

Glossary of Terms

Accreditation: Accreditation is the process by which The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) verifies the quality of higher education through peer review, assessment, and evaluation. Institutions apply for accreditation, and the Commission implements a review cycle that ensures compliance with standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, and applicable federal regulations.

Accreditation Commission: The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) is a global institutional accreditor recognized by the United States Department of Education since 1952. MSCHE assures students and the public of the educational quality for its over 500 institutions of higher education. The Commission's accreditation process ensures institutional accountability, self-appraisal, improvement, and innovation through peer review and the rigorous application of standards within the context of institutional mission.

Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO): The president of each institution appoints an Accreditation Liaison Officer to review and monitor the accreditation process; to maintain working knowledge of MSCHE standards for accreditation policies, procedures, and guidelines; to ensure compliance with MSCHE's requirements of affiliation; and to ensure consistency between data submitted to MSCHE and external agencies.

Accreditation Status: MSCHE affirms and reaffirms accreditation to an institution. A non-compliance action of warning, probation, or show cause means that the Commission has identified one or more areas in which the institution does not meet Commission standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, or federal compliance requirements. An adverse action means that the institution has not been able to remedy any areas of non-compliance and the Commission has taken action to deny or withdraw candidate status or accreditation. A Statement of Accreditation Status for each institution is posted on MSCHE's website.

Additional Locations: Locations geographically apart from the main campus at which an institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program. Institutions are required to inform MSCHE about additional locations under its Substantive Change policy.

Adverse Accrediting Action: An adverse action means that an institution has not been able to remedy any areas of non-compliance, has had the opportunity to show cause, the 36-month allowable time period for noncompliance has expired, and the Commission has taken action to deny or withdraw candidate status or accreditation. Adverse actions are subject to appeal and the institution maintains its accreditation status until exhausting the institution's appeal.

Appeal: An institution subject to an adverse action is entitled to a review of the Commission's decision by an Appeal Panel prior to the adverse action becoming final in accordance with the Appeals from Adverse Actions Procedures. The Appeal Panel has the authority to make decisions to affirm, amend, or remand adverse actions taken by the Commission in accordance

with Commission policy and procedures and federal regulations. Subsequent action will be taken by the Commission to implement the decision of the Appeal Panel. If an institution contends that the decision of the Appeal Hearing Panel was arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, unsupported by substantial evidence and/or otherwise not in accordance with law, the institution may commence an arbitration pursuant to the Commission's procedures for arbitration.

Articulation Agreement: An articulation agreement is an agreement between or among institutions of higher education that specifies the acceptability of courses in transfer toward meeting specific degree or program requirements.

Complaints: MSCHE provides opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and members of the public to submit Complaints Involving Applicant or Member Institutions, Third-Party Comments for Institutions Under Review, Whistleblower Complaints, and Complaints Against the Commission.

Credit/Credit Hour: A credit hour is a unit of measure that gives value to the level of instruction, academic rigor, and time requirements for a course taken at an institution of higher education. The credit hour is approved by an institution's accrediting agency or state-approval agency and consistent with commonly accepted practices in postsecondary education.

Distance Education: Distance Education uses various technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously.

Educational Program: An educational program is a legally authorized postsecondary program of organized instruction or study that leads to an academic, professional, or vocational degree; certificate; other recognized educational credential; or comprehensive transition and postsecondary program.

Evaluation Team: In the development of the Self-Study Design, an institution is asked to provide recommendations for a team of peer reviewers to visit their institution and conduct an on-site evaluation. Then, the Commission selects a team of trained, knowledgeable, and appropriate evaluators, led by a Team Chair and Vice Chair. These evaluators are volunteers from the academic community, and they contribute a thoughtful assessment of the institution.

Evidence Inventory: The Evidence Inventory is a well-organized and referenced repository of documents, processes, and procedures. It assists institutions as a tool to document compliance with standards for accreditation and requirements of affiliation, as well as commission policies and procedures. Because the self-study process requires institutions to provide documents and explain and evaluate processes and procedures, a well-developed Evidence Inventory offers one place for members of the institutional community, the Evaluation Team, and Commissioners to readily access and evaluate them.

Final Adverse Action: The final adverse action is a final determination by the Commission regarding an adverse action taken against an accredited or candidate institution at the conclusion of any appeals process available to the institution under the Commission's policies and procedures.

Higher Education: An institution of higher education is a community dedicated to students, to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, to the study and clarification of values, and to the advancement of the society it serves.

Higher Education Act of 1965: The HEA is a federal law that regulates and strengthens the educational resources of colleges and universities, providing financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education. Under the HEA's federal student aid programs, accrediting agencies, like MSCHE, must meet the regulatory criteria set by the United States Department of Education.

Institutional Federal Compliance: MSCHE verifies institutional compliance with accreditation-relevant federal regulations developed by the United States Department of Education in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 at the time of self-study evaluation and at any other time required by the Commission. Institutions must provide evidence of federal compliance in student identity verification in distance and correspondence education, the transfer of credit policies and articulation agreements, Title IV program responsibilities, institutional records of student complaints, required information for students and the public, standing with state and other accrediting agencies, contractual relationships, and the assignment of credit hours.

Institutional Priorities: Institutional priorities stem from an institution's strategic plan and align with an institution's mission. After participating in the Self-Study Institute, and prior to writing the Self-Study Design, the Steering Committee works with stakeholders to choose three-four priorities for evaluation in the Self-Study Report.

Institutional Record: The institutional record is the compilation of all materials and data the Commission has on file related to an applicant, candidate, or accredited institution, including but not limited to the all accreditation materials related to any accreditation activity.

Lines of Inquiry: Lines of Inquiry are significant questions that develop a particular analytical focus directed toward the institutional priorities and outcomes in alignment with MSCHE standards.

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.

Noncompliance Actions: A non-compliance action of warning, probation, or show cause means that the Commission has identified one or more areas in which the institution does not meet Commission standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, or federal compliance requirements.

Other Instructional Site: MSCHE defines an instructional site/other instructional site as a location, other than a branch campus or additional location, at which the institution offers one or more courses for credit. Dual Enrollment courses offered at local school districts are examples of other instructional sites.

Peer Review: Phase 2 of the accreditation process begins when the Commission selects a team of trained and knowledgeable peer evaluators to visit an institution and conduct an on-site evaluation. The team writes a report, offering advice for institutional improvement and innovation, and emails a draft of this report to the institution. The institution responds to this report through an Institutional Response letter addressed to the President of MSCHE. Finally, the Team Chair reviews the Institutional Response and provides a Confidential Brief to the Commission. The brief summarizes the Team Report and proposes an accreditation action in accordance with the Commission's Accreditation Actions Policy and Procedures.

Policies, Guidelines, and Procedures: MSCHE provides policies, guidelines, and procedures that assist the Commission and member institutions through the accreditation process. These documents, accessible through the MSCHE website, include accreditation policies, peer review process policies, and administrative procedures of the Commission.

Probation: MSCHE places an institution on Probation when the institution is not in compliance with one or more Commission standards, and that the noncompliance is serious or extensive, or raises concerns about the adequacy of the provided education, the institution's capacity to make improvements in a timely fashion, or the institution's capacity to sustain itself in the long term.

Reaffirm Accreditation: When MSCHE concludes that an institution is in compliance with the Standards of Accreditation, the Commission reaffirms, or continues, the institution's accreditation.

Reaffirming Actions: The Commission may Reaffirm Accreditation when the institution appears to meet all of the Commission standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, and applicable federal regulatory requirements.

Requirements of Affiliation: To achieve and maintain accreditation, an institution must meet the four Requirements of Affiliation. Compliance is expected to be continuous and will be validated at the time of institutional self-study and during any other evaluation of the institution's compliance.

Self Study (SSD): Phase 1 of the accreditation process is the self-study, where an institution engages in an in-depth, comprehensive, and reflective process to assess the institution's

educational quality and success in meeting its mission, as well as identify institutional priorities and opportunities for improvement and innovation.

Self Study Design (SSD): The Self-Study Design (SSD) is a document developed by an institution to serve as a guide for the self-study process. It provides a blueprint for the self-study process, including the final Self-Study Report.

Self-Study Report (SSR): The Self-Study Report (SSR) serves as a primary foundation of evidence for both the institution and evaluation team members, provides an analytically based narrative aligned with standards and institutional priorities, and references additional documentation to be found in the Evidence Inventory.

Show Cause: Show Cause is an accreditation action taken by the Commission requiring an institution to demonstrate why its accreditation should not be denied or withdrawn. An institution may be placed on Show Cause when the institution does not appear to demonstrate compliance.

Standards for Accreditation: The Standards for Accreditation serve as a guide for candidate institutions and accredited institutions seeking accreditation and reaffirmation through the Self-Study and Peer Evaluation process. Institutions need to demonstrate compliance with the Standards for Accreditation in order to be granted accreditation and reaffirmation.

Statement of Accreditation Status (SAS): The SAS is the Commission's official public statement about each institution's current accreditation status. The SAS is a downloadable, printable statement with information about an institution, including the institution's accreditation phase, accreditation status, scope of accreditation, and a history of the accreditation actions taken by Commission.

Steering Committee: The Steering Committee provides leadership to the entire self-study process and its responsibilities include, but are not limited to, developing the Self-Study Design, supervising the Working Groups, overseeing the completion of the Self-Study Report, and managing the arrangements to host the On-Site Evaluation visit.

Substantive Change: MSCHE seeks to ensure that member institutions sustain ongoing compliance with Commission standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, and applicable federal regulatory requirements while undergoing institutional changes that are considered substantive. Types of substantive changes which require Commission review include a substantial change in mission or objectives; a change in legal status, form of control, or ownership; significant departure from existing educational programs; alternative delivery method; direct assessment programs; increase in credential level; change in measures of student progress; substantial increase in the number of credit hours awarded; written arrangements; establishment, relocation, reclassification, or closure of branch campuses or additional locations; Planned Institutional Closures; Experimental Sites Initiatives (ESI) as

Required by the United States Department of Education USDE; and Prison Education Programs (PEP).

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 of that program; 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.

Vision, Mission, and Values: An institution's vision statement pinpoints its aspirations and goals. The mission statement describes its purpose and intentions. An institution's values help guide decision-making processes through student admissions, curriculum, community outreach, governance, and more. LCCC's Vision, Mission, and Values Statements can be found [here](#).

Warning: MSCHE plans an institution on a Warning that its accreditation may be in jeopardy when the institution is not in compliance with one or more of the Commission standards and a follow-up report (Monitoring Report) is required to demonstrate that the institution has made appropriate improvements to bring itself into compliance. The Warning indicates that the Commission believes that the institution has the ability to make improvements and sustain itself.

Working Groups: Working Groups engage in evidence-based analysis, the parameters of which are determined by the lines of inquiry identified in the Self-Study Design.

Works Cited

"Accreditation Actions Procedures." *Middle States Commission on Higher Education*, 1 Oct 2022, <https://www.msche.org/policies-guidelines/>

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