in General Education**, University of Delaware Conference Center, Newark, DE
- October 30-31: **The Self-Study Institute** (*for institutions being evaluated in 2008-09*), DoubleTree Hotel, Philadelphia, PA
- November _: **Student Learning Assessment for Beginners Workshop**, University of Delaware Conference Center, Newark, DE
- December 6-8: **MSCHE Annual Conference**, Philadelphia Marriott Hotel Downtown

Commissioners

Dr. Elaine Ryan, MSCHE Commissioner, retired as President of The College of Southern Maryland as of June 30. She joined the Commission in January 2003 and served on both the Committee on Evaluation Reports and the Committee on Follow-up/Candidate Institutions. In addition, she chaired the 2005 annual conference planning committee.

Dr. Stephen J. Sweeny, President, The College of New Rochelle, was appointed to complete Dr. Ryan's term from July 1 through December 31. He will be eligible to stand for election to his own term on the next ballot, beginning service on January 1, 2007.

On January 1st, the Commission will have four vacancies, including both institutional and public representatives. The Committee on Membership has received more than 80 nominations. Ballots will be mailed in September 2006 to the CEO of each member institution, and the election will be final in October.

In Memoriam:

Former Chair of the Commission, Dr. Frank Piskor, died on March 8, 2006. He joined the Commission in 1961 and served as Chair from 1967 to 1970. Previously, he was the Academic Vice President at Syracuse University and the President of St. Lawrence University.

Annual Conference to feature Bok, Kirwan, Lapovsky & Nunley

The opening keynote speaker for the 2006 annual conference will be Dr. Charlene Nunley, President, Montgomery College, Maryland, and a member of the U.S. Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education. She will speak on "**Shaping the Future: The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education.**"

A luncheon panel will include Dr. William Kirwan, Chancellor, University System of Maryland and Dr. Lucy Lapovsky, Professor, Mercy College. They will discuss **cost, quality, and access in higher education.**

Mr. Derek Bok, President of Harvard University, will close the conference by discussing “**Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education.**” He previously served as President from 1971 to 1991 and was named Interim President on July 1, 2006, succeeding Dr. Lawrence H. Summers.

The conference this year will be at the Philadelphia Marriott Hotel Downtown and consists of five tracks:

- Track 1, **Effective & Innovative Assessment**, occurs on Wednesday, December 6.
- Tracks 2 to 5 extends from Thursday, December 7 to Friday, December 8, including **Keeping the Doors Open, Seeking Flexibility, Ensuring Accountability, and Surviving Self-Study.**

Attendees may register for Track 1 only, Tracks 2 to 5 only, or Tracks 1 through 5. The conference website and registration open on September 5th.

Clarification:

When Is Accreditation Not Reaffirmed?

Results from the most recent cycle of evaluation visits and MSCHE actions indicate the need to clarify when the Commission is not able to reaffirm accreditation.

The evaluation team report will document requirements or required actions when an evaluation team concludes that the institution does not comply with one or more of the accreditation standards outlined in *Characteristics of Excellence*. In this situation, the evaluation team report states the ways in which the institution does not meet the standard. When appropriate, the report also should indicate what steps should be taken to bring the institution into compliance with the standard.

The team report and institutional response are subsequently reviewed by the Commission’s Evaluation Committee and by the Commission itself. When the Commission agrees that the institution has not complied with one or more standards, an action other than reaffirmation of accreditation must be taken. These actions include warning, probation, and show cause.

- An action of *warning* is taken when the institution appears not to be in compliance. In such situations, the Commission will request a monitoring report and may request a special visit if on-site verification of institutional status or progress is necessary.
- An action of *probation* signals that the institution is not in compliance, and that it may not have adequately responded to previous actions of postponement or warning. Under these conditions, the Commission will request a monitoring report and may request a special visit.

- A *show cause* action indicates that the institution has been judged not to be in compliance either with eligibility requirements or with accreditation standards. When a show cause action is issued, the institution will be required to present its case for continued accreditation by means of a substantive report and/or an on-site evaluation. Show cause may be, but need not be, preceded by either a warning or probation.
- The Commission may reaffirm an institution's accreditation or place it on probation if the institution satisfies the Commission that it meets accreditation requirements. If the institution is unable to satisfy the Commission's concerns regarding compliance, the Commission removes accreditation.
- The institution remains accredited by the Commission while it is under a warning, probation, or show cause. If the Commission removes the accredited status, the institution has the right to appeal from the Commission's decision.

New Institutes Focus on Assessment and Planning

Three residential institutes on student learning assessment and a new institute on integrated planning and assessment became successful landmark events for the Commission in 2006. Two more institutes are scheduled for January 2007.

The first three Student Learning Assessment Institutes were designed for institutions that already had a basic understanding of assessment and needed focused time to develop strategies for advancing assessment on their campuses. They were piloted in 2004 and continued on January 9-10, January 11-12, and June 12-13. The institutes were designed for teams of up to six people from each participating institution.

Linda Suskie, MSCHE Executive Associate Director, organized the assessment institutes. The facilitators who worked with the teams included Virginia Anderson, Professor of Biological Sciences, Towson University; Elizabeth Jones, Director of Assessment and Director of the Teaching and Learning Center, Northampton Community College; and Elizabeth Paul, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Past Chair, Department of Psychology, The College of New Jersey.

The 2007 Student Learning Assessment Institute will take place on January 8-9 at the University of Delaware Conference Center, Newark, DE.

The Institute on Integrated Planning and Assessment emphasized institutional effectiveness and educational effectiveness as elements of integrated planning and assessment. It was held on June 14-15, sponsored jointly with the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP).

Participants who completed the Institute also satisfied the requirements for Step I of SCUP's three-step planning institute, and individuals who also take Steps II and III will receive a SCUP certificate of completion. The Commission is considering the possibility of offering additional joint institutes that expand upon SCUP's Step I and Step II.

The MSCHE-SCUP institute was organized by Elizabeth Sibolski, MSCHE Senior Executive Associate Director, and Michael Middaugh, MSCHE Commissioner, President of SCUP, and Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Planning, University of Delaware. Other faculty included Joanne Passaro, Vice President for Planning and Institutional Assessment, Mercy College; Steven Poskanzer, President, SUNY College at New Paltz; and Jeff Seybert, Director of Research, Evaluation, and Instructional Development, Johnson County Community College.

The 2007 MSCHE-SCUP institute (Step I) will be held on January 28-30 at the University of Delaware Conference Center, Newark, DE

Commission's Website Now Includes the Statement of Accreditation Status, Templates for Team Reports, and Commission Actions

The SAS:

Institutions and the public now can view the Statement of Accreditation Status (known as the SAS) for each accredited and candidate institution in the Middle States region. An institution's SAS consists of a basic profile of the institution and its accredited status.

The profile includes enrollment, public or private control, affiliation, institutional type, degrees offered, whether the institution is approved to offer more than 50 percent of a degree or certificate through distance learning, and any branches, additional locations, or other instructional sites.

The accredited status provides the date of initial accreditation, the date it was last reaffirmed, the most recent Commission action, a brief history since the previous decennial evaluation, and the dates of its next evaluations.

When a Commission action involves warning, probation, or show cause, Commission staff will develop a Public Disclosure Statement that accompanies the SAS.

Each institution's SAS, and a Public Disclosure Statement when applicable, may be found on the Commission's website (www.msche.org) under Institutions/Institution Directory.

Templates:

Chairs and evaluators now can have ready access to various templates for team reports during decennial evaluations and for the Chair's brief. These templates will assist them in developing the structure for reports when a visit is based on:

- a comprehensive or a comprehensive with emphases self-study
- a self-study organized by the sequence of the standards in *Characteristics of Excellence*
- a self-study organized by groups of standards
- a self-study organized thematically
- a selected topics self-study.

The templates may be found on the website under Evaluators/Templates & Samples.

Commission Actions

The Commission's actions taken between its most recent meeting and the previous meeting are available to members and the public under Institutions/Recent Commission Actions. Users also may click on each institution listed and view its Directory listing and its Statement of Accreditation Status.

New Institutional Profile Entirely On-line

The Institutional Profile (IP) was completely redesigned for the 2005-06 reporting period so that accredited and candidate institutions could complete it entirely on the web. The "thin client" software that caused many people difficulties in previous years was abandoned, and this in turn eliminated the firewall issues that some institutions had experienced.

The Commission will continue to introduce improvements that will make the process more user-friendly. Key users at each institution are encouraged to send Oswald Ratteray (oratteray@msche.org) any suggestions they may have for enhancing the annual IP filing process.

A summary of the data collected on the 2005-06 IP is available on the Commission's website under Institutions/Institution Profile. It includes region-wide profiles of the 522 institutions and more than 3.1 million students and 264,000 faculty, as well as distance learning courses and programs in the Middle States region.