



Middle States Commission on Higher Education

ACCREDITATION LIAISON OFFICER

Orientation e-Packet

Updated August 2017

Congratulations on your selection as your institution's Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO). In this role you will serve as the primary contact with the staff of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) and will be an important resource to your institution on accreditation issues.

Official correspondence between the Commission and an institution's president is typically copied to the ALO. Other types of communications (emails, faxes, phone calls, letters) may occur directly between the Commission staff and the ALO. In such instances, you, as the ALO, should ensure that your president is appropriately informed.

The effective ALO is carefully selected by the president and has the time, knowledge, and authority to engage in regular communication about accreditation-related issues with the institution's president, other offices and individuals on campus, and with the Commission. As the ALO you should be in regular and direct communication with your president. In addition, to be an effective ALO you should have adequate time and resources to focus on accreditation issues, and should have appropriate status, visibility, authority, knowledge, access to data, and support from the senior administration to fulfill the responsibilities of being the ALO. *To learn more about the role and responsibilities of the Accreditation Liaison Officer, [click here to view the Commission's official policy statement.](#)*

About the Commission

In your role as ALO it is important that you understand the nature of the Commission on Higher Education.

The Mid-Atlantic Region Commission on Higher Education, *doing business as* the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, was legally incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on March 1, 2013. From its origins in 1919 through February 2013, the Commission was a unit of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Although now an independent corporation, the Commission maintains an ongoing business relationship with the Middle States Association.

The Commission is recognized by the United States Secretary of Education to conduct accreditation and pre-accreditation (Candidacy status) activities for institutions of higher education in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, including distance education and correspondence education programs offered by those institutions. In addition, the Commission accredits a limited number of institutions that are not based in the United States.

When acknowledging their accreditation, institutions should include the following information in appropriate publications and in electronic communications such as websites: *(Name of Institution) is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (267) 284-5000.* Note: the mailing address and telephone number of the Commission are required by federal regulation to be included in all public references to an institution's accreditor(s).

[Click here to view the Commission's Mission, Principles, and Strategic Goals and Objectives.](#)

Key Accreditation Publications

MSCHE has produced several publications that will prove very helpful to you in your role as ALO. To download any of these publications, click on the title:

[Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation](#)

The Commission's new *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation* were approved by member institutions during Fall 2014.

This document, containing fewer Standards for Accreditation (seven) but more Requirements of Affiliation (15), was used by 15 institutions that participated in the unique Collaborative Implementation Project (CIP). The CIP institutions completed their self-studies while communicating regularly with the Commission staff and each other, and the lessons learned during this process are being used to train all other MSCHE institutions. Full implementation of the revised Standards and Requirements begins during the 2017-18 academic year.

[Becoming Accredited](#)

Available in electronic form only, this publication contains useful information not only for staff at institutions seeking their initial accreditation, but also for newcomers to accredited institutions. Of special use are the initial sections that define accreditation and the role of accreditors.

Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report (2017-18)

(for institutions submitting a self-study during 2017-18)

This is a newly revised version of the Commission's self-study handbook and is intended for use by institutions with self-studies that are due for submission during 2017-18.

Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report (2018-19)

(for institutions addressing the new standards and requirements for evaluation visits in 2018-19)

This is yet another newly revised version of the Commission's self-study handbook and is intended for use by institutions with self-studies that are due for submission during 2018-19.

Team Visits: Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Visit

(for institutions in the Collaborative Implementation Project and for institutions with evaluation visits in 2017-18 and 2018-19).

Other Documents

MSCHE has a range of other publications, covering such topics as Becoming a Peer Evaluator; History of Accreditation and MSCHE; Promoting Educational Excellence and Improvement: Facts About MSCHE; and more.

Statements of Accreditation Status

The Statement of Accreditation Status (SAS) provides information on an institution's recent accreditation history. It includes notations about degree levels, branch campuses, additional locations, and other instructional sites included within the scope of the institution's accreditation; whether the institution has been approved to offer distance education programs; and information on the years the institution's next key accreditation events (self-study) are due. Your institution's SAS, including a recent history of Commission actions involving your institution, is available by visiting the [Institutions](#) section of www.msche.org. Click on the first letter of your institution's name, and then scroll down until you see your institution's name. Click on *Statement of Accreditation Status* in the lower right to view your SAS.

Your MSCHE Liaison

One of the central responsibilities of an ALO is to maintain contact with the MSCHE vice president who is assigned as your institution's liaison. You should communicate with your MSCHE vice president as needed and respond promptly when contacted by that individual. To identify the name of your MSCHE liaison, visit www.msche.org, click on the *Institutions* button, at the top of the screen click on the first letter of your institution's name, and then scroll down until you see

your institution. To verify the name of your designated MSCHE staff liaison, click on *Detail View*.

Policies, Guidelines, and Procedures

The Commission's policies and procedures are either elaborations of the standards for accreditation or they describe procedural requirements for institutions and for the Commission. Guidelines are based on best practices and provide advice to members for implementing the accreditation standards. To view all MSCHE [Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines, click here](#). Of special interest to ALOs are the following documents:

- [Substantive Change Policy](#) and [Substantive Change Procedures](#)
Certain institutional changes must be approved by the Commission before they are implemented. Failure to follow this process could impact an institution's federal Title IV student financial aid. As ALO you should be aware of the policy and processes, and should ensure that all substantive changes are submitted in a timely manner to the Commission for review and approval.
- [Degree and Credit Guidelines](#) and [Credit Hour Policy](#)
The Commission's Requirements of Affiliation stipulate that accredited institutions comply with all applicable federal, state, and other relevant government policies, regulations, and requirements, which generally include requirements and expectations for degrees and credits. These guidelines provide an overview of federal and state definitions.
- [Accreditation Actions](#)
As your institution's ALO, it is important for you to understand the types of Affirming, Monitoring, Procedural, and Non-Compliance actions the Commission may take.
- [Follow-Up Reports and Visits](#)
The Commission typically takes an accreditation action once every five years, following an institutional self-study and an on-site evaluation or periodic review report. Follow-up reports and visits may be requested when the Commission is concerned about current or future institutional compliance with one or more of the accreditation standards. This set of guidelines provides valuable information for an ALO whose institution is preparing for a follow-up report or for a follow-up visit.

- [Public Communication in the Accreditation Process](#)
The Commission has an obligation to share with the public essential information about its accreditation standards, its procedures, and the accreditation status of its member institutions.
- [Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status](#)
This policy describes in detail the key information that institutions are required by the Commission to include in their publications, whether in print or online. It also provides the framework for the advertising or promotion of the institution's accreditation status and acceptable terminology.
- [Procedures for Appeals from Adverse Accrediting Actions](#)
This set of procedures describes in detail the steps to be taken if an institution wants to appeal an adverse accrediting action, including timelines, required documentation, and costs.

Professional Development Opportunities

Throughout the year MSCHE offers professional development opportunities for representatives of member institutions. These include one and two-day workshops, the annual conference, pre-conference workshops, the annual Chairs and Evaluators workshop, the Self-Study Institute, and various webinars. [To view the current schedule for these activities, click here.](#)

The annual conference, held during December, also provides many opportunities to enhance your skills in a variety of accreditation-related topics. [To view the latest information about the conference, click here.](#)

The Higher Education Opportunity Act

In August 2008, the United States Congress passed the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA). The HEOA contained new requirements for accreditors and the institutions they accredit. These involve distance education, monitoring of enrollment growth, substantive change reporting, and transfer of credit policies. For additional details on the HEOA, visit the U.S. Department of Education's website at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/hea08/index.html>

Reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act is expected to occur in the next few years.

Recent Commission Actions

The Commission meets three times per year, in March, June, and November. The Commission revised its website so it is now easier to access information regarding actions taken during the meetings of the full Commission, the Commission's

Executive Committee, and the Committee on Substantive Change. [You can view recent actions of these groups by clicking here.](#)

Frequently Asked Questions About Accreditation

The Commission has developed a comprehensive online section of Frequently Asked Questions. They can be accessed by clicking on <https://www.msche.org/?Nav1=ABOUT&Nav2=FAQ>

Some Other Things You Should Know

Compliance Review- 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.

The Commission and its peer evaluators have initiated a new procedure to verify institutional compliance with the accreditation-relevant provisions of the HEOA. 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 are 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 currently concentrates on the following eight areas: Student Identity Verification in Distance and Correspondence Education courses, Transfer of Credit Policies and Articulation Agreements, Assignment of Credit Hours, Title IV Program Responsibilities, Institutional Records of Student Complaints, Required Information for Students and the Public, Standing with State and Other Accrediting Agencies, and Contractual Arrangements.

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.

To view the procedures the Commission currently follows in compliance review, click on the following link: <http://www.msche.org/publications/Compliance-Booklet2017.pdf>

Please note that the compliance review process is expected to encompass additional requirements in future years. The Commission will publish (and post to www.msche.org) revised compliance review guidelines as they become available.

Complaints and Third-Party Comments- Federal regulations require accrediting organizations to review and respond to complaints and third-party comments regarding member and candidate institutions. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education has specific policies and procedures for such situations. If the Commission determines that a complaint or third-party comment requires a response from an institution, a letter

will be sent to the institution's Chief Executive Officer with a copy of the complaint or third-party comment and a list of information the Commission will need to complete its review. For further details, view the following:

[Policy on Complaints Involving Member and Candidate Institutions](#)

[Policy on Third-Party Comment](#)

Using the MSCHE Logo- The Middle States Commission on Higher Education allows member institutions to use the Commission logo in publications and on institutional websites. Certain restrictions apply. To request permission to use the logo, please contact Richard J. Pokrass, the Commission's Director for Communications and Public Relations, at rpokrass@msche.org. If your request is approved, you will receive versions of the logo in EPS and JPG formats as well as a copy of the Commission's acceptable use guidelines for the logo. Please note that under federal regulation, whenever an institution acknowledges its accreditor in print or electronic form, the institution is required to provide the accreditor's full name, mailing address, and telephone number.