



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

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### **MSCHE Town Hall Meetings Slated for April and May**

The Commission on Higher Education is holding a series of town hall meetings with presidents, chief academic officers, and accreditation liaison officers of member institutions throughout the winter and spring.

The first meeting in the series was held in Puerto Rico during January. A second town hall was held Friday, March 19, at Harrisburg Area Community College in Pennsylvania. The remaining town hall meetings are scheduled for April 9 at the Albany Marriott in Albany, NY; and May 4 at The College of New Jersey in Ewing, NJ. Each will run from 10:00 am to Noon, with Continental Breakfast available from 9:00 to 10:00 am.

During the March 19 town hall, MSCHE President Elizabeth H. Sibolski discussed the changing nature of the regulatory environment and its effect on accreditation. She explained new regulations that have resulted from the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 and the subsequent negotiated rulemaking sessions that have taken place during 2009-2010. During negotiated rulemaking, interested constituents and representatives of the U.S. Department of Education met to attempt to agree on the interpretation of the HEOA and appropriate regulatory language. Some new regulations will be effective July 1, 2010 and additional regulations may become effective July 1, 2011.

Dr. Sibolski noted that the new regulations will require the Middle States Commission on Higher Education to do some things differently than in the past. These include, for example, monitoring of enrollment growth, substantive change issues, and transfer of credit policies, as well as greater emphasis on distance education during the peer review process.

Another key part of the March 19 town hall was a presentation by MSCHE Chair Michael F. Middaugh, who discussed recent correspondence with member presidents regarding the relationship between MSCHE and the Middle States Association. Dr. Middaugh stressed the need for MSCHE to meet the U.S. Department of Education's "separate and independent" provisions

and thanked those in attendance for their continued support of the Commission. He fielded multiple questions from the audience.

Participating in the upcoming town hall meetings will be Dr. Middaugh, Dr. Sibolski, and Commission Vice Chair R. Barbara Gitenstein. MSCHE vice presidents/institutional liaisons will also be on hand for these sessions.

For additional information about the town hall meetings, contact Abigail Mosebrook at [amosebrook@msche.org](mailto:amosebrook@msche.org) or call (267) 284-5025.

### **New Policies and Guidelines on Website**

MSCHE has posted to its website several updated policies and guidelines, following January approval by the Commission's Executive Committee. The changes are as follows:

#### [Substantive Change](#)

Text was added to this policy to bring it into compliance with new federal distance education regulations regarding verification of student identity. The changes are on pages two (Distance Education) and 11 (Processes: Content of Substantive Change Requests) of the policy and address the terms distance education and student verification processes exclusively.

#### [Follow-up Reports and Visits](#)

The Commission has seen a number of monitoring reports and progress reports that fail to address the Commission's concerns or are otherwise inadequately prepared. Institutions are often confused about the nature and purpose of staff visits and small team visits. The revised guidelines provide much more thorough information on the Commission's expectations and add suggestions for preparing a successful follow-up report. These guidelines were last revised in 2004.

#### [Governing Boards: Understanding Middle States Expectations](#)

This is a new publication, similar in intent and format to the Commission's earlier publication, *Assessing Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness: Understanding Middle States Expectations*. This publication was created because the Commission has taken an increased number of accreditation actions related to governance. Information provided should clarify how to document compliance with Standard 4: Leadership and Governance.

#### [Selection of Peer Evaluators](#)

Under these revised guidelines, Commission staff may, as appropriate, avoid assigning volunteer peer evaluators to institutions that compete with the evaluator's home institution, be it for students, grants, or athletic contests. The staff will also avoid assigning evaluators whose institution is part of the same small consortium, community, or other network. These revisions state more clearly that final determination of evaluator assignments rests with the Commission. These guidelines were previously titled *Selection of Chairs and Evaluation Team Members*, and were last revised in 2005.

#### [The Accreditation Liaison Officer \(ALO\): Role and Responsibilities](#)

The new guidelines provide expanded information about the role and responsibilities of the ALO, offer suggestions on the traits and characteristics of effective ALOs, and establish an expectation that every member institution will designate an active ALO. These guidelines were last revised in 2004 and were previously known as *Institutional Liaison with the Commission*.

#### [World Wide Web Policy](#)

This new policy establishes guidelines and operating procedures for the Commission website and the use of blogs and social media.

Additional policy revisions are expected later this year. Watch your email account and the Commission's website ([www.msche.org](http://www.msche.org)) for details.

### **New Online Document Describes Distance Education, Substantive Change, Monitoring Growth and Transfer of Credit Elements of HEOA**

A newly developed MSCHE document has been posted to the Commission website to provide member institutions with a better understanding of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. Based on articles that first appeared in the September 2009 and January 2010 editions of this newsletter, and updated with additional information, the document provides an overview of the Distance Education, Substantive Change, Monitoring Growth, and Transfer of Credit components of the federal Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. The document provides a detailed explanation of how the HEOA and related federal regulations are impacting the accreditation process. To download the document [click here now](#). If you want to download it at a later date, the link is <http://www.msche.org/publications/Distance-Education-and-the-Higher-Education-Opportunity-Act.doc>.

### **Annual Institutional Profile Process Underway**

The Commission's annual Institutional Profile process has begun. The person who completed the IP last year and the person designated as the "Accreditation Liaison Officer" at each MSCHE – accredited institution recently received an email message with a login ID and password. If either of those individuals is no longer at your institution, please inform Mr. Tze Joe ([tjoe@msche.org](mailto:tjoe@msche.org)).

### **There are some significant changes to this year's IP process. Even if you have submitted past Institutional Profiles, please pay careful attention to this year's instructions.**

Beginning this year, the IP will use the same financial data MSCHE member institutions report to IPEDS. A screening question will ask which accounting standard is used by a member institution (FASB or GASB). The answer will then determine from which section and line number of the IPEDS report the financial data will be extracted. In addition to simplifying institutions' financial reporting by using the IPEDS data, the new IP also allows institutions to submit electronic copies of their audited financial statements and the financial section of their IPEDS report, provided electronic versions are available.

In the General section of the IP, the names of the Doctoral degrees in the degree list have changed. "First Professional Degree" has been changed to "Doctor's-Professional Practice." "Doctoral" has been changed to "Doctor's-Research/Scholarship." A third category, "Doctor's-Other," has been added to the list.

Because of some past misunderstandings of the guidelines in the Enrollment section of the IP, clarifications have been made. The label "Number of credit hours for the credit load of a full-time student" has been changed to "Minimum credit load to be considered a full-time student." In addition, a validation rule has been added to clarify the identification of full and part-time student credit hours.

References in the IP have been changed from Distance *Learning* to Distance *Education*, reflecting new terminology in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008.

In the IP sections on Branch Campuses and Additional Locations, the label "Address" was changed to "Street Address, City, State, Postal" so more consistent and complete information will be submitted. In the section on "Other Instructional Sites," the label "Name" was changed to "Name of the site or facility at which courses are being offered."

Should your institution encounter any problems or have any questions during the preparation of your Institutional Profile, please contact one of the following people:

Financial Questions- Joseph Pellegrini ([jpellegrini@msche.org](mailto:jpellegrini@msche.org))

Non-financial Content Questions- Oswald Ratteray ([oratteray@msche.org](mailto:oratteray@msche.org))

Technical Issues- Tze Joe ([tjoe@msche.org](mailto:tjoe@msche.org))

### **A Clarification About Certification Statements for Related Entities**

The January, 2010 MSCHE Newsletter contained an article about the Commission's new Certification Statements. Federal law requires that the Commission obtain from each accredited institution a certification that the institution is in compliance with the Commission's Requirements of Affiliation and Related Entities policy and with federal Title IV requirements. Most institutions certify their compliance by submitting the [Certification Statement](#) found on the Commission's website. Signed Certification Statements are required of all institutions seeking initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. The signatures of the institution's Chief Executive Officer and Chair of the Board also certify that the institution is in compliance with relevant requirements under the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 such as those on distance education and transfer of credit. As noted in the January article, SUNY institutions are asked to submit two certification forms. Those forms are also available on the [Commission website](#).

Some confusion has recently arisen regarding certification under the Commission's Related Entities policy. This policy applies to some applicant, candidate, or accredited institutions at which the institution's governing board shares decision-making responsibility with one or more non-accredited Related Entities concerning some functions and operations. These typically involve finances, planning, governance, budget and approval processes, recruitment, information systems, or employee compensation. A Related Entity may be a corporate parent, system administration or board, religious sponsor, funding sponsor (which, in some cases, may include an equity or investment fund), or other entity that can affect decisions related to accreditation. Related Entities may include institutional or corporate layers or groups. Ordinarily, local, county, and state legislatures, other accreditors, local advisory boards, and government agencies are not considered Related Entities.

When an institution shares certain functions with a Related Entity, the institution is responsible to the Commission for presenting, explaining, and evaluating all significant matters and relationships involving Related Entities that may affect accreditation requirements and decisions. This is explained in far more detail in the Commission's [Related Entities policy](#). This policy requires that the Related Entity provide a certification, on the Related Entity's letterhead, that it controls the institution, either directly or through one or more intermediaries; that it recognizes the Commission's compliance requirements; and that it will ensure that the institution's responsibilities related to areas controlled or influenced by the Related Entity will be fulfilled. This certification must be signed by the Chief Executive Officer of the related entity, NOT by the Chief Executive Officer of the accredited institution.

### **MSCHE Welcomes Two New Commissioners**

During its March 4 meeting, MSCHE welcomed two new Commissioners who were recently appointed to fill unexpired terms. Dr. Jose Jaime Rivera, President of the University of the Sacred Heart (Puerto Rico), was appointed to fill the term of Dr. Marcelina Velez de Sanitago, who recently resigned from the Commission. Dr. Steven Poskanzer, President of the State University of New York at New Paltz, was appointed to fill the term of Dr. Sean Fanelli, who recently retired from the presidency of New York's Nassau Community College.

## **Nominations Sought for MSCHE**

The Commission's Committee on Membership is seeking nominations for new Commissioners for the term January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2013. Nominations may be made by the chief executive officers of member institutions. CEOs may nominate themselves, anyone from their own campus, or someone from another institution.

The actions that the 26 members of the Commission on Higher Education take are the culmination of peer review accreditation activities in the Middle States region. The composition of the Commission is vital to ensure that all relevant points of view are represented and that there is an appropriate balance of academic and administrative representatives.

This year, the Commission invites nominations for three individuals to serve as institutional representatives. Nominees should be of a **senior administrative position** within a member institution. The nomination form is available at [www.msche.org/documents/nombal10.pdf](http://www.msche.org/documents/nombal10.pdf).

The Committee considers all nominations based on the proportional representation of the Commission as compared to the region, as well as federal requirements for academic, administrative and public representation. *However, the Committee seeks in particular individuals with accreditation experience.*

Commission members spend approximately 10-12 days each year on Commission business, including Commission meetings and accreditation committee meetings. The full Commission usually meets for one day in each of March, June, and November. The Commission's standing committees – the Committee on Evaluation Reports and the Committee on Follow-Up Activities/Candidacy – each meets between three and seven days per year. In addition, Commissioners may be asked periodically to serve on the Committee on Periodic Review Reports, the Committee on Substantive Change, or *ad hoc* committees or task forces for an additional one to four days each year.

If you would like to submit a nomination for one or more of the vacancies, please complete the nomination form and return it by fax to Ms. Mary Beth Kait, Senior Director for Planning & Policy, by March 30, 2010. Please note that the Committee on Membership cannot consider a nominee unless it has a copy of the individual's current resume, which should be provided with the nomination form. It is not necessary to provide a full *curriculum vitae*.

## **Upcoming Training Opportunities**

Two outstanding training opportunities are being offered in the coming months for representatives of MSCHE member institutions.

MSCHE's popular retreat for campus leaders, *Fostering a Campus Culture of Assessment*, is scheduled for Thursday, April 15 at Pace University in New York City. Earlier versions of this program were sold out. MSCHE Vice President Linda Suskie, author of *Assessing Student Learning, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (2009, Jossey-Bass) serves as the program facilitator/lead presenter in this session, which will focus on creating a thriving culture of assessment; how to get faculty, administrators, and staff "on board" with assessment; and ways to foster a climate in which assessment is an ongoing part of campus life.

Research and experience show that assessment happens only with the active commitment, involvement, and tangible support of campus leaders. For that reason, registration is open only to campus teams that include the following: the chief executive officer or the chief academic officer (provost or vice president for academic affairs), a faculty governance leader, and an assessment coordinator. Institutions are invited to bring larger teams, provided that the teams include these

three individuals. Small institutions (those with fewer than 1,000 students and who do not have three separate individuals in these three roles) may register only two people. The registration fee for the retreat is \$340 per person if received no later than April 5.

The spring workshop series will conclude on Thursday, May 20 with the return of *A Basic Toolbox for Assessing Institutional Effectiveness*, presented by Dr. Michael F. Middaugh, Commission Chair, Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness at the University of Delaware, and author of *Planning and Assessment in Higher Education: Demonstrating Institutional Effectiveness* (2009, Jossey-Bass). This workshop will focus on ways to measure the extent to which an institution is making the most effective and efficient use of its human and fiscal resources in support of the teaching/learning process. Features will include presentations and interactive discussions on strategies to identify those dimensions of institutional effectiveness that are appropriate for your institution; an overview of data collection tools that have been found to be demonstrably successful in assessing institutional effectiveness; a review of student learning outcomes as a component of overall institutional effectiveness; and analytical approaches that foster the use of information on institutional effectiveness to support institutional decision making. The registration fee is \$295 per person if received on or before April 23, and \$375 per person if received April 24-May 10.

To register, or for further information on either of the upcoming workshops, visit [www.msche.org](http://www.msche.org) and click on *Events*.

A first-time workshop, *Becoming an Assessment Facilitator*, was held March 8 in Philadelphia. This one-day program was designed for those who are familiar with assessment and who want to learn how to guide others in developing plans and tools for assessing student learning. The workshop sold out quickly and the Commission staff has received many requests for an additional session. Plans are currently being developed to offer *Becoming an Assessment Facilitator* as a pre-conference workshop immediately prior to the 2010 MSCHE annual conference in Philadelphia. Watch for details.

### **www.msche.org is Your Green Alternative to Commission Publications**

Would you like to do your part in the area of conservation? Do you need a copy of one or more publications from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education? Do you want to read a specific Commission policy or review some of our guidelines? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, log onto [www.msche.org](http://www.msche.org), the official website of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. On our website you'll find downloadable copies of:

- All MSCHE publications, including *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*, *Team Visits: Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Visit*, *Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process*, *Handbook for Periodic Review Reports*, *Assessing Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness: Understanding MSCHE Expectations*, and many more.
- All MSCHE policies and guidelines.
- Promotional/informational materials on upcoming workshops and conferences.
- All MSCHE forms, including certification statements, expense reimbursement sheets, templates for the Chair's Confidential Brief and evaluators' reports, and more.
- Other resources on accreditation, including Power Point presentations, writings on accreditation issues by MSCHE staff members and others, plus valuable web links to other resources.
- Frequently Asked Questions about various aspects of accreditation.

**Website Enhancements Are Planned: What Information Would You Like to See?**

The staff continually makes enhancements to the Commission website ([www.msche.org](http://www.msche.org)). We are seeking your input for future improvements. Specifically, what information do you have difficulty finding on our website? What information would you like us to add to the website?

Please send your comments to Richard Pokrass, Director for Communications and Public Relations ([rpokrass@msche.org](mailto:rpokrass@msche.org)). Please be as specific as possible.

### **Sponsorship, Exhibitor, and Advertiser Information for 2010 Annual Conference**

The brochure containing sponsorship, exhibitor, and advertiser information for the 2010 MSCHE Annual Conference is now available online by [clicking here](#). The 2010 conference is scheduled for December 8-10 at the Philadelphia Marriott-Downtown.

### **Recent Commission Actions**

The Commission on Higher Education held its Winter/Spring meeting on March 4. A [Summary of Commission Actions](#) is available on the MSCHE website. This same section of the website summarizes Commission actions from meetings dating back five years.