

Accreditation Review Cycle and Monitoring Policy

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I. Purpose

The Mid-Atlantic Region Commission on Higher Education (MARCHE), doing business as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE or the Commission), seeks to ensure that institutions are reevaluated and monitored on a regular and consistent basis. The purpose of this policy is to establish the timeline and components of the Commission's accreditation review cycle and monitoring activities. Additional information about the range of accreditation activities conducted by the Commission, including reviews or proceedings and any related reports and visits, can be found in *Accreditation Activities Guidelines*.

II. Statement of Policy

In accordance with federal regulation 34 CFR § 602.19, the Commission shall implement a cycle for accreditation review that reevaluates and monitors institutions to ensure compliance with the Commission's standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, and applicable federal regulatory requirements. The Commission shall assign institutions to an accreditation review cycle which dictates the timeline and a regular and consistent schedule of review. The Commission shall require accredited institutions to conduct a comprehensive Self-Study Evaluation and On-Site Evaluation visit at least every eight years*. As part of regularly scheduled accreditation activities, the Commission may direct institutions to submit follow-up reports or host follow-up visits. The Commission shall conduct annual monitoring activities to assess the institution's ongoing compliance.

While the Commission has established a continuous accreditation review cycle, the Commission reserves the right to collect additional information or conduct reviews or visits outside of regularly scheduled accreditation activities at any time when it obtains information that raises concerns about the institution's ongoing compliance with the Commission's standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, and applicable federal regulatory requirements.

The accreditation review cycle is continuous and does not expire until accreditation ceases. The institution's assigned cycle cannot be altered except under extraordinary circumstances, following non-compliance, to comply with federal regulation, or in accordance with Commission

* The full implementation of the eight-year cycle began with accredited institutions that had self-study in 2020-2021.

policy and procedures. Only the Commission may alter the accreditation review cycle.

III. Procedures

The Commission staff will develop procedures as are necessary to ensure the consistent implementation of policies. See *Accreditation Review Cycle and Monitoring Procedures*, *Follow-Up Reports and Visits Procedures*, *Out of Cycle Monitoring Procedures*, and *Voluntary Surrender Procedures*. In the implementation of this cycle, the Commission may alter procedures at any time to respond to state and federal regulations or other legal requirements.

IV. Definitions

The following definitions are used and/or inferred in this policy and/or procedures:

- A. **Accreditation activities.** All activities (including but not limited to reviews, reports, visits) conducted by Commission representatives related to the institution's accreditation phase, accreditation status, or scope of accreditation occurring throughout the accreditation review cycle and during monitoring activities for a member (accredited or candidate) or applicant institution.
- B. **Accreditation materials.** All documentation related to accreditation activities including but not limited to the institution's written reports to the Commission, submitted evidence, team reports, institutional responses, confidential briefs, complaints or third-party comments, action notifications, substantive change requests, transcripts of proceedings, team rosters, and any correspondence of record. Accreditation materials are treated as confidential by Commission representatives, become part of the institutional record, and are retained in accordance with the Commission's *Maintenance and Retention of Commission Records Policy and Procedures*.
- C. **Additional location.** A domestic or international physical facility or location that is geographically separate from the main campus and within the same ownership structure of the institution, at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of the requirements of an educational program. An additional location participates in Title IV programs only through the certification of the main campus. A Federal, State, or local penitentiary, prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, juvenile justice facility, or other similar correctional institution is considered to be an additional location even if a student receives instruction primarily through distance education or correspondence courses at that location. The Commission utilizes the federal definition of additional location in 34 CFR § 600.2 and will conform its designation to match the Secretary of Education's if it learns its designations diverge in accordance with federal regulation 34 CFR § 602.24(f)(1-3).
- D. **Annual Institutional Update (AIU).** One of the approaches used by the Commission to regularly and systematically monitor key data indicators including but not limited to enrollment, financial information, and measures of student achievement in accordance with federal regulation 34 CFR § 602.19.
- E. **Branch campus.** A domestic or international physical facility or location of an institution that is geographically apart from the main campus of the institution, and within the same

ownership structure of the institution, and that is also (1) approved by the Secretary as a branch campus, and (2) independent from the main campus. The branch campus is considered independent of the main campus if it is permanent in nature; offers credit bearing and/or Title IV eligible courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential; has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and has its own budgetary and hiring authority. The Commission utilizes the federal definition of branch campus in 34 CFR § 600.2 and will conform its designation to match the Secretary of Education's if it learns its designations diverge in accordance with federal regulation 34 CFR § 602.24(f)(1-3).

- F. **Location status.** A status assigned to each additional location and branch campus by the Commission for substantive change, billing purposes, and to determine which locations will be visited during the self-study evaluation (self-study site visits).
- G. **Main campus.** The primary physical facility at which the institution offers eligible programs, within the same ownership structure of the institution, and certified as the main campus by the Department and the Commission. The institution's primary administration, classroom buildings, residence halls, library, and other buildings are housed within the same reasonably contiguous geographic area or parcel of land of the main campus. For an institution that only offers distance education programs, the main campus is where its administrative offices are located.
- H. **Other instructional site (OIS).** Any off-campus site where the institution is operating and where it offers one or more credit-bearing or Title IV eligible courses when 49 percent or less of an educational program can be completed there. An institution must report any location as OIS in the secure MSCHE portal whenever the location does not meet the definition of a main campus, branch campus, or additional location. Some examples include but are not limited to dual enrollment courses at high schools, schools where students complete practica or other structured, institution-supervised learning experiences for teacher preparation, or clinical sites or hospitals so long 49 percent of an educational program can be completed at the site.
- I. **Peer evaluator.** An individual who is selected and assigned to an accreditation activity by the Commission staff. This individual is part of the multi-level accreditation decision-making process and will participate in the proposal of an accreditation action. Peer evaluator is not intended to include a Commissioner serving in an official Commissioner capacity on a committee or the Commission. Peer evaluator is not intended to include an assistant or any other observer of an accreditation activity.
- J. **Planned institutional closure.** An institutional closure that is submitted to the Commission through the substantive change process more than six months prior to the date of closure allowing enough time to implement an orderly closure and a comprehensive teach-out plan and applicable teach-out agreements. The date of closure is defined as the point in time at which the institution has ceased academic/instructional operations and has no students actively enrolled in its degree programs (Requirement of Affiliation 2). The institution can choose to dissolve their corporate legal entity under applicable state law at a later date, but the Commission's focus is on ensuring the institution winds down academic/instructional operations in an orderly manner and

implements a comprehensive teach-out plan (and teach-out agreements if applicable) making arrangements for students to transfer to another institution or complete their education. See also the definition for unplanned institutional closure.

- I. **Scope of accreditation.** The institution's accreditation status covers a defined scope of educational offerings, including but not limited to credential levels, delivery methods, and locations (additional locations, branch campuses, and other instructional sites (OIS)) which have been reviewed by the Commission during accreditation activities. Any changes proposed by a member institution that are considered substantive must be reviewed through the substantive change review process prior to implementation in order to be included within the institution's scope of accreditation by the Commission.
- J. **Statement of accreditation status (SAS).** The Commission's official public statement about each institution's current accreditation status. The SAS is a downloadable, printable statement with information about the institution, including but not limited to the institution's accreditation phase, accreditation status, scope of accreditation, and a history of the accreditation actions taken by Commission.
- K. **Teach-out.** A process during which an institution or institutional location that provides 100 percent of at least one program engages in an orderly closure or when, following the closure of an institution or location, another institution provides an opportunity for the students of the closed school to complete their program, regardless of their academic progress at the time of closure. (federal definition in 34 CFR § 600.2, slightly modified to remove the word "program").
- K. **Teach-out agreement.** A written agreement between two or more institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students and a reasonable opportunity for students to complete their program of study if an institution, or an institutional location that provides one hundred percent of at least one program offered, ceases to operate before all enrolled students have completed their program of study. (federal definition in 34 CFR §600.2)
- L. **Teach-out plan.** A written plan developed by the institution that provides for the equitable treatment of students if an institution, or an institutional location, ceases to operate before all students have completed their program of study, and may include, if required by the institution's accrediting agency, a teach-out agreement between institutions. (federal definition in 34 CFR §600.2)
- M. **Unplanned institutional closure.** The Commission deems any institutional closure that is submitted less than six months from the date of closure to be unplanned and disorderly because there is insufficient time to implement a comprehensive teach-out plan and applicable teach-out agreements. Unplanned institutional closures are not permitted to be processed through the substantive change review process. The date of closure is the point in time at which the institution has ceased academic/instructional operations and has no students actively enrolled in its degree programs (Requirement of Affiliation 2). See also the definition for planned institutional closure.

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Federal Regulations: §602.18 *Ensuring consistency in decision-making*; §602.19 *Monitoring and reevaluation*; §602.22 *Substantive change*; 602.23 *Operating procedures all agencies must have*; 602.24 *Other procedures certain institutional agencies must have*

Related Documents: *Accreditation Actions Policy and Procedures*; *Accreditation Activities Guidelines*; *Communication in the Accreditation Process Policy and Procedures*; *Dues and Fees Policy and Procedures*; *Follow-Up Reports Guidelines*; *Follow-Up Reports and Visits Procedures*; *Out of Cycle Monitoring Procedures*; *Peer Evaluators Policy and Procedures*; *Substantive Change Policy, Procedures, and Guidelines*; *Teach-Out Plans and Agreements Policy and Procedures*; *Travel Policy and Procedures*; *Voluntary Surrender Procedures*;