

Good Practice for Accrediting in Higher Education

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education follows these general guidelines in the review and accreditation of its members:

- (a) arranges evaluations or other visits always in consultation with institutional officers;
- (b) permits the withdrawal of a request for initial accreditation at any time (even after evaluation) prior to final action;
- (c) recognizes the right of an institution to be appraised in light of its own stated purposes so long as those purposes demonstrably fall within, and adequately reflect, the expectations of institutions defined by the Commission in Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education;
- (d) considers a program or programs of study at an institution, including its administration and financing, not on the basis of a single predetermined pattern, but directly in relationship to the mission, operation, and goals of the entire institution;
- (e) establishes criteria for accreditation in terms that are relevant to the quality of an institution, with respect for the principle of institutional uniqueness;
- (f) uses only relevant qualitative and quantitative information in its evaluation process;
- (g) assists and stimulates improvement in the educational effectiveness of an institution, and to this end is prepared to provide consultative assistance separate from the accrediting process;
- (h) encourages sound educational experimentation and innovation;
- (i) designs the evaluation process not only to obtain information for visiting evaluators but also to stimulate an institution to evaluate and improve itself;
- (j) conducts evaluation visits by utilizing qualified evaluators under conditions that assure impartial judgment, including representation from the staff of other institutions knowledgeable about the type of institution to be visited;

- (k) appoints visitors whom the institution does not reject for conflict of interest; however, the Commission has final authority in the formation of evaluation teams and follow-up visitors;
- (l) cooperates with other accrediting organizations so far as possible in scheduling and conducting joint or collaborative visits with other accreditors, agencies, and organizations when an institution so requests;
- (m) provides for appropriate consultation during an evaluation visit between and among the team members and the faculty and staff of an institution, including the chief executive officer, his or her designated representatives, and/or members of the governing body;
- (n) provides opportunities for interviewing students during evaluation visits;
- (o) provides the president of an institution being evaluated an opportunity to review a draft of the evaluation report prepared by the visiting team and to comment on its accuracy before it is submitted to the Commission;
- (p) considers decisions relative to accreditation only after an institution has submitted a formal response to the substance of the evaluation report, and when the views of the evaluation team are adequately represented;
- (q) regards the text of an evaluation report as confidential between an institution and the Commission, except as otherwise provided by applicable law, by accreditation standards or processes, or with the consent of the institution;
- (r) permits an institution to make such public disposition of evaluation reports as it desires, provided they are not used to misrepresent its status;
- (s) refrains from conditioning accreditation upon payment of fees for purposes other than membership dues or fees;
- (t) notifies an institution in writing within 30 days regarding any accreditation decision;
- (u) revokes accreditation only after advance notice has been given to an institution that such action is contemplated, and the reasons therefore, sufficient to permit timely rejoinder and to pursue established procedures for appeal and review;
- (v) notifies the U.S. Department of Education, appropriate State agencies, and the public in accordance with Commission policy and federal and state regulation.

Regard for Decisions of States and Other Accrediting Organizations

In making accreditation decisions, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education adheres to these guidelines relative to the decisions of States and other accrediting organizations:

- (1) The Commission does not accredit or grant candidacy to institutions that lack legal authorization under applicable State or foreign law to provide a program of education beyond the secondary level, if such authorization is required.
- (2) The Commission does not accredit or grant candidacy, initial accreditation, or renewed accreditation to an institution if it is known that the institution is the subject of: a pending or final action brought by a State agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education in the state; a decision by an accrediting organization, which is recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education, to deny accreditation or candidacy; a pending or final action brought by a recognized accreditor to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution's accreditation or candidacy, or probation or an equivalent status imposed by a recognized accreditor, except as noted below in (3).
- (3) If the Commission grants candidacy or accreditation to an institution described in (2) above, the Commission provides to the U.S. Secretary of Education, within 30 days of its action, a thorough and reasonable explanation, consistent with its standards, why the action of the other accreditor does not preclude the Commission's grant of candidacy or accreditation.
- (4) If the Commission learns that an institution that has candidacy or accredited status with the Commission is the subject of an adverse action by another recognized accreditor or has been placed on probation or equivalent status by another recognized accreditor, the Commission promptly reviews the accreditation or candidacy of the institution to determine whether the Commission also should take adverse action or place the institution on probation or show cause.
- (5) The Commission shares with other appropriate recognized accrediting organizations and recognized State approval agencies information about the accreditation status of an institution and any adverse actions it has taken against an accredited or candidate institution.