

## Communication in the Accreditation Process Policy

*Effective Date: September 1, 2019*

### Contents

- I. Purpose
- II. Statement of Policy
- III. Procedures
- IV. Definitions

### I. Purpose

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE or the Commission) seeks to ensure transparent and clear communication about the accreditation process with its constituencies (member and applicant institutions, government, other quality assurance agencies, the higher education community, and the public). The purpose of this policy is to outline the requirements for the Commission related to communication in the accreditation process. See the accompanying document *Communication in the Accreditation Process Procedures*.

### II. Statement of Policy

As a member of the regulatory triad which oversees higher education institutions, the Commission holds a responsibility to share information with constituencies while ensuring the confidentiality of accreditation activities. The Commission shall share publicly information about itself and member institutions, provide notification of its accreditation actions, and communicate with government and other quality assurance agencies in accordance with federal regulation 34 *CFR* §602.23(a), §602.26, §602.27(a), and §602.28(e). The Commission shall determine when it is in the best interest of the public to release information to correct misleading information.

### III. Procedures

The Commission staff will develop procedures as are necessary to ensure the consistent implementation of policies. See the *Communication in the Accreditation Process Procedures*.

### IV. Definitions

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

- A. Accreditation activity.** All activities (reviews, on-site visits, etc.) 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 or applicant institution.
- B. Accreditation lapse.** An occurrence when an institution does not maintain membership responsibilities, including but not limited to: following Commission policies and procedures, completing required accreditation activities, or paying outstanding dues and/or fees.

- C. 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, 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*.
- D. Accreditation phase.** The stage of the institution in the accreditation lifecycle (applicant, candidate, accredited). The phase will also indicate if an institution is a *former* applicant, candidate, or accredited institution. Accreditation phase is posted on the institution's directory listing on the MSCHE website, with the exception of applicant institutions which are not displayed publicly in the institution directory.
- E. Accreditation status.** The member institution's standing with the Commission based on the most recent grant of candidate for accreditation status, grant of accreditation, reaffirmation, non-compliance, or adverse action taken by the Commission. Administrative, procedural, or substantive changes do not affect the accreditation status of an institution. Accreditation status is posted on the institution's directory listing on the MSCHE website.
- F. Commission representatives.** Individuals who represent or serve the Commission in any capacity including but not limited to peer evaluators, Commission staff, and Commissioners.
- G. Confidential information.** Confidential information includes, but is not limited to, all information related to the institution and not generally known in spoken, printed, electronic or any other form or medium relating, directly or indirectly to business practices, policies and procedures, plans, strategies, agreements and contracts, pending or future transactions, trade secrets, negotiations, computer and information technology resources information, accounting information and records, and financial information. Confidential information shall not include information that was required to be disclosed by law, regulation, other lawful means or any information that is generally known to the public or in the public domain.
- H. Correspondence of record.** Any written communication or correspondence between the institution's key contacts (as reported by the institution in the secure MSCHE portal) and Commission staff and any correspondence between other agencies or related entities and the Commission staff related to an institution. Correspondence of record is confidential and part of the institutional record.
- I. Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs (DAPIP).** A database operated and maintained by the federal government that provides information about institutions of higher education. The Commission reports required information to USDE through DAPIP. DAPIP may not always reflect the most recent accreditation action taken by the Commission; the official actions taken by the Commission appear on the Commission website and the institution's Statement of Accreditation Status (SAS).
- J. Institution directory.** The Commission's online listing of institutions that currently have

candidate for accreditation status with or are accredited by MSCHE. The institution directory also provides pertinent information about former candidate or accredited institutions.

- K. Institutional record.** The compilation of all documentation that the Commission has on file related to the institution including but not limited to accreditation materials and any materials received from the government or other quality assurance agencies related to the institution.
- L. Member institution.** All institutions that are accredited by MSCHE and all institutions that have been granted Candidate for Accreditation Status by MSCHE, that are in good standing with respect to payment of dues and fees, shall be institutional members of MSCHE. Accreditation and candidacy shall be established according to the standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, and federal compliance requirements adopted by the Commission. (*MARCHE Bylaws Amended and Restated Effective as of July 1, 2019*)
- M. Regulatory triad.** The regulatory triad in U.S. higher education is comprised of three oversight bodies (accrediting agencies, state governments, and the federal government), all holding different roles in the institutional oversight process. These three entities are also known as the program integrity triad and are intended to provide a balance between consumer protection, quality assurance, and oversight and compliance in postsecondary education.
- N. Related entity.** A non-accredited entity that shares decision making responsibility with the member institution's governing body. 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. Local, county, and state legislatures, other accreditors, local advisory boards, and government agencies are not considered related entities. Contractual arrangements in which the institution has a written contract for services with a non-accredited entity are not considered related entities.
- O. 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 which have been reviewed by the Commission during accreditation activities. Any substantive changes in the scope of accreditation must be reviewed through the substantive change review process before they are included within the institution's scope of accreditation by the Commission.
- P. 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 for the past ten years.

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Federal Regulations: *34 CFR §602.23(a); §602.26; §602.27(a); §602.28(e)*

Standards: Requirements of Affiliation #5, #14, Standard II

Related Documents: *Accreditation Actions Policy; Accreditation Actions Procedures; Appeals from Adverse Accrediting Actions; Government Agencies and the Commission on Higher Education; The Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO): Roles and Responsibilities; Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations; Public Disclosures Policy; Public Disclosures Procedures;*