

CHE Letter, Spring 2004

The newsletter of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education

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Long-range Planning:

MSCHE Considers Future Developments

What will be next in higher education and accreditation?

The MSCHE continues to support member institutions as they use the new accreditation standards. At the same time, we are also looking into a "crystal ball" to plan for the future. Now is a good time to review recent accomplishments and to decide where next to devote efforts and resources. The Commission invites all of its members to reflect on the issues mentioned later in this article and to suggest other areas for consideration.

Student Learning and New Providers

The new accreditation standards and processes proved to be very timely in anticipating the concerns that institutions and the public have discussed during the current debates on reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Working together, regional accrediting organizations presented legislators with evidence that the higher education community had already addressed, through accreditation, the need to assess student learning and to create flexible requirements to accommodate new content and new types of higher education providers.

The higher education community can be proud that the peer review/accreditation process worked so well, and we can be grateful that we are still governed by standards that are innovative, flexible, and individualized, rather than standardized and quantitative.

Middle States has created new publications and policies to support our institutions that are using the new standards. The Commission also has begun to experiment with new processes that allow members to separate compliance and improvement reviews, and to focus more precisely on areas they select.

Now the Commission is looking ahead to what may happen after our members have become comfortable with the new standards and processes. What will be the most important developments in higher education? How can accreditation best invest its limited resources?

Facing Emerging Issues

Some of the issues that may become important in the near future include:

- Is there a better process to make the accreditation process more useful and to involve faculty?
- Should the self-study process be shortened and/or refocused?
- Should Commission staff have different roles than they currently have?
- Regional accreditors have greatly increased their cooperation on matters such as student learning and Reauthorization. Should there be more national activity among regional accreditors? If so, on what issues should they increase cooperation? Should a national accrediting body be created?
- Are more students seeking higher education without pursuing a degree?
- Is an emphasis on student-centered learning becoming more widely accepted, and how does this affect the delivery of services and the physical structure and organization of institutions?
- Should accreditation increase its focus on how institutions assess specific student competencies?
- Should regional accreditors develop the capacity to review programs in addition to reviewing the institution as a whole?
- How do consortia of providers affect the quality of what a particular institution offers?
- How will rapidly-expanding "franchise" types of institutions affect quality assurance processes?
- Should the Commission train a cadre of paid consultants to offer training at or for institutions?
- What responsibilities does the Commission have internationally? As other nations expand or consider restructuring their higher education systems, including creating their own quality assurance agencies, what types of connections should regional accreditation develop with foreign institutions and quality assurance agencies?

As the Commission plans, it will continue to communicate with you and to solicit your suggestions. We hope that you will call us at any time with suggestions.

Assuring Quality at Rapidly-Expanding Institutions

The Commission has taken several steps in recent years to ensure that accreditation processes do not unnecessarily slow down institutional growth.

For example, the Commission formed a separate Substantive Change Committee, enabled it to meet more frequently than other committees, and delegated to it authority to act on behalf of the Commission in certain cases without further delay.

The Commission now has a new challenge: how to assure the quality of institutions that are opening significant numbers of branches and additional locations and doing so on a continuing basis. These sites often are outside the United States, and some may involve distance learning. The Commission now is discussing what processes should be used to ensure an efficient and fair review of rapid-growth institutions.

Readers are invited to submit comments and suggestions to Ms. Jean Avnet Morse, Executive Director.

Revised Policies, Guidelines, & Procedures on the Web

All of the Commission's policies, guidelines, and procedures are being revised. Draft copies of the new policies will be placed on the Commission's website for comment in July.

Most of the existing policies, currently loose leaf in a 3-ring binder, evolved over more than 30 years.

The revised drafts eliminate redundancies, clarify relationships among similar policies, and speak more directly to what constitutes a policy statement as opposed to informal guidelines to institutions and evaluators or administrative procedures.

The Commission has authorized publication of the revised policies after members provide comments.

Please submit comments to the Executive Director at info@msache.org.

New Publications Available on Accreditation Process and on Assessment

The Commission has released three new publications for institutions, faculty and staff, and evaluation teams. They include two new manuals on the accreditation process, *Handbook for Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Team* and *Handbook for Periodic Review Reports*, as well as a new brochure with frequently asked questions on assessment to supplement *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources*.

Handbook for Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Team

This handbook outlines the joint responsibilities and roles of evaluation team members, team chairs, and host institutions. It also explains the context within which an evaluation occurs.

Handbook for Periodic Review Reports

This handbook streamlines the process for developing and submitting PRRs, making it compatible with the standards for accreditation that were revised in 2002.

Resources for Student Learning Assessment

This brochure answers some of the most frequently asked questions about student learning assessment. It also describes the Commission's new book on the subject and its accompanying website (See Publications at www.msache.org.)

Reauthorization: When & What?

Congress did not pass a bill to reauthorize the Higher Education Act during the past session, although legislation proposed by Congressmen McKeon and Boehner received much attention. The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) has been working "behind the scene" since last year, successfully informing legislators about the practices and needs of accrediting organizations and their member institutions.

Until Congress next considers reauthorization, the Commission will continue to work with member institutions, other higher education organizations, and other accrediting organizations to find the best approach to issues that may continue to interest Congress.

These issues could include accountability, defining or measuring student "success," greater public access to accreditation reports, student access to higher education, transfer of credits among institutions, and the quality of distance learning offerings. However, this agenda could change.

Please send any comments and suggestions to Ms. Jean Avnet Morse, Executive Director.

New Dues Structure Approved

The Commission considered and approved a proposal at its June meeting for restructuring the method used to assess annual dues for member institutions.

The purpose of the proposal that was previously announced is to improve the equitable allocation of dues among members. It also eliminates sudden dues increases that institutions experienced when they made a transition to a new dues category. In addition, it adjusted the fees for institutions whose primary location is outside the United States.

The Commission approved the restructuring after discussion of the many expenses and challenges facing the Commission. The new dues structure will be effective for FY 06.

Each institution will be able to go to the Commission's website, www.msache.org, and use a program to calculate its dues under the new dues structure.

Two MSCHE Staff Liaisons Changed

Executive Associate Directors Dr. George Santiago, Jr., and Dr. MaryAnn Baenninger have accepted appointments to promising new careers in higher education. Two new executive associate directors, Dr. Luis Pedraja and Dr. Robert Schneider, will join the staff in July 2004.

Dr. Pedraja currently is Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean, and Professor of Theology at Memphis Theological Seminary. His accomplishments include completion of curriculum review, increase in student enrollment, development of distance education classes, obtaining grants, and more.

Dr. Schneider has been Assistant Vice Provost for Core and Transfer at Temple University since 2001. He was responsible for the general education program, the University's relations with community colleges, and transfer students.

The Commission will ensure that member and candidate institutions scheduled for evaluation visits, periodic review reports, or substantive change approval experience a smooth transition as the portfolios of staff liaisons are realigned in the coming academic year.

Dr. Santiago will become the provost at Briarcliffe College in Long Island, New York, effective July 16, 2004. He joined the Middle States staff in June 1998 and served a broad range of institutions in the region. He also was responsible for the more than 40 institutions in Puerto Rico.

Dr. Baenninger will become the president of the College of Saint Benedict, St. Joseph, Minnesota, effective July 1, 2004. She joined the Commission staff in 2001. In addition to

serving as staff liaison to institutions, she provided her expertise in the field of assessment as the principal staff contributor to the 2003 publication *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources*.

The incoming staff will be introduced in greater detail in the fall newsletter.

New Assessment Workshop Series Piloted in June

Seventeen institutional teams participated in a hands-on workshop on June 7-8 in Philadelphia to focus on student learning assessment at the institutional and program levels.

Teams were selected competitively based on proposals demonstrating that they are committed to using assessment as a means of institutional and departmental strength, not simply as a vehicle for achieving accreditation.

The teams consisted of four to five people from each institution, including an administrator and a faculty member. They focused on such topics as developing learning goals, choosing assessment measures, creating a structure for a plan, and surveying existing practices at a large, complex university.

Guiding the teams in developing meaningful products for their campuses were facilitators Dr. MaryAnn Baenninger, MSCHE Executive Associate Director; Dr. Elizabeth Paul, Chair, Department of Psychology, The College of New Jersey; and Ms. Linda Suskie, Director of Assessment, Towson University.

The workshop will be repeated on November 8-9, immediately prior to the annual Self-Study Institute. Announcements will be mailed in the fall.

Progress in IP Data Collection

Almost all of the Middle States institutions either completed the on-line Institutional Profile (IP) on time and without technical difficulties. Some institutions also notified the Commission that they would be filing a paper submission instead of the online IP.

There were few incidents this year of institutions being unable to get access to the database to complete the IP. Eight institutions still have not registered, in spite of several mail and e-mail notices. Commission staff is exploring the reasons for possible communication failures at these institutions.

A number of institutions have reported financial data that are inconsistent with their audited financial statements. Commission staff is considering programming solutions to prevent certain types of errors next year.

Data will be imported into the Commission's internal database in the coming weeks, and an aggregate profile of institutions in the region will be available on the Commission's website this summer.

Commission Actions

March 3, 2004

A "Statement of Accreditation Status" (SAS) is available for each institution listed below. The SAS is the official public record of each institution's current status and recent accreditation history, and it provides a context for Commission actions. Submit requests in writing to the Executive Director, Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Commission actions also are available on the Commission's website at www.msache.org within 30 days of a scheduled Commission meeting.

Candidate for Accreditation Status Granted:

Graduate College of Union University, NY

Withdrawal from Candidate for Accreditation Status:

Center for Advanced Manufacturing and Technology, PA

Initial Accreditation Granted:

National Labor College, MD

Northeastern Seminary, NY

Accreditation Reaffirmed via Evaluation Visit:

Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico - Mayaguez Campus, PR

Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico - Ponce Campus, PR

St. John's College, MD

State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

Accreditation Reaffirmed after Follow-Up:

Erie Community College, NY

Reaffirmation of Accreditation Postponed:

Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico - Arecibo Campus, PR

Substantive Change:

alternative delivery method

Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania

Edinboro University of Pennsylvania

Inter American University of Puerto Rico - Ponce

Onondaga Community College, NY
St. John's University, NY
Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania
Sistema Universitario Ana G. Mendez - Universidad del Este

new degree level

College of Notre Dame of Maryland
Conservatory of Music of Puerto Rico
Five Towns College, NY
Inter American University of Puerto Rico - Barranquitas
The Sage Colleges, NY
Saint Francis University, PA
University of Scranton, PA

new program level (certificate)

Keuka College, NY

new location for main campus

Strayer University, DC

new branch campus

Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, PA

additional location

Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico
Rochester Institute of Technology, NY
State University of New York College at Plattsburgh
Washington Bible College/Capital Bible Seminary, MD

change in mission

Inter American University of Puerto Rico - Barranquitas

new program

State University of New York Downstate Medical Center

Follow-up Reports/ Candidate Reports/Visits/ Developments:

[(*) Reference to these institutions appears more than once in the Summary of Actions. Reports and/or visits were required prior to MSCHE action.]

Albany College of Pharmacy of Union University, NY
Baltimore City Community College, MD
Baltimore International College, MD
Cambria County Area Community College, PA
Cazenovia College, NY

*Center for Advanced Manufacturing and Technology, PA
College of Mount Saint Vincent, NY
The College of Saint Rose, NY
Columbia Centro Universitario, PR
Education Direct Center for Degree Studies, PA
Electronic Data Processing College of Puerto Rico, PR
Elizabethtown College, PA
*Erie Community College, NY
*Graduate College of Union University, NY
Institute of World Politics, DC
International University in Geneva, Switzerland
Keuka College, NY
Medaille College, NY
New York Institute of Technology - Old Westbury, NY
Passaic County Community College, NJ
Pratt Institute, NY
Richmond, The American International University in London, England
Rockland Community College, NY
Saint Peter's College, NJ
Suffolk County Community College, NY
Sullivan County Community College, NY
State University of New York - College of Technology at Delhi, NY
Tai Sophia Institute, MD
Touro College, NY
Trinity College, DC
Washington Bible College/ Capital Bible Seminary, MD
Westminster Theological Seminary, PA